We bid goodbye to Bishop John Wesley Hardt

He led Oklahoma from 1980 to 1988

BY SAM HODGES
UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

Bishop John Wesley Hardt was, as his name suggests, a cradle Methodist who would have a long, profound influence as a pastor, Oklahoma episcopal leader, and bishop-in-residence at Southern Methodist University’s Perkins School of Theology.

Hardt died June 18 at C.C. Young, a Methodist-founded retirement home in Dallas. He was 95.

“His spirit was such that he brought out the best in the people he worked with, and his faith was such that he endured to the end, trusting that whatever happened, he was in God’s hands,” said Boyce Bowdon, who was the Oklahoma Conference communications director when Hardt led the Oklahoma Area, 1980-1988.

Hardt Lodge at Canyon Camp is named in his honor.

Many United Methodists paid tribute to the bishop’s contributions over decades and to his personal attributes. Those included a memory for names and family connections that astonished people and remained sharp into his 90s.

“That was a sign not simply of a man with a great memory but with the heart of a pastor,” said William Lawrence, a professor at Perkins seminary and its former dean. “He cared about the people he served.”

Hardt was born on July 13, 1921, in San Antonio, Texas. His father, Wesley Hardt, was a Methodist Episcopal Church South pastor, and his mother, Ida Wilson Hardt, was also a devout Methodist.

“I’ve never known what it was to be outside the church,” Hardt said in an oral history video for SMU.

The family moved from parsonage to parsonage in East Texas during the Depression. In the video interview, Hardt recalled a particularly trying move.

“On the first night there, the rats chewed up my father’s hat and my mother’s best dress,” he said.

He attended Lon Morris, a Methodist two-year college in East Texas. There he and another male student worked in the college dairy (they formed what Hardt called the Moo Chi Moo fraternity) and sometimes got called out of class when the cows escaped the fence.

At the college, he also met Martha Carson, whom he followed to SMU. Their 73-year marriage began in 1943, and she survives him.

Hardt preached his first sermon in 1938 and, while at SMU, where he earned his undergraduate and theology school degrees, he led five small East Texas churches on Sundays.

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His SMU years also saw the death of his father. Still a student, he succeeded his father in 1943 as pastor of a Methodist church in Malakoff, Texas. He went on to lead a handful of Texas Conference churches, including a long tenure at First Methodist Church of Beaumont.

There, he helped pull together an interracial coalition.

Circle of Care

Farm fosters kids’ connection to God

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The 20-acre property surely seemed like a bit of heaven on earth to open-house guests June 10 at Oh Be Joyful Farm, a new foster care site near Coweta for the Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care.

Children and adults fished in the pond, explored blackberry and blueberry patches, interacted with animals, and roamed the land, hills visible in the distance. They jumped in a bounce house, played beanbag toss and other simple games, enjoyed grilled burgers — and toured two comfortable homes for foster families.

This generous gift from Brad and Becky Johnson, deeded to Circle of Care last year, provides safe haven for young brothers and sisters who are in the custodial care of the state.

The Johnsons founded LawnAmerica, based in Tulsa.
A banner year for OCU athletics

Oklahoma City University’s colors are blue and white, but you wouldn’t know it when you step into the Freede Center arena and encounter a sea of red. Hanging from the rafters are rows of national championship banners.

“While other schools tend to hang their conference championships and runner-up banners, OCU only hangs their national championships,” explained athletic director Jim Abbott.

On May 26, the third-ranked OCU Women’s Golf Team defeated the fourth-ranked team, from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University (Arizona), by eight shots on the Squire Course at PGA National Resort in Florida. That secured OCU’s eighth national title in women’s golf since 2005.

Six days later, on June 1, OCU’s Softball Team defeated Corban University (Oregon) 4-1 in the NAIA Softball World Series in Florida to clinch OCU’s 10th national softball title. That win raised OCU’s national championships to a total of 66 since the university joined the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA).

In addition to the new banners, the United Methodist-related university now also has a prized crystal cup to display on campus. OCU has been named the 2017 NAIA recipient of the coveted Learfield Sports Directors’ Cup — the first time the school has received this honor.

It recognizes the best-of-the-best across all college athletic programs, including NCAA schools, and puts OCU on par with Stanford, Michigan, and Ohio State universities in terms of success in their athletic programs. The Directors’ Cup recognition this year came after OCU secured the golf and softball national championships in the weeks after the spring semester, combined with national titles in Women’s Basketball and Competitive Cheer as well as second- and third-place finishes for many of OCU’s other athletic teams.

The crystal cup stands more than 2 feet tall on a wooden base and weighs nearly 30 pounds.

