Master the media

Get your smartphone and download Oklahoma’s Annual Conference app right now. You’ll find OKUMC in the iTunes or Google Play store.

This free software application, launched by your Communications Ministry, enables you to quickly access all the information you need for your annual conference experience.

Among the contents you’ll find are a daily agenda, special events, social media feeds, even restaurant locations.

Click to open the Pre-Conference Workbook. Click to donate to the Annual Conference Offering for Circle of Care. Tell your friends far away that they can download OKUMC and watch the meeting’s live stream.

You also can choose to receive push notifications for specific groups: all delegates, laity, clergy, and/or youth delegates.

If you need help downloading or navigating the app, volunteers will be available at the on-site registration tables.

Get the app for Annual Conference news

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The A-to-Z aspects of Oklahoma’s Annual Conference begin with “app” and examine “Why?” (the theme) in sessions May 29-June 1 at Oklahoma City University and OKC-St. Luke’s United Methodist Church.

The OKUMC app can be downloaded to your smartphone or other digital device. The free software application will put at your fingertips all the information you need for the conference. (See instructions, left.)

Bishop Jimmy Nunn will deliver his inaugural episcopal address, and he will preach Monday and Wednesday evenings at St. Luke’s.

Guided conversation on challenging issues will fill Tuesday evening at OCU’s Freede Center.

Live streaming of the worship and business begins Monday evening.

Resolutions await vote

The Board of Church & Society has proposed the resolution “Addressing Environmental Challenges, Global Warming, and Climate Change.”

Tulsa-Boston Avenue and OKC-First seek designation as United Methodist Historic Sites, in proposals from the Commission on Archives & History.

Action to close four churches is sought by the Board of Trustees for OKC-Douglas Boulevard, Franklin, Crescent-Mount Vernon, and Tulsa-Rose Hill.

Five constitutional amendments advanced by the 2016 General Conference also will be considered.

The offering will go to the “Legacy of Care” project of the Circle of Care, marking 100 years helping Oklahoma children and youths.

The Office of Mission asks for donations of health and bedding kits to meet emergency needs in disasters.

In addition to favorite lunch options, delegates may lunch with Native artist Connie Seabourn on Wednesday. (See story, page 5.)

Print on-demand

For the first time, you may order and pay for a printed copy of the Pre-Conference Workbook through an online publishing service. Print on-demand publishing also will be used for the 2017 Oklahoma Conference Journal, when it is produced later this year.

The digital version of the Pre-Conference Workbook, 100-plus pages, is available online for you to view or for free download.

Online registration closes on May 17.

MORE CONFERENCE NEWS ON PAGES 4 AND 5

Prayers to fill conference week

The week of May 28 to June 3 will be a special time for everyone in the Oklahoma Conference.

Not only will it include Annual Conference, but also it will be a time for all Oklahoma United Methodists to pray and fast, joining in the Council of Bishops’ initiative called Praying Our Way Forward.

A prayer by Bishop Jimmy Nunn will start the week for the Oklahoma Conference, said Derrek Belase, director of discipleship.

The bishops’ initiative seeks to surround in prayer the work of the denomination’s Commission on a Way Forward. That 32-member group, established by the 2016 General Conference, is pursuing a thorough examination and possible revision of the paragraphs in the United Methodist Book of Discipline that concern human sexuality as well as exploring options to maintain the unity of the denomination.

Each annual conference has been asked to intentionally focus one week on Praying Our Way Forward, but the conferences decide what form their participation will take, Rev. Belase said.

Materials to direct Oklahomans every day of that week in prayer and fasting have been drawn up by the leaders of this Conference’s Five-Day Academy for Spiritual Formation, Belase said.

Each of the eight districts also has been assigned a day to pray during that week. For example, the Northern Prairie District’s prayer theme on May 28 is “One in Christ,” using Matthew 12:46-50.

The Oklahoma leaders have been dedicated in planning for this prayer week. “We really think it’s a serious thing,” Belase said.

Praying Our Way Forward will be lifted up visually for those attending Annual Conference, too.

Prayer guides, shaped as table tents, will be in place throughout the meeting. They include a Scripture reading, reflection, and prayer. They also feature a specific breath prayer for each day.

For example, the breath prayer for May 28 is “Lord of all, make us one in you.”

Globally, two bishops of the Church co-chair this prayer movement: Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett of the North Carolina Conference/Raleigh Area, and Al Gwinn, retired, from the North Carolina Conference/Raleigh Area.

“Our prayer focus is two-fold: We are praying that unity of the denomination.

