From left: Lisa Wolfe, Katy Hirsch, and Ethan Watt display a new book on the Dead Sea Scrolls that includes an OCU team's research.

Sacred artifact illuminates study for OCU team

By Holly McCray

The secret is out, and Katy Hirsch is exuberant. With college peers, she got to see and study a fragment of Psalm 11 from one of the oldest existing biblical manuscripts: the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Three Oklahoma City University religion students and professor Lisa Wolfe were chosen in 2013 to research the artifact through the Green Scholars Initiative by the Museum of the Bible. Their work was part of a collaboration by 50 scholars, reported in the book “Dead Sea Scrolls Fragments in the Museum Collection.” They had to keep secret their conclusions until the book’s publication in July.

Passionate about history and religion, Hirsch said waiting on the book’s release was hard. The time she spent studying the precious fragment “was such a journey for me, intellectually and spiritually.”

Hirsch, Dr. Wolfe, and Ethan Watt spoke on Nov. 3 at OCU. Extra chairs were brought out for the crowd.

“I cannot possibly explain how exciting it is” for an undergraduate to get such an opportunity, Wolfe said. Allison Bevers, Leigh Smith, Hirsch, and Watt were students in her class, “Readings in Biblical Hebrew.”

The Dead Sea Scrolls consist of more than 900 scrolls — in tens of thousands of fragile fragments — found in clay jars in 11 caves beside the Dead Sea and other sites nearby.

Their subjects are biblical and non-biblical, some written in Hebrew and some in Aramaic, Watt said. They are between 2,330 and 2,050 years old. The first scrolls were discovered in 1947.

From connections made when the Oklahoma City Museum of Art in 2011 hosted the “Passages” exhibit, which showcased items from the Museum of the Bible, the adventure developed for the five-member team from United Methodist-affiliated OCU.

They used digital technologies to study photos of the tiny piece — which contained 1½ letters of one word — and were thrilled to view the actual fragment because the Museum of the Bible archives are in Oklahoma City.

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The new church building emerges suddenly amid the woods in far north Edmond. Sleek bands of cedar wrap around the gray concrete structure. Even the architecture is unconventional at Connect United Methodist Church, an undeniably modern outpost in God’s mission field.

The 7,000 square feet “matches our identity,” said Pastor Adam Ricks. “You won’t walk into here expecting a choir.”

The band’s energy will bring you to your feet to sing even as the on-screen announcements roll before Sunday’s contemporary service.

Dress comfortably. Bring into the worship space the yummy breakfast bites and juice or morning caffeine you’ve chosen from the custom-built buffet in the lobby.

Register your child, fifth-grader or younger, at one of three electronic check-in stations. Staff with digital tablets are on hand to assist.

Use your smartphone to scan the QR code in the bulletin to give electronically.

Look up and see the exposed ductwork, both functional and fitting the church’s aesthetic.

In addition to the worship space that seats 220 people, there are four multipurpose rooms, all equipped with smart TVs. Restrooms are state of the art. There is no office. Even the

SEE NEW. PAGE 8

Building connections in Edmond

By Holly McCray

In Edmond, Adam Ricks leads Connect UMC, now worshipping in its new building, 5400 N. Coltrane.

Matching gift will help fulfill Hayes endowment for Africa University

A promise to match donations moves the Conference closer to its Dec. 31 goal to endow a scholarship, in honor of Bishop Robert Hayes and Mrs. Dee Hayes, for Africa University (AU).

The Woodworth Trust has offered to match additional gifts, up to the amount needed, to complete the endowment for AU, which is the first fully accredited United Methodist-related university on the African continent.

At Oklahoma’s 2016 Annual Conference, one way we celebrated the 12 remarkable years of service by our retiring bishop and his wife was by designating the offering for a missional cause dear to them — that is AU.

The offering was $61,000. To establish the endowment, $69,000 more is needed — for a total of $130,000.

New Bishop Jimmy Nunn knows the positive ways this school of higher education has affected people.

“I have met several leaders who were educated at
Advent calls for commitment

By Bishop Jimmy Nunn

The word “Advent” literally means “coming.” It marks the beginning of the Christian year and in 2016 is observed Nov. 26-Dec. 24. Advent is one of the seasons of that year when I intentionally reflect on my life and journey with Jesus Christ.

Note that spiritual reflection is more than simply checking off a box on a list. I do not try to recount the number of times I worshipped, read the Bible, prayed, or sought to do a good deed. All these are important — but they are outward signs of an inward grace.