A week of celebrations is planned for the fall to recognize the accomplishments of OCU student-athletes, coaches, and the athletic department. At the center of the celebration will be that crystal cup amid the sea of red banners overhead.

Thrown out by a curveball

F red lay in his bed, nearing the end of his life, in 1939. He held a faded newspaper clipping from the Brooklyn Eagle. Fred read the article one last time.

A deep sense of sadness crept into his heart. He had lived with that sadness for nearly 70 years.

The date of the paper was Aug. 18, 1870.

It was his record. He held proof in his hand. He had accomplished what no one had been able to do before him. He had been the first person to demonstrate how to throw a curveball — not the other guy.

Cummings had Hicks behind home plate; Goldsmith could not catch a curveball, the nature of the game had changed. The ball could be caught before it hit the ground. The old techniques employed by catchers no longer worked, and the curveball became a staple pitch in baseball.

In 1939, the same year that Fred Goldsmith died, Candy Cummings was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame — as the inventor of the curveball.

Why Cummings and not Goldsmith?

Cummings had Hicks behind home plate; Goldsmith could not use his curveball in a game without an innovative, fearless catcher. The introduction of the curveball required both a pitcher and a catcher.

The story is a parable for the church. It takes a body of believers to fulfill the mission of the church.

Paul reminds us that we all have roles to play in the body of Christ. “Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: Don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each of you. We have many parts in one body, but the parts don’t all have the same function. In the same way, though there are many of us, we are one body in Christ, and individually we belong to each other.” (Romans 12:3-5 CEV).
Because of the generosity of Brad and Becky Johnson, foster children find safe haven at Oh Be Joyful Farm, which the couple donated to the Circle of Care. A church in Colorado inspired the Johnsons to give the farm its name.
Newlyweds get new appointments in Enid

BY JAMES NEAL
ENID NEWS & EAGLE

It's not unusual for United Methodist ministers to move from congregation to congregation every few years. Pastoral itinerancy is one of the hallmarks of the denomination. So, there was nothing unusual about the Christ United and New Hope congregations in Enid, Oklahoma, receiving new ministers at the same time. What is more distinctive is that these new leaders are a newly married couple.

Emily and Michael Robnett took over the pastoral posts on June 1 — Emily at New Hope and Michael at Christ United. The Revs. Robnett were introduced by a mutual friend while attending seminary.

In May the couple married, both graduated, and Emily was commissioned during the 2017 Oklahoma Annual Conference. Then the two provisional elders packed up and moved to Enid.

"It's been all the major life events in a month," Emily said with a laugh.

"It's been quite a hectic couple of months," Michael added, "but we love it.

They share similar stories of how they came into career ministry. Both felt God's call early in life, and both put it off for some time.

From Ada, Emily said she was first drawn to ministry in her senior year of high school. She'd been invited by a friend to attend church, and before long she felt at home in the congregation.

"It really felt like I belonged there," she said, "and I never looked back."

She grew in her faith and her connection to the church, and her pastor eventually saw something of Emily's future.

"I talked to my minister, and he asked me if I'd ever thought of becoming a minister," she said. "At the time, it was absurd, because no 18-year-old wants to be a minister. But it was something that stuck with me through college."

Michael also first felt the call in high school.

From a Navy family, he moved a lot when he was a kid, and he experienced "church shopping" as the family was relocated around the country.

The family attended Baptist and non-denominational churches. When they settled in Louisiana, Michael found a church where finally he felt at home.

"I started attending a United Methodist church there, and I really liked it and what it was about," he said.

Then Hurricane Katrina made landfall in August 2005. The storm destroyed Michael's new church home.

He joined some of the other members in trying to repair and reinstate services at the church,

but their numbers were few.

"A lot of the adults had left by that time," he said, "because who wants to go to a bombed-out church?"

Despite the odds, the remaining congregants managed to revive the church — an experience he carries with him.

After college he went to work in the nonprofit sector. Michael said it was worthwhile work, but there was something missing.

"I had gotten out of college and into the real world, but something wasn't sitting quite right."

Eventually he resigned from his job, surrendered to what he'd been feeling since high school, and enrolled in seminary.

"It was only partly my choice," Michael said. "It's what I had to do. I tried to do something else, and I couldn't do it because my heart wasn't in it, and God was pulling on me."

He said most people who have a calling to ministry run from that call for a time.

"If you look at almost all call stories, they try to fight it, but every time God sees them through it. It doesn't matter how long you run from it, it's still going to call you."

Emily also hesitated to pursue ministry, but found peace when she accepted her calling.