SEE PRAYER, PAGE 4

Welcome, little ones

Two churches in the Northern Prairie District made affordable Christian day care a shared priority in a more rural setting. Jesus is smiling. See page 3.
Many years ago, I discovered an affirmation from John Killinger’s book “Lost in Wonder, Love, and Praise.” Reading it, I was filled with gratitude for my mother and thankful for the memories I have of both my grandmothers. I have consistently admired my wife as she has lived out her love for our children.

Now my daughter is a new mother, and I have returned to that statement once again. I feel such deep gratitude for the mothers in my life.

Killinger wrote: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of the loving God, who was born of the promise that statement once again. I feel such deep gratitude for the mothers in my life.

“I believe in the love Mary gave her son, that caused her to follow him in his ministry and stand by his cross as he died. "I believe in the love of all mothers, and its importance in the lives of the children they bear. It is stronger than steel, softer than down, and more resilient than a green sapling on the hillside. It closes wounds, melts disappointments, and enables the weakest child to stand tall and straight in the fields of adversity.

“I believe that this love, even at its best, is only a shadow of the love of God, a dark reflection of all that we can expect of him, both in this life and the next.

“And I believe that one of the most beautiful sights in the world is a mother who lets this greater love flow through her to her child, blessing the world with the tenderness of her touch and the tears of her joy.”

I hope on this Mother’s Day weekend that you, too, will be filled with gratitude for mothers who have nurtured you with their love. Yet I realize that many people, especially in childhood, do not experience the same blessings that I have experienced. But the United Methodists of Oklahoma have always valued the children and sought to love them all — especially those who face daunting challenges in life.

My heart breaks when I consider the plight of children in foster care, especially those who become separated from their siblings. It is heart-rending for me to imagine the challenges a child must face when all alone.

Today, about 10,000 children in Oklahoma find themselves in the custody of the state’s foster care system. Many others are solely dependent on grandparents or other extended family for a place to call home.

Sibling groups of three or more must often cannot be placed in the same home, for lack of space.

Our United Methodist Circle of Care is developing a response to address the needs of siblings who are within the foster care system. The Legacy of Care project

An enthusiastic reader, Bishop Jimmy Nunn is suggesting books that he finds influential. From the Classics of Western Spirituality collection, he recommends “John and Charles Wesley: Selected Prayers, Hymns…” (Frank Whaling is editor.)

The bishop describes the book as “the best primer on the Wesleys that I know. Just the intro is worth the price; then you get their writings, too.”

is a creative vision that will keep children together in the system, in safe and healthy settings.

When this vision is fulfilled, children in the care of the state no longer will be torn apart from their siblings.

This year as you celebrate mothers in your own life, consider extending that celebration by participating in our Annual Conference Offering for the Circle of Care. This offering will support children most at risk, who yearn for hope.

We can give them hope.

Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

They traveled with Bryan Tener, pastor of OKC-Grace United Methodist Church; Leslie Long, OCU’s associate professor of Religious Education, V.V. Harris Endowed Chair in Christian Education; and David Wilson, superintendent of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

The reservation has been in the national news due to active opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline project.

Standing Rock is home to several Lakota and Dakota tribes. During the Oklahomans’ visit, the mission team visited tribal sites, met with residents, and helped clear and repair fallen shelters. The trip was organized and led by Rev. Dr. Wilson in coordination with the OCU Native American Society and the OIMC, with sponsorship by OCU University-Church Relations.

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Day care teaches churches to value shared ministry

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

Outside the church, the day care children helped prepare last year’s palm leaves for use on Ash Wednesday. Some remembered waving the branches last year. As they worked, the pastor talked with them about the rituals; later that day, she visited their classrooms and showed them the ashes.

In Perkins, Okla., a longtime mission to provide affordable day care with a Christian curriculum is re-energized. Because two United Methodist churches, Perkins-First and Lost Creek, partnered for the kids, the Educare program is “in a positive season,” according to director Marcia Hargrove.

This program showcases United Methodist connectionalism. Enrollment is 65 children, Hargrove reported, with 30 of those attending after school. Educare operates at Perkins-First, which is just across the street from an elementary school. Day care hours are 7 a.m.-6 p.m. South of Stillwater, rural Lost Creek UMC is about 5 miles from Perkins, population 2,831. Weekly worship at Perkins-First averages 48 people; Lost Creek, 199.

Pastors Laura Glover of Perkins-First and Max Rudd of Lost Creek began discussing shared day care ministry in 2015. They credit Mike Wiley of the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation with introducing the idea.

By early 2016, the collaboration was under way. “It was a need for the community that wasn’t being met,” said Rev. Glover. “Day care is expensive, period. There are a lot of families in the community that struggle financially. We try to make sure to the greatest extent possible that it is affordable.”