Discovering the sources of inward grace is a task of expectant examination. Since Advent proclaims the coming of Christ, this expectation gives rise to an examination of the heart.

Times of distress or celebration both provide clues to the state of my spiritual life. In the ancient tradition of the Desert Ancestors, I have learned everything that happens has meaning; my task is to discover the meaning and to commit myself to following Jesus.

Spiritual reflection is best accomplished by committing to a plan. Here are three commitments in my plan for the season.

1. I plan to enter Advent with a new awareness of my need for grace. Grace is the free gift of God’s love and mercy. I cannot earn it, but my life will be enriched as I open myself to the healing power of grace and as I open my heart to people around me. Yet it is hard to receive grace because it is hard to receive anything that one feels has not been earned. Understanding that grace is what United Methodism offers.

2. I plan to hear a fresh word from God during the Advent season. This commitment will be hard for me to keep because it will require me to slow down. However, I have learned that constant activity does spiritual harm. There are many places I expect to encounter a fresh word from God. One of those places is in the Bible, both in the traditional stories of the season and in unexpected passages. I also expect to find a fresh word from God as I listen to other people share their experiences and as I seek to do something that will be helpful to people in need this season.

3. I plan to grow in my faith this Advent. My friend Jim Jackson writes a daily thought. He shared a profound insight from his wife, Susan, which I’ll paraphrase: We often hear that prayer is talking to God. But when two people are in love with each other, they don’t always talk; sometimes they just gaze in the same direction.

I plan to grow by looking in the same direction that God is looking this season. What are you planning for Advent 2016?
Southwest Region youths presented the Bible to Bishop Jimmy Nunn, and Christopher Whiteshirt from Clinton Indian Church & Community Center gave him the basin and towel.

OIMC honors Nunns’ arrival

More than 200 people worshipped and feasted as the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) celebrated the assignment of Bishop Jimmy and Mary Nunn, on Nov. 6 at Oklahoma City University.

They were welcomed by OCU President Robert Henry. The school’s clock tower chimed as the bishop vowed to “serve faithfully and well” right after receiving symbols of his role.

Pastor Mike Svitak read “The Character of a Bishop,” from Titus 1:7-9, and OIMC Lay Leader Ramona Eyachabbe conducted the covenant liturgy.

Throughout, tribal hymns were sung a capella. Bishop Nunn said, “I heard a lot of joy today in songs I don’t know; my heart is uplifted.” Youths collected the offering, designated for Water Is Life. Eight churches prepared the community meal. Worship was in the OCU chapel building named for another bishop, W. Angie Smith, who led Oklahoma Methodists for 24 years.

Endowment:
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Africa University in my travels throughout the connection and in Africa,” he said. “I have been impressed with the spiritual depth, humility, and level of expertise each graduate has demonstrated.

“An endowed chair will make a difference in thousands of lives for decades to come. Your expression of gratitude for the ministry of Bishop Hayes will make a huge impact on this ministry.”

One of the AU graduates who ministers right here in Oklahoma is Pastor Gerard Nsabimana of Stroud UMC. He earned a bachelor’s degree at AU in 2002, a master’s at Oklahoma State University in 2005, and graduated in 2011 from Duke Divinity School. He was ordained as an elder in 2014.

Before his appointment to Stroud, he directed the Wesley Foundation at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond.

The 1988 General Conference of The United Methodist Church unanimously approved the founding of AU on land donated by The UMC in Zimbabwe. The Africa University Fund is one of seven apportioned funds of the Church.


Today its students come from 26 nations. Its graduates number more than 7,000, of which 54 percent are women. Many are engaged in vigorous efforts to improve public health, food security, peace, stability, and the enjoyment of economic prosperity on the African continent.

Your special money gifts are sought specifically for the Hayes scholarship endowment.

With the generous offer of matching funds, the yearend goal is in sight, Conference leaders agreed.

“We are asking you to prayerfully consider helping us complete this by Dec. 31,” said Joseph Harris, Communications Ministry director and assistant to the bishop.

You can mail your check to the Conference Treasurer: Write in the memo line of the check: “AU - Hayes Scholarship Fund.” Send to 1501 NW 24th St., Oklahoma City OK 73106.