"I was young, and it felt like a lot of responsibility," she said. "In considering your call there's a lot of fear, especially early on, because you don't understand what God is asking of you. But, once you accept that all, there's a peace.

"You just have to ask yourself, 'Is this a message worth living for? I think we can look back at our past and see it is, no matter the risk.'"

Now in her first assignment as a pastor, Emily said she's driven by the spirit that first called her to serve.

"It's the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit that keeps me going."

She said the two Enid churches are a match for them as a couple because both churches were in need of new ministers at the same time, the churches are close to each other, and "they're a good match for our gifts."

The Robnetts said those gifts and their passion for ministry feed into a common need for both congregations: to grow.

"Christ United is in a position where it's ready to become something new," Michael said. "It has wanted to become that for quite a while now, and it just needed that little push."

He said that "something new" would involve pushing outside the church walls.

"I think that is the same overarching need of this church, too," Emily added about New Hope. "They just want to grow."

She sees in New Hope much of the warmth and potential of her childhood congregation.

"My church in Ada gave me a place to grow, and that's what the community needs. They're ready to grow and try new things and provide for the needs of the community."

Both pastors look forward to being out of the office as much as possible — out in the community, serving people's needs. They share a common vision of what that ministry will look like.

"It's basically about emulating God in all that you do," Michael said.

"We're called to be with people at some of the most beautiful and the most tragic parts of their lives," Emily said. "Ministry is about those relationships, and caring about people and loving them no matter where they are in their lives."

(Reprinted with permission from Enid News & Eagle, June 19, 2017)
TREASURED MOMENT — The ministry of giving in Oklahoma has been guided by these four leaders in succession. From right to left, the Conference’s treasurers from 1991 to current day are Jerry Perryman, Jo Ann McNaught, Brian Bakeman, and Norma Quinn. They posed for a snapshot during the annual health screening in May. McNaught is a lay woman, and the others are clergy. A total of 476 people completed the health screening, according to Wellness coordinator Debbie Ware.

Clergy take big steps for God

“Moving Day” for Oklahoma’s pastors carries extra weight for those taking part in the Conference Wellness walking program.

Each June, one day is designated as the official travel date for clergy who are relocating.

This year that was June 8.

Picture packing boxes, rental trucks, fast food, and families in transit throughout the state.

Wellness coordinator Debbie Ware checked the walking program statistics for that day.

On average, 1.5 million steps are taken per day by all program participants.

On Moving Day 2017, they walked an additional 219 miles — a total of 1.9 million steps.

Ware also tracked down step totals for “moving week.” Those topped 18.3 million, compared to an average 11 million steps per week.

Christ said, “Go,” and Oklahoma’s clergy certainly step up in answer.

Four excel in evangelism

Four people received the Harry Denman Evangelism Award at the 2017 Oklahoma Annual Conference.

A program of The Foundation for Evangelism, this award honors United Methodists in each annual conference.

Evangelism happens in many contexts and many settings, impacts and engages all generations, and requires relationship among a variety of people. What distinguishes a Denman award recipient is a commitment to consistently introduce others to the good news of Jesus Christ in all ministry settings.

• Youth winner: Kailee McCrary, Abiding Harvest UMC, Broken Arrow

Kailee, a senior at Broken Arrow High School, has been described by those who know and love her as one who has a “missionary mindset and an evangelistic heart.”

As a direct result of her witness, 11 students now take part regularly in the church’s youth group and half of her high school golf team has attended that group.

Kailee invites friends to church and camp every year, knowing that the benefit of it all is a relationship with Jesus Christ.

She is a true friend to those beyond her immediate circle of peers as well as within that circle, and she always keeps the door open to invite in new friends.

She also welcomes and visits with youth group newcomers in spreading the good news of the Gospel.

• Laity winners: Don and Nancy Whittaker, Madill-First UMC

Don and Nancy have been actively living out an attitude of evangelism in Madill for 47 years. Their uncommon nomination for this award as a couple is based on ministry so entwined that it’s impossible to distinguish where each one’s ministry begins or ends.

Their evangelism encompasses facilitating worship at Bridgeview Resort’s campgrounds for neighbors and visitors who otherwise would not have that opportunity. They practice an inclusive attitude in their outreach of caring for nursing home residents and hosting a monthly service/visitaton at one such facility in Madill.

They open their home and often Don’s workshop as a gathering place for United Methodist Men to do service projects. They support community outreach with their involvement in “Dad-n-Me Reading Night” and are active in the Emmaus community.

These everyday evangelists participate in smaller-scale missions and are peacemakers within the community as they seek to carry Christ to those in need.