From both churches, eight to 10 people meet monthly as the Educare board; a Christian curriculum committee meets quarterly; and churches’ members serve alongside parents on workdays. The licensed day care, for children ages 12 and younger, has seven full-time and six part-time staff members.

At Perkins-First, “almost all the space is used during the week” for the day care, said Tish Malloy, Northern Prairie District superintendent. She said First UMC members are “all in” to help children as their primary ministry. For Lost Creek UMC, Educare is one of numerous ministries that have evolved since that church purchased property in Perkins.

“They are two distinct congregations,” said Rev. Malloy, but also “very close to one another. They’ve handled it beautifully. Those two pastors did the work to bring them together.”

Rev. Rudd said, “It isn’t a normal thing to share.” But key Lost Creek leaders returned from an initial meeting about the vision and said, “We need to do this,” he recalled.

“Our people are really passionate, excited about it,” he said.

“I honestly have seen the hand of God on all of it,” Glover said. “There is no ours-mine-yours, no sense of discord. I think it has been an opportunity to see how well we really can work together.”

Director Hargrove said some Sunday School classes have pooled funds to help children in special circumstances. A church women’s group donated new toys; volunteers painted classrooms.

Preacher’s kid finds door to Upper Room

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Growing up as a preacher’s kid can be exciting, Beth Richardson says. Her family moved every few years in Oklahoma. Each time, she and her two brothers had a different house and different furnishings to explore.

It was a different story for her mother, Marty, every time her father, Charles, was appointed to a different church. The movers asked where to put items in a house the family had never seen. “Let me look at the house first,” her mother always said.

Growing up within the church made Beth “an enthusiastic Methodist,” she said.

This Oklahoma PK wound up becoming a United Methodist deacon and joining The Upper Room in Nashville, Tenn., to edit and write. As director of creative content, she works with Upper Room’s beloved daily devotional booklet and its extensive web ministry. She has written three books — two on Advent and one on Celtic blessings. She also serves at Edgehill UMC in Nashville.

Recently Beth, who was born in Norman, traveled back to Oklahoma. She held listening sessions in Tulsa and Oklahoma City; Upper Room seeks to “help people grow in their relationship to God,” she said. And she led workshops on Celtic Christianity, using her newest book.

Upper Room, which traces its origins to the Great Depression, was started by Methodists in 1935 to offer “something for people to hang on to hope,” she said.

Amid today’s rapid technological changes, “we pray that God shows us the way into this next thing.” The publishing ministry is studying new ways to deliver content to people, such as print-on-demand publishing of books.

During Beth’s childhood, other kids looked to her to pray at youth events because she was a PK. Her first job after high school was at a church camp beside Lake Texoma. An annual conference youth program taught her leadership skills.

When Beth thought about her future, “first, I thought I would marry a preacher.” She didn’t know women could be clergy until she met a female Local Pastor in Mangum.

“That was very formative to me,” she said. She went to college at Oklahoma City University, “the only place I ever wanted to go.” She studied sociology there.

Beth joined a group from Tulsa-Boston Avenue United Methodist Church for a stint with the Appalachia Service Project. That led her to move to Tennessee, where she completed seminary at Vanderbilt University Divinity School.

While Beth was in seminary, her mother became seriously ill but insisted Beth continue her studies. Her parents still lived in Oklahoma City.

The death of her mother at age 48 challenged Beth’s faith. “I could not understand where God was in that.” The “loving” Upper Room family has been a comfort to her, she said, with prayer mentors, afternoon prayer, and weekly chapel services.

During her 30 years with Upper Room, Beth said she has learned a different kind of prayer, which “led me to a deeper place.”
Prayer:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

God will help us to fulfill the mission of the Church, and we are praying to be one in Christ,” Bishop Wallace-Padgett said.

The Commission on a Way Forward brings together clergy and laity from nine countries and of diverse perspectives. At least three commission members are openly gay; others have long advocated for maintaining the Book of Discipline bans on same-gender unions and “self-avowed, practicing” gay clergy.

During phase 1 of the Praying Our Way Forward program, bishops prayed daily for the commission’s work. On Jan. 1, with the help of The Upper Room, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Communications, this initiative expanded and is moving across the Church.

You are invited to:

- Pray daily for the Church’s effectiveness in fulfilling its mission of making disciples and for the outcome of the Commission on a Way Forward.
- Participate in the week of prayer in the Oklahoma Conference.
- Fast weekly as you are able for The United Methodist Church and our future.
- The Upper Room website www.UMCprays.org helps engage all people in the prayer initiative, Bishop Gwinn said.