• Go to the Share the Joy playlist on the YouTube channel “OkumcCommunications”; you will find video resources there.
• Visit a church unfamiliar to you and then ask yourself what would have heightened your enjoyment.

At the event
• Greeters with name badges and smiles are a great help.
• Fellowship with munchies before the event seems to relax folks.

For suggestions specific to small churches, contact Jim Hollifield at Wagoner-First UMC.

New people are just waiting to be invited by you to experience a spiritual Christmas. Plan now to invite them and then welcome them with Jesus’s love.

SHARE THE JOY

The Conference evangelism task force is leading a SHARE THE JOY social media campaign during this holiday season.

Pastors, watch for details and promotional materials in your email this month.

BY JIM HOLLIFIELD

Wow! They came! I invited someone to my church’s Christmas event, and WHAT NOW?

They’re here. Just how do we prepare for company in the Christmas season?

New folks in our churches need extra consideration and kindness to help them experience the fullness of warmth in Christ when they come among our church family.

Simple things can clutter their minds. They wonder which door to use, where the bathrooms are, if there is a changing area for babies.

Thoughtfulness on our part can meet these needs so they will feel free to experience joy in the birth of our Savior.

In advance
• Invite a church member’s grandchild who isn’t familiar with your services to attend one Sunday. Afterward, talk with them about what they didn’t know, understand, or enjoy. That can yield helpful insights.

PHOTOS BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The Oklahoma United Methodist Contact November 25, 2016 Page 3
National consultants introduce multisite strategies. Participants came from one of every five churches in the Conference. (Of the 25 churches with 300 or more people in worship weekly, 22 participated.)

Speakers were nationally recognized experts in multisite strategy: Jim Tomberlin of MultiSite Solutions and Greg Ligon of Leadership Network. Their collective experience is from work with hundreds of churches.

MultiSite is “church planting on steroids,” said Rev. Tomberlin (aka @MultiSiteGuy and @MergerGuru). “It’s a valid instrument for local churches. Multisite aren’t only in urban areas, and the concept isn’t new. In the U.S., 5,000-plus such churches are operating.

This movement was radically new in the 1990s, “cool” in the first decade of the 21st century, and now is mainstream, Tomberlin said. “We don’t want to lose our message but have to constantly re-evaluate our methods.”

He said 61 percent of Americans don’t go to any church.

A video portrayed the success of a multisite strategy in Sterling, Kan. The town’s population is 2,328. “If it will work in Sterling, it will work anywhere,” said Chris Tiger, the Conference’s director of New Faith Communities.

“Jim and I hope to paint for you that there are lots of opportunities,” said Rev. Ligon.

They urged Oklahoma’s churches to make the most of mergers — a subject that can stop conversation cold but with proven value in multisite success. Property is “redeemed.” Resources are pooled.

Dedicated people in leadership focus on

1  Wellston UMC

Wellston United Methodist Church is celebrating three improvements to its building, topped off by a custom-made Cross and Flame crafted by a church member.

The congregation gathered Oct. 2 to dedicate the changes, which also include a renovated children’s classroom and an interior ramp to improve accessibility between the sanctuary and fellowship hall, Pastor Paul Calkin said.

The Cross and Flame on the steeple replaced a cross installed about 50 years ago. The symbol was designed and built by member Adam Smith out of recycled materials.

The United Methodist Cross and Flame symbolizes the time when John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, experienced conversion, finding his heart “strangely warmed” during a religious meeting in 1738.

“Today we celebrate that long heritage of hearts strangely warmed, the times when the redemptive power of God’s grace is recognized...when lives are changed, hearts are opened, and love is made known,” Rev. Calkin said at the dedication, which was on World Communion Sunday.

Before the new ramp was built, there was only outside access to the sanctuary and fellowship hall.

“The ramp is here because we take to our hearts the statement that ‘All are welcome here.’ We want no barriers,” Calkin said.

He said construction of the ramp led to the third project, renovation of the children’s classroom. A portion of the old classroom was in the way of the proposed ramp.

In the Ritual of Holy Baptism, the church is asked, “Do you as a congregation accept the responsibility of assisting these parents (and sponsors) in fulfillment of the baptismal vows, and do you undertake to provide facilities and opportunities for Christian nurture and fellowship?”

Calkin said, “That’s why we renovate classrooms. That’s why we have children’s moments. That’s why we love our children. We have made a commitment to them and to children yet unborn to have a place ready for them.”