• Clergy winner: Rev. Tiffany Nagel Monroe

Tiffany was nominated by those who love her “evangelical enthusiasm” and willingness to serve others. As the Holy Spirit guided her recent leadership of Calumet and Red Rock United Methodist Churches, through innovation, visitation, and evangelism they have grown in attendance and professions of faith.

Her efforts were crucial as they launched Cal’s Service Station and Youthvity, two after-school programs that grew quickly and met community needs. During the recent school year, attendance was 88 youngsters at Cal’s on Wednesday afternoons, and Youthvity served 45 youths.

In 2016, the Calumet congregation grew by 37 people, with five professions of faith. Red Rock has grown also, to 180 in average professions of faith.

Submit a nomination: www.okumc.org/DenmanAward.
District VIM team marks milestone

BY TABITHA BECKMAN

T he Wichitas District celebrates its sixth year of sending Volunteers in Mission teams to Cobija, Bolivia, to serve with members of the Bolivian Methodist Church.

During the June mission this year, we got to participate in blessing the cornerstone for a new church building. In 2012 the former Lawton District made a 5-year commitment to build a church for the congregation of Cristo El Buen Pastor (Christ the Good Shepherd). The people were meeting in the local Methodist school. That church was completed last year.

This year we began moving out to serve in the Amazonico District of Northern Bolivia, to Villa Vista, just outside Cobija. Work has begun on Nueva Criatura (New Creation), one of the oldest Methodist churches in that district. The congregation needs to move from the original wooden structure, open on three sides, to a brick building with bathrooms and a small kitchen.

Pastor Mario, the 72-year-old founder of Nueva Criatura, shared with us the history of the church in the area. The blessing service was an extremely moving moment. We had four youth volunteers, four on the team had served previously in Cobija, and several were VIM first-timers. Randy Oakes, a new VIM Team Leader, did a great job.

We return again in June 2018. To learn more about our work, view our team blog, lawtontocobija2014.wordpress.com.
Pocket squares carry prayers

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Borrowing from the popular prayer shawl tradition, Norman-McFarlin UMC members create tiny “pocket prayer shawl” squares to remind mission volunteers, nursing home residents, Vacation Bible School participants, and others that they are blanketed in prayer.

Susan Carruth, who is involved in McFarlin’s prayer shawl ministry, estimated the church has given out “thousands” of the knitted or crocheted squares.

“The people pray while they’re making them,” she said.

The squares, which fit easily in a pocket or purse, “represent a larger prayer shawl,” said Jane Cook, also part of the ministry. A basket of pocket prayers is on hand at the church so people can take some to give out any time.

Linda Harker, McFarlin’s senior pastor, posted a photo of one such square on Facebook. With it was a note from Carruth to a mission volunteer: “Just to let all of you know that you will be in our thoughts and prayers. Thank you for being Christ’s hands and feet and heart. Safe travels and God’s blessings.”

Some squares are well-traveled, Cook said. McFarlin’s chapel choir took 450 with them on a performance tour to New Mexico. The musicians handed them out at nursing homes where they sang.

The idea started when the church planned a mission service trip to Mexico at a time when violence there was much in the news. Youths on the trip received the tiny squares to let them know “they were being prayed for when they were gone,” Carruth said.

The squares are usually made from yarn scraps left over from sewing prayer shawls, she said. They vary in size, 3 inches or smaller, depending on who makes them. Each one takes about 20 minutes to make.

One member cranked out 400 for Vacation Bible School participants. “She is a machine,” Carruth said.

$eminar seeks younger clergy

The value cannot be overstated for young clergy to start investing now for retirement, said Stephen Mitchell, who is the Oklahoma Conference director of benefits/personnel.

That’s why he is strongly urging clergy younger than age 50 to attend a one-day benefits symposium in August.

Bishop Jimmy Nunn affirmed that. “It’s essential for new clergy to invest a little time to understand a long-term financial plan, including pension and insurance benefits,” he said, “and to develop a plan and follow it.”

Mitchell offered a comparison based on a 6 percent annual rate of return on investment.

- A person age 35 who starts saving $1,200 a year will accumulate almost $200,000 by age 65.
- But a person age 55 who starts saving $1,200 per year will have only $17,000 by age 65, the typical milestone for retiring.

“It’s so hard to convince people but so necessary” to set aside money for the future, Mitchell said, in spite of the financial demands of today.

The free symposium will be offered twice: on Aug. 21 at Oklahoma City University, in the Sarkey’s Science & Math Center; and on Aug. 22 in Tulsa at Boston Avenue UMC. The event is open to all active clergy.