Also on that website, the Prayer Week Schedule shows when our Conference is praying.

View a video of bishops explaining this prayer initiative at Praying Our Way Forward: We Are One in Christ.

— Compiled by Chris Schutz

Fast facts, not mystery

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

What is fasting? Why are all United Methodists being urged to practice it as the denomination’s Commission on a Way Forward examines the Book of Discipline paragraphs about human sexuality?

The experience of fasting “reorients you in some important ways,” said Elaine Robinson. “We know by our experience that it draws us nearer to God.”

She is a professor at Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University.

Fasting, or abstaining from food, appears in both the Old and New Testaments. It was taught by John Wesley, the father of Methodism, said Rev. Dr. Robinson.

She said that Wesley viewed fasting, along with prayer, reading the scriptures, and worship as means of receiving God’s grace in our lives.

Some ways to fast are:

- Abstain from food from morning until evening.
- Observe “half-fasts” on Wednesdays and Fridays until 3 p.m., then have a light meal such as potatoes or rice. Wesley practiced this during his life, Robinson said.
- Another way to follow this practice is to continue eating, but consume only “the plainest of foods,” she said. “That could be a form of fasting because there’s an intentional eating to it. If you do it and you brag about it, that will actually dishonor God.”

A person who is fasting should “significantly curtail what you’re eating,” Robinson said.

“If it costs you nothing, it wouldn’t glorify God.”

Abstaining from water is not suggested. “I don’t think even Wesley would recommend that.”

Fasting may seem exotic these days because of the consumer society we live in, she said.

References in the Bible to fasting include Matthew 4:1-11, the time Jesus was tested in the wilderness; Matthew 6:16-17; and Acts 13:3, when Saul is converted to Paul.

What is the purpose of fasting?

- To glorify God
- To express our regret over sin
- To receive God’s grace
- To focus our attention upon God
- To deepen our prayer

Fasting is frequently practiced by seminary students. “They do want to deepen their spiritual life,” Robinson said.

Save the date

Young Adult Retreat
July 21-23, Camp Egan
Dean: Matt Franks
www.okumcministries.org/camps

Awaken 2017
(worship convocation)
July 24-27, Little Rock, Arkansas
Sponsor: The Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts
Early bird specials by May 10
https://awaken2017.wordpress.com/
Oklahoma/

South Central Jurisdiction
Mission Academy
(VIM and disaster response)
Sept. 10-13
Aurora, Nebraska
www.scjumc.org/mission

Fall Willson Lecture Series
featuring Nadia Bolz-Weber (pastor and author of “Accidental Saints”)
Oct. 19
Oklahoma City University
Delegates can meet artist

The work of Cherokee artist Connie Seabourn will go on display at OCU on Monday, May 29, the same day that Annual Conference opens. Theme is “The Feminine Face of God/God Loves Us Like a Mother” for the free exhibit that will continue in OCU’s Norick Art Gallery through July 28.

Seabourn studied art at OCU and the University of Central Oklahoma, earning her B.F.A. at the University of Oklahoma. She works in acrylic, watercolor, pastel, and prints.

Her statement about this exhibit is excerpted below.

“My favorite themes are awakenings, or new understandings that pop into my head, sometimes after reading or dreaming. Attending a one-day workshop, I had just such a moment, with wonderful images and new thoughts flooding my brain. The Oklahoma Catholic Archdiocese sponsored workshops that featured various art disciplines on the integration of spirituality and creativity. The artist/lecturer (that day) was watercolorist Doris Klein, a member of the Sisters of St. Agnes. She has particularly explored the subject of women in the Bible and other inspired texts.

“What really caught my attention were Klein’s references to God with feminine pronouns. I, too, sometimes referred to God as Father/Mother. Although I left the church/organized religion of my youth, I have maintained a close relationship with God and I believe that we are all primarily spiritual beings. However, when I referred to God as She, as Mother, or even Father/Mother, I felt uncomfortable.

“When I pictured God in my mind, He was always male — until Sister Klein told us about early, inspired writings, original texts — many of these for the Bible — that sometimes referred to God as She, sometimes talked about God loving us as a Mother.

“That feels right; it rings true. God is neither Father nor Mother, but we can only understand God better by making those familiar comparisons. God isn’t limited by gender.

“It was a simple, small understanding I received that day, but how exciting! It has become the subject for a new series of artworks as I also read and research about how God loves us like a mother, the feminine face of God, and the feminine in religion.”

In June and July, churches are encouraged to bring groups to view the free exhibit on Mondays-Thursdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Holly Moye is OCU’s director of the School of Visual Arts. Call ahead to schedule a free tour, 405-208-5569.