2  Mannsville UMC

Members of Mannsville UMC are taking inspiration from a couple who found a way to help others even as they deal with their own health problems.

Longtime church members Eddie and Betty Pittman of Ardmore, who have not been able to attend church lately because of illness, came up with the idea of saving their nutritional supplement bottles and giving them to church youth to collect donations for mission.

So far, the youth group has collected over $235 in the bottles. The money, sent to World Vision, has helped buy chickens and goats and provide medical assistance for the poor.

Betty Pittman, who is a cancer patient, took on the job of washing out the bottles.

The couple gives the clean bottles to the youths, so they can ask for donations to fill them. Sometimes, the Pittmans put in some of their own money.

Eddie, who is on dialysis, has been involved over the years with major fundraising for the church, including the building fund.

“The Pittmans set a wonderful example of what Christian behavior should be,” said member Andra Jennings. “They have inspired all of our congregation, and we would like to share their story.”

Photo: Seven members of the youth group from Mannsville UMC visit the Pittmans in Ardmore.

3  Vian UMC

The men of Vian UMC recently honored the town’s emergency personnel by treating them to breakfast at the church and giving them copies of the devotional book “Strength for Service to God and Community.” President Fred Hamon

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The United Methodist Cross and Flame were dedicated on Sept. 26, 2015.

The Oklahoma United Methodist Contact November 25, 2016 Page 4

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BY HOLLY MCCRAY

Vibrant churches take many shapes. A recent Oklahoma forum that focused on the multisite movement attracted more than 200 people from 112 congregations.

Presented by the Conference’s New Faith Communities Ministry Team, the seminar was held at St. Luke’s Edmond — the newest satellite of multisite St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in the greater Oklahoma City area.

Attendance confirmed a desire to know more about multisite strategies. Participants came from one of every five churches in the Conference. (Of the 25 churches with 300 or more people in worship weekly, 22 participated.)

Speakers were nationally recognized experts in multisite strategy: Jim Tomberlin of MultiSite Solutions and Greg Ligon of Leadership Network. Their collective experience is from work with hundreds of churches.

MultiSite is “church planting on steroids,” said Rev. Tomberlin (aka @MultiSiteGuy and @MergerGuru). “It’s a valid instrument for local churches.” Multisites aren’t only in urban areas, and the concept isn’t new. In the U.S., 5,000-plus such churches are operating.

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strategy snapshots

4 McLoud UMC
At 5 a.m., the men started fires in two big meat smokers at McLoud-First United Methodist Church on Oct. 22.
At 7 a.m., they carefully placed the first of 800 seasoned, thick-cut pork chops on the grills. Meal service began at 11.
Homegrown pickled okra and loaded baked potatoes were among the side dishes.
McLoud’s annual Pork Chop Dinner, a fundraiser, began with the need for a build-
ning. "We’ve been doing this so long we’ve forgotten how many years, but we know it’s over 20," declared a Facebook event post.
Harold Scott recalled his wife’s pronouncement decades ago as the congregation discussed how to raise money to build. "My husband can cook pork chops." He still does. He even made one smoker.
The church served 200 pork chops that first year.
The town anticipates the dinner each fall. People who grew up at McLoud-First and moved away come back, from as far as Ponca City.
Brenda Hill and Dick Allen currently co-chair missions at the church.
Food connects the congregation to its community in several ways, said Pastor Charles King.
McLoud UMC takes its turns feeding the high school football team. The church supports the local ministerial alliance’s food pantry. The community-wide Thanksgiving meal is prepared in its kitchen.
"We are looking at ways to be faithful in what we’re doing," said Rev. King.
One week after the Pork Chop Dinner, members prepared and served a free meal of beans and cornbread.