Both begin at 10 a.m. and include lunch. Attendees earn continuing education credits.

Leading will be representatives from Wespath, which is the new name for the denomination’s General Board of Pension & Health Benefits; from EY financial services; and from the Conference Benefits Office.


Appointments

- Jeremy Sanders, from OKC-St. Luke’s associate pastor to CEO, Upward Transitions, Oklahoma City; effective July 1.
- Mary Irby, from Fort Cobb/Highland to Highland and 2 OIMC churches; effective July 1.
- Andre Contino, from OKC-Quail Springs associate to Moore-First associate; effective June 15.

Retiree Project — Delphine Jewell, left, and Wilma Reppert, residents of Epworth Villa in Oklahoma City, organize clean donated clothing from the retirement community’s twice-annual drive to benefit Skyline Urban Ministry. Jewell, a retired missionary, said the spring drive yielded 1,290 pounds of clothes. Organizers place collection bins throughout the campus. Both Skyline and Epworth Villa are United Methodist-related.
The Benefits of an Estate Plan

Our free Planning Your Legacy guide is designed to encourage you to think about how you want your assets to be distributed at your passing, and to assist you in gathering the information your attorney will need. The process will be much easier, less expensive, and help fulfill your desires for family and the Lord’s work.

Peace
An estate plan should give you peace of mind knowing that important and sometimes difficult decisions have been made to care for you and your loved ones.

Provision
An estate plan is designed to help you provide for both you and your family. With a good estate plan, you can give loved ones the property you have acquired in the right way, at the right time, and at minimal cost.

Protection
A good estate plan will protect you in your senior years. It may be important to designate a specific person to manage your property; help doctors and other medical staff with important decisions; and make certain that you are receiving the best possible care. An estate plan can increase your lifetime security and also achieve your goals for family and charity.

Spiritual Legacy
1 Chronicles 29:11-12 clearly illustrates God’s ownership of all. An estate plan acknowledges that ownership; helps to prepare the next steward; and ensures that your final act on earth is one of good stewardship.

How do I get started?
We have designed the Planning Your Legacy guide for your benefit. Feel free to take the time to move through the different sections. You may, however, need to come back later and fill in more detailed information. Most of this information you will know or have readily available.

What if I have some questions?
When it comes time to decide on the distribution of your property, you may have some questions. There are two resources that will help you.

In addition to the explanations within our free guide, we have a wealth of online estate planning information on our website. Feel free to visit our website and learn about wills at www.okumf.org. We are always available to help.

Contact David Battles at 800-259-6863 or send an email to dbattles@okumf.org to get a FREE COPY of the Planning Your Legacy guide. Don’t wait any longer to plan your legacy of love!

“Labor Day on the Lake”
Sept. 1-4 at Cross Point Camp

Spend the last official weekend of summer relaxing at Lake Texoma.

- Arrive Friday evening and leave after lunch on Monday.
- Choose a lodging package — tent, RV site, by the bunk, or by the cabin — for families, small groups, or singles.
- Enjoy swimming, tubing, and other water fun. Bring and launch your boat, too.
- Meal package includes three breakfasts, three lunches, and two dinners.

Sign up at www.okcamps.org

CANYON CAMPERS AIM FOR FUN — Junior-high CLUE campers from about 40 churches learned archery, faced off in chess, enjoyed group games after dark, and more on June 5-9 at Canyon Camp, near Hinton. Deans Morgan Ross, Kelley Ramey, and Laura Glover led the 156 campers, mostly from Cimarron and Northern Prairie Districts.

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Save the dates

- Free Practical Learning Seminars
  Saint Paul School of Theology
  Live stream www.spst.edu/video
  - July 12, 1-3 p.m.
    Distinctives of the Wesleyan Movement, by Hal Knight
  - July 26, 1-3 p.m.
    The Bible Through a Missional Lens, by Jeremy Basset
  - Aug. 2, 1-3 p.m.
    Improving Our Preaching, by Mike Graves

- Mission u (2 events)
  July 21-24 at Oklahoma City University
  Weekend event begins at 5 p.m. July 21
  One day-plus event begins at 8:30 p.m. July 23
  - 3 studies for adults — Living as a Covenant Community, U.S. Missionary Conferences, and Climate Justice
  - Children will study Missionary Conferences
  - Youths will study Climate Justice
  Deadline to register — July 12
  Brochure and registration: www.okumc.org/missionu

- Single Parent Family Camp
  Aug. 11-13 at Camp Egan
  Dean: Jacob McIntosh of Jenks
  www.okumcministries.org/camps/specialty.htm