Luncheon and Q&A session with the artist, Wednesday, May 31, for conference delegates and guests, OCU Norick Gallery. Sign up by choosing “OCU School of Visual Arts” among the meal options in the online registration. The gallery will be open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. during the conference.

Artwork by Connie Seabourn

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It worked for us: winners

Winners of the 2017 “It Worked for Us” awards have been chosen by the Board of Laity of the Oklahoma Conference.

At the Celebrate the Laity Luncheon, on Tuesday, May 30, during Annual Conference, an outstanding lay-led ministry in each district will be honored by the board.

- Cimmaron District — Laverne and Rosston, MAST (Methodist After-School Tutoring program)
- Council Oak District — Lake UMC, First Monday Feast Soup & Beans
- Crossroads District — OKC-Chapel Hill, Holy Hands
- Green Country District — Bartlesville-First, Ashes on the Go
- Heartland District — Wayne UMC, Freecycle/Free Garage Sale
- Lake Country District — Atoka-First, God’s Kids
- Northern Prairie District — Braman-First, Quilters
- Wichitas District — Marlwood-First, Mid-Day Manna

This luncheon will be held at OKC-St. Luke’s. Register and pay online by May 17. Please note: Tickets will not be sold during Annual Conference. Direct questions to Barbara. perry@okstate.edu

Used Book Sale returns

Coordinated by Oklahoma’s clergy retirees, the Used Book Sale again will be held on the first floor of the Kramer East Building — just east of the Freede Center at OCU — during Annual Conference.

The sale will open on Tuesday, May 30, at 8:30 a.m. and close on Thursday, June 1, at 10:30 a.m.

This 20-year-old project continues to give support to the Clergy Crisis Fund, as well as provide enjoyable socializing for those who just “drop by.” The books generally are not priced, but donations received will assist clergy families with emergency needs.

Donations of books useful to pastors and lay members are welcomed for the sale, and also clergy robes and stoles in good condition.

- Do not bring old journals, magazines, tapes, curriculum materials, etc.
- Pack your donations in boxes that are easy to handle and arrange books with the spines up.

To limit handling work by the volunteers, please take your donations directly to Kramer East during the week before Annual Conference. Deliver them between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on May 24-26.

If this is not possible, take your books after May 1 to OKC-Wesley Church, located at 24th and Classen; they will be accepted from 1 to 4 p.m. on weekdays.

In Tulsa, books may be taken to Boston Avenue UMC until May 24. Volunteers from Tulsa will transport the books to Oklahoma City.

For further information call Burrel McNaught, 405-254-3846.

Churches connecting with apps

The anecdotal evidence is everywhere. People are spending more and more time using apps on their smartphones. Research shows a 600 percent increase in smartphone usage since 2010.

Churches increasingly are developing apps — software applications — to serve members and others interested in the congregation. For Pastor Jerome Brimmage of Lufkin, Texas, the value of a church app became clear when he visited another church while vacationing. As he walked in, he received information about the church’s app that would allow him to see announcements, follow the scripture reading, and take notes on the sermon.

Rev. Brimmage pulled out his phone, downloaded the app in seconds, and was ready to follow along when the service began.

To register his attendance, he returned to the app to fill out that online form and clicked “submit.” A similar thing happened during the offering; he contributed online. When the service ended, the app emailed his notes to him in PDF format.

What the app enabled him to do during that hour of worship tapped into his passion. “We are trying to create new and fresh avenues for people to connect to the church.”

He also is working to encourage regular financial support for the church “in a new world for giving. Younger generations don’t have checkbooks.”

Get Oklahoma’s new app — See page 1.

- Brimmage and the Lufkin-First team began researching church app creators.
- In relatively quick order, they had an app ready for release that incorporated an online bulletin, registration, giving, attendance taking, announcements, sermon note taking, and a live stream of the worship service.
- The staff launched the app digitally, announcing it in the weekly e-newsletter. Worship bulletin inserts also declared, “Try our new app.” Instructions were given to find it on iPhones and Androids.
- Lufkin First won’t be throwing away the offering plates and pew registration pads, but Brimmage reported guests and members of all ages are comfortable with the technology.
- “They find it easy that they don’t have to fill out a registration pad or card.” And usage of the app-based worship bulletin has reduced the number of printed copies needed.
- Rather than fighting technology, the Methodist movement has often embraced it. John Wesley, the father of Methodism, was among the first to take full advantage of the printing press and moveable type.