5 Duncan-St. Paul’s
In the Cinderella fairy tale, a pumpkin turns into a magic coach. Hopes are that a real pumpkin (and many of its companions) will help fund a children’s program at Duncan-St. Paul’s United Methodist Church.
St. Paul’s pumpkin patch, the only one operated this fall by a church in Duncan, has helped remind the community about the church’s presence, said Pastor Andrew Haire.
Proceeds from the pumpkin sales, which ended Oct. 31, went to the church’s Faith Weavers program, a children’s ministry.
The church opened its first-ever pumpkin patch on Oct. 10. About half of the first shipment — 505 pumpkins — had been sold within two weeks, Rev. Haire said.
The pumpkins were supplied by Pumpkins USA, a farm in New Mexico that employs Navajo workers, and the church got to keep a percentage of the proceeds.
"There is no upfront cost to the church," Haire said.
On Oct. 22, St. Paul’s paired the pumpkin patch with a community festival, which included a chili cookoff, bake sale, door prizes, a professional pumpkin carver, live music, and face painting. Several emergency vehicles were featured, including a medical evacuation helicopter and tactical command truck for children to tour.
The pumpkin patch and festival have “brought up the vitality and excitement of the congregation,” Haire said.
About 60 people currently are attending worship, he said. The 2015 Journal reported 36.
The pumpkin patch raised over $5,000 for Faith Weavers, said Haire’s wife Ashley, and several more children have been attending Faith Weavers since the festival.
“We’ve met a lot of new people in the community,” she said. — Chris Schutz

strategy to grow churches in Conference

reaching new people rather than holding on to members.
Yet in general, any proposal to merge churches gets pushback. Congregations recoil and circle the wagons.
The consultants reject such negativity.
They see a lot of mergers in their multisite consulting work.
"Better Together" declares Tomberlin in his book by that name. The goal of a merger should be "join with," he said, not "hand over."
They recast mergers as extending ministry, not abandoning it.

“Build on where (church) is working; replicate that. Don’t get focused on where it is broken,” Ligon advised.
Using a medical term, “ICU mergers” don’t succeed, according to their research. "Survival-driven" efforts “to preserve an outmoded way of doing church” are unhealthy, said Tomberlin.
The time is now to create multisites, they emphasized. The United Methodist Church is perceived positively in U.S. culture as safe, inclusive, and welcoming. Its legacy of involvement in social justice issues continues.

Lots of practical help for this growth strategy is available, they noted.
Among Conference-level resources are New Faith Communities’ help and the New People New Places grants program.
Appropriation giving by every church funds the work. With that support, more multisites are developing in the Conference in addition to St. Luke’s.
“I believe God opens amazing doors when you and I are willing to step out and try,” said Rev. Dr. Long, OKC-St. Luke’s senior pastor.
In Claremore, First UMC is launching two satellites, and one will meet in a diner.
Owasso-First and Edmond-Acts 2 are extending their Kingdom work.
Bishop Jimmy Nunn also fully participated in the Oct. 13 seminar. He thanked the advisers for calling churches to “make something happen.”
“I do believe every county in Oklahoma has got potential to reach people for Jesus Christ,” he said. “Lord, give us the will that we might act on that vision.”
For more information, contact Rev. Tiger at the United Methodist Ministry Center, ctiger@okumc.org, 405-530-2005.
The annual Retired Clergy/Spouse Retreat drew 85 people to Canyon Camp in October to fellowship, learn, and play. The retirees, spouses, and those widowed represented all walks of ministry.

They listened as featured speaker Tex Sample challenged them to continue being effective in ministry even when they no longer are classified as “active clergy.”

The collective past service of the retreat’s participants totaled more than 1,600 years in ministry.

Among the variety of assignments represented in their attendance were:

- One bishop
- Seven district superintendents
- Four Conference staff leaders
- One university president
- Three university vice-presidents
- Three university professors
- One seminary professor
- Several directors of education/music ministries
- One jurisdictional staff person
- Pastors and spouses, who served in local churches over the past 50-plus years.

Nor have these folks taken to their rocking chairs. Some continue to preach in churches. Others teach weekly Sunday School classes. Some are published authors, including Rev. Dr. Sample, writer of a dozen books.

Many are involved in cross-cultural and ecumenical ministries and serve on agency boards in their communities.

All have remained vital — and all seem delighted to be retired.

Oh, the stories they could — and do — tell at the annual retired clergy retreat at Canyon Camp!

Who are these people?

BY DAVID SEVERE

The annual Retired Clergy/Spouse Retreat drew 85 people to Canyon Camp in October to fellowship, learn, and play. The retirees, spouses, and those widowed represented all walks of ministry.

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Among the variety of assignments represented in their attendance were:

- One bishop
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- Four Conference staff leaders

Appointments

- Jaimie Willis, new, to Claremore-First associate pastor, effective Nov. 15.
- Claudia Lovelace, from Hominy/Fairfax to Hominy, effective Nov. 1.
- Lindee Deroin, from NA to Fairfax, effective Nov. 1.
- Cynthia Arnwine, new, to Bokoshe, effective Oct. 15.
- Marty Hern, new, to Braggs/Woodall, effective Oct. 15.