(Reprinted with permission, United Methodist Interpreter, March-April 2017. www.interpretermagazine.org)
PT builds international bridge for young adults

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

S
ome 60 young adults in Oklahoma will turn their attention to Ukraine in August.
Right after completing eight weeks assisting children here in Project Transformation (PT), they will cheer on a group of United Methodist young adults launching a similar program thousands of miles away.

Project Transformation Oklahoma is a Christian literacy day camp for elementary-age students. Nine churches in the state will host some 500 children June 8-July 27. The United Methodist-supported program began here in 2002.

The Eurasia Episcopal Area, which includes Ukraine, “is taking the best practices of PT and making it their own,” said Sarah Nichols. “I feel like we’ve found kindred spirits over there.”

For the Oklahoma Conference, she directs Young Adult Mission & Service and also PT, both ministries within the Office of Mission.

The origin of the Ukraine Conference program is in an international trip by Nichols and Jeremy Basset, Office of Mission director, in early 2016. They represented the denomination’s Board of Global Ministries at a summit in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Led by one bishop, the Eurasia Area covers eight time zones, and the common language is Russian.

“The young adults there were really hungering for this culture of mission,” Nichols observed. “We wanted to be a resource if they needed it.”

Later in 2016, Bishop Eduard Khegay and two young clergymen of the Eurasia Area visited Oklahoma “to have a missional perspective as its reason for existence” as well as “concerned about the departure of some key leadership because of opportunities out of the Area.”

He said the bishop wants to:
- develop experiences for the Area’s young-adult members — many are first-generation Christians — to understand mission in the Eurasian context; and
- introduce best practices to guide them in those experiences.

“Something is connecting the culture in our Office of Mission, in Oklahoma, to the passion that these young people are exuding,” Nichols said. “I feel like ‘shoulds’ are popping up within that faith community. Children should have access to quality education and a safe place to go when they’re not in school. In the name of Jesus, they’re going to make that true.”

Sarah Nichols welcomes three international guests at the Office of Mission in the Oklahoma Conference headquarters. From left, the men are Bishop Eduard Khegay of the Eurasia Area and pastors Dmitrii Lysin of Kainda, Kyrgyzstan, and Volodymir Prokip of Lviv, Ukraine.

She said UM young adults in Eurasia are “already doing wonderful things. They’re on Christ’s mission, and they are so open to talking about how they came to be believers in Christ. We have to connect Oklahoma with these young people; Oklahoma has to know.”

So during PT this summer she’ll encourage digital conversations between the groups. Nichols wants the Eurasian young people to know “56 college kids in Oklahoma have your back and are excited for you” as the August camp approaches.

Then she will go to Ukraine in August as a key volunteer for that camp’s first week, sharing digitally with Oklahoma’s PT members while she is away.

“I’m not going for that missionary-on-vacation feeling. I’m going because my friends and young people I really care about are there, they’re talking about the way God’s working through their church, and I want to be a part of it.”

Neighborhood blitz

In south Oklahoma City, more than 1,000 volunteers made repairs on 35 homes in the Heronville Elementary neighborhood on April 8. Those serving included members of the Asbury campus of St. Luke’s; one group is shown offering bottled water at the school. Their Asbury T-shirts were made by Chuck Jackson, standing at back. The church was the center that day for cooking and assembling 1,400 hot meals to feed everyone, said Connie Barnett, campus pastor, and provided advance storage space for the repair supplies. The annual workday is coordinated by Rebuilding Together OKC. Among other United Methodist churches supporting the effort were OKC-Chapel Hill, OKC-Church of the Servant, and Edmond-First UMC.

EASTER VISITOR — A winged guest lingers with Luke Kern at Marlow-First UMC after a butterfly release on April 16. The children in Sunday School had nurtured the creatures, watching them emerge from their cocoons and feeding them until freeing them on Easter Sunday, according to Pastor Doyle Sharpe.

PHOTO BY MOLLY GANN

PHOTO BY MOLLY GANN
Statistics help define seminary’s value in state

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The Oklahoma Conference’s five-year Special Apportionment is set to culminate this year for Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University. That prompted a series of conversations in December and January among leaders of those three entities. Charles Neff stepped up to help them answer a key question.

What has been the impact of this United Methodist seminary in Oklahoma?

OCU’s vice president for University-Church Relations, Rev. Dr. Neff relates to all three groups. From analyzing online statistics, he made these conclusions.

- The establishment of Saint Paul at OCU has drastically altered the trend of ordinands in the Conference.
- The number of part- and full-time Local Pastors attending seminary and serving churches in the Conference has undergone a dramatic shift since Saint Paul at OCU was established.
- A seminary within the borders of an annual conference will attract the highest percentage of that conference’s seminarians who continue toward ordination.
- Seminarians will travel far afield to study when their home conference doesn’t have a seminary within its borders.
- Saint Paul classes at OCU began in 2008, as a satellite to the seminary’s main campus in the greater Kansas City area. Now a student can fulfill all degree requirements at either location. The first doctoral graduates at the Oklahoma City location will be recognized this month.
- Enrollment in Saint Paul at OCU has been steady, about 45 students since 2009, while the primary campus in Kansas has seen a decline during that period, from almost 250 to about 120 students, according to Neff’s numbers.

Seminary changes

The Kansas campus relocated in 2013, and the seminary has gone through several key leadership changes in a short time. On Feb. 23, it was sanctioned by the Higher Learning Commission. Saint Paul’s status is “Accredited — on Probation.”

The sanction added urgency to the discussions by the leaders of the three entities. Neff provided his analysis to assist as they consider next steps.

The proposed 2018 budget for the Oklahoma Conference does not include funds for Saint Paul at OCU.

The Oklahoma Conference isn’t arbitrarily ending the Apportionment for the school, Neff clarified. The Conference has “fulfilled its obligation; in fact, it extended it once since the initial promise.”

Neff said two seminaries shared almost 50-50 in 2011 in educating the deacons and elders who were ordained in the Oklahoma Conference. Those schools were Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, which is affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); and Perkins School of Theology, a United Methodist seminary at Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

That year also saw the first graduation ceremony for Saint Paul at OCU. All five members of that Class of 2011 became provisional clergy members in Oklahoma, journeying toward ordination.

In 2016, according to Neff’s analysis, 56 percent of Oklahoma’s deacon and elder ordinands were educated at Saint Paul.

He also sees benefit in an increasing number of United Methodist-trained student local pastors.

“Most notably, prior to Saint Paul’s arrival in Oklahoma, almost all of our student appointments were coming out of Phillips,” he said. “That changed pretty dramatically when Saint Paul at OCU became an option. Now half of our student appointments come out of Saint Paul.”

Close to home

As Neff examined the statistics, “The overall thing that became clear to me was that a seminary within the borders of an annual conference will be THE seminary for that annual conference. The majority of the ordinands will come out of that seminary.”

He believes this reflects people’s desire to stay close to home while pursuing their calling, especially those who are married, perhaps with children, and those for whom ministry is a second career.

The home conference also benefits because the presence and leadership of those students stay in that conference, Neff pointed out. The data showed only 50 percent of students return to the home conference when they attend schools beyond its borders.

Students of Saint Paul at OCU “are receiving United Methodist training in ministry, are available to serve concurrently in Oklahoma churches, and participate fully in Conference committees, camps, leadership teams … that benefit a wide range of constituencies,” Neff said. Those connections also strengthen students’ relationships within Oklahoma early in their ministry careers.

Thirteen United Methodist seminaries operate within the United States.

Appointments

- Harriette Leigh, from Norman-McFarlin UMC to retirement, effective May 1.
- Clark Struebing, from Capron to not appointed, effective May 1.
- Michael Strange, from Perry UMC to retirement, effective April 1.

(Find weekly updates at www.okumc.org/appointmentchanges.)
Survivors include sons Jeffrey Dean McGrew and Steven Lee McGrew. He was preceded in death by his wife, Joan Ruth McGrew, in 2016.
Service was April 22 at Boston Avenue.

MOODY — Rev. Robert Moody, 88, of Enid, died April 9, 2017. He served Sulphur, Bristow-First, Beaver, Bixby, Lindsay/Criner, Lindsay, Coalgate/Centrahoma, Nardin/Deer Creek, and Nardin-Asbury. Prior to his Oklahoma service, he pastored churches of Enid, died April 9, 2017. He began his ministry at Wichita Falls (Texas) First Methodist Church and then served in Oklahoma at OKC-St. Luke’s (associate), OKC-Nichols Hills (associate), Adair, Ponca City-Albright, and Lindsay. He also served as director of the Council on Ministries.
Survivors include his wife, Doris Youngs, his daughter, Diana.
April 17, 2017. She was the widow of Rev. Argus J. Hamilton Jr.
Survivors include daughter Marjiean Hamilton and sons Argus Hamilton III and Billy Hamilton.
Service was April 19 at Resthaven Memory Garden, Oklahoma City.

SHORT — Cecille Short, 82, of Oklahoma City, died April 6, 2017. She was the widow of Rev. Arnold Short.
Survivors include two daughters, Lisa Carlile and Melinda Clonts. She was predeceased by her husband of 52 years.
Service was April 14 at First Church of the Nazarene, Bethany.