Employment

Youth Director: Broken Arrow-St. Stephen’s UMC. Part-time. Send inquiries to Kirt Moelling, kmoelling@ssumcba.org, 918-455-4202.

Organist and Pianist: OKC-Wesley. Part-time. Contact Marla Lobo at marla.lobo@yahoo.com

Accompanist/Organist: OKC-Sunny Lane. Part-time. Send resume to cmoore@sunnylanecumc.com

Director of Student Ministries: OKC-St. Matthew. Part-time. Contact Ron Perceful at 405-326-2337.

Administrative assistant: OKC-Lakeside. Part-time. Send resume to Randy McGuire, lakesideumc.pastor@coxinet.net

Associate Director of Children’s Ministry: Tulsa-Faith. Part-time. Contact Laura Eldridge at leldridge@faithtulsa.org

Contemporary Music Assistant Leader: Tulsa-Faith. Part-time. Contact James Lambert at jlambert@faithtulsa.org. More information at faithtulsa.org/jobs

Two positions: Fairview-First UMC. Youth Director (full- or part-time) and Children & Family Ministry Director (part-time). Send resume to First United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 457, Fairview, OK 73737-0457 or fairviewumc@sbcglobal.net

2017 Oklahoma Conference Calendars

Order your Conference Calendars online now at www.okumc.org

- The calendar is a helpful tool in local church planning. (It includes important Oklahoma United Methodist dates, the lectionary, and liturgical colors for the year.)

Cost is $10 each.
Bishop to visit Cimarron District

On Dec. 4, Bishop Jimmy Nunn will conclude a series of district conferences — his first such meetings as Oklahoma’s new bishop. He will meet with the people of Cimarron District at 4 p.m. in Woodward, at First UMC.

Update officers by Dec. 15

The deadline is Dec. 15 to update your church’s officers in the Conference database.

Don’t forget to make changes by that date in names and contact information for your church’s leadership, to ensure the best communication to accomplish our work in Oklahoma. Accuracy is vital to United Methodist connections.

The link is www.okumc.org/dashboard. Put the start date for any new leaders as Jan. 1, 2017.

This task is key for each new calendar year, although you can update such information at any time.

Apply for rural church grants

Churches with average worship attendance of 50 or fewer people can apply for financial help on special projects through the Marjorie Van Sickle Small Rural Church Fund.

Applications must be postmarked no later than Dec. 15. Click the link at www.okumc.org/GrantForms.

A Board of Laity team reviews requests and sends selections to the bishop and Cabinet for approval.

The 2016 grant recipient was Waynoka UMC.

Orders Meeting is Jan. 17

Jan. 17 is the date for the first Orders Meeting with Bishop Jimmy Nunn preaching. All active clergy are expected to attend. The session will be at OKC-St. Luke’s.

Program about environment

The Environmental Coalition of the Board of Church and Society continues presentations for church and community groups of the program “Changes in Nature and What To Do About It.”

One recent session was set for the adult Sunday school classes at Fort Gibson-First UMC.

Jane Wheeler and Pat Hoerth co-chair the coalition. They both attend OKC-Mosaic UMC.

Hoerth, who also is a United Methodist deaconess, said the program “helps people reflect on why we care about creation and how to take practical steps that allow all life on the planet to flourish.”

She explained, “We touch on the Natural World parts of the UM Social Principles, help people recall the times in nature when they felt close to God and were in wonder at creation, and offer ways that individuals and churches can cut their carbon footprint.”

The program’s length can accommodate a group’s needs.

Presentations have been made at Pauls Valley-First UMC, Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC, PTO women’s club in Yukon, City of Pawnee public forums, and a women’s philanthropic group in Anadarko, among others.

GCORR calls for unity

While many United Methodist leaders offered prayers and messages of unity after the U.S. presidential election, others called on Christians to hold leaders accountable and take action against hate.

“In his acceptance speech, U.S. President-elect Donald Trump promised to unify the country ... And it is the job of citizens of the United States, particularly those who call ourselves Christians, to hold him to this promise,” said a statement by the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race, reported by United Methodist News Service on Nov. 16.

In a statement issued Nov. 14, Susan Henry-Crowe, top executive of the General Board of Church and Society, said her agency had received, directly and indirectly, reports of incidents of violence and abuse over the past week.

Harriett Jane Olson