SHEARER — Mary Ellen Shearer, 87, of Tulsa, died March 29, 2017. She was the widow of Rev. Leslie G. Shearer.
Survivors include a daughter, Gwnell Pierce, and a son, Eugene Shearer.
Service was April 21 at Oklahoma Methodist Manor in Tulsa.

Employment

Director of Youth Ministries: Claremore-First. Full-time. Call 918-341-4580 x314 or send resume to Brent Youngs, byoungs@claremorefumc.org

Children’s Ministry Assistant Director: Edmond-First. Part-time. Contact Megan Borum at megan@fumcedmond.org

Summer Day Camp Staff: Edmond-First. Part-time. Contact Megan Borum at megan@fumcedmond.org

Passages

He served at Harmony/Lacey, Wayne, Fittstown/Pontotoc, OKC-Lakeside, Seiling, Tulsa-St. Mark’s, Del City-Sunny Lane, OKC-Grace, and Tulsa-Boston Avenue (associate).
Survivors include sons Jeffrey Dean McGrew and Steven Lee McGrew. He was preceded in death by his wife, Joan Ruth McGrew, in 2016.
Service was April 22 at Boston Avenue.

He served Sulphur, Bristow-First, Beaver, Bixby, Lindsay/Criner, Lindsay, Coalgate/Centrahoma, Nardin/Deer Creek, and Nardin-Asbury. Prior to his Oklahoma service, he pastored churches in Mississippi and Georgia.
Survivors include his wife, Doris Smith-Moody; three sons, Robert, Andy, and Gary Moody; and two daughters, Kerri Moody-Shiflett and Marla Moody-Patterson.
Service was April 17 at Enid-First UMC.

He began his ministry at Wichita Falls (Texas) First Methodist Church and then served in Oklahoma at OKC-St. Luke’s (associate), OKC-Nichols Hills (associate), Adair, Ponca City-Albright, and Lindsay. He also served as director of the Council on Ministries.
Survivors include his wife, Kathye; two sons, Stephen and Peter; and a daughter, Diana.
Service was April 10 at OKC-Grace UMC.

HAMILTON — Claudia Johnson Hamilton, 90, of Oklahoma City, died April 17, 2017. She was the widow of Rev. Argus J. Hamilton Jr.
Survivors include daughter Marjiean Hamilton and sons Argus Hamilton III and Billy Hamilton.
Service was April 19 at Resthaven Memory Garden, Oklahoma City.

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By incorporating your church or favorite ministry into your plans, you can create options with benefits that go beyond making direct cash gifts to your loved ones.

Charitable Remainder Trust
With the charitable remainder trust, or CRT, you can transfer almost any asset to create an income stream that will provide for your loved ones after you are gone. Most often, these plans are written to pay income to family members for a term of up to 20 years.

CRT Benefits
• Avoid capital gains tax with the gift of appreciated assets
• Receive an income tax deduction immediately for part of the funding amount
• After payments are made to your family, the remainder goes to help the ministry or cause of your choice

Charitable Lead Trust
A charitable lead trust (CLT) is similar to a CRT but provides income to your church or a ministry for a number of years, then gives what remains (plus growth during the trust term) to your family. The CLT gives you an unparalleled way of transferring wealth to your family while minimizing gift and estate taxes.

Life Insurance
Life insurance is also a tool you can use to achieve surprising results for your loved ones. Life insurance alone is a relatively inexpensive way to provide your family with a tax-free inheritance. Life insurance coupled with a CRT is another way to create lifetime income for yourself, fund an insurance plan for your family, and make a significant gift to your favorite ministry or church.

Contact us to learn more about charitable trust and life insurance plans. With just a little planning, we can help you provide for your family and give to the causes you care about. Call or email David Battles at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org to view this plan for your family.

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Charitable Remainder Trust

Charitable Lead Trust

Life Insurance

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The rating “puts it in a very select group of high-performing charities,” said Michael Thatcher, president of Charity Navigator.

Restore Hope gets high rating
For the third consecutive year, Restore Hope Ministries in Tulsa has received a coveted four-star rating from Charity Navigator.
By reducing hunger, preventing homelessness, and promoting hope, the charity works every day to fight poverty and restore hope for families in need in Tulsa County, Oklahoma.
“This rating affirms the trust our donors have in us that we are using our funding wisely to accomplish our mission,” Executive Director Jeff Jaynes said.
Restore Hope is supported by Oklahoma United Methodist Apportionment giving.

The rating “puts it in a very select group of high-performing charities,” said Michael Thatcher, president of Charity Navigator, which evaluates thousands of nonprofits every year.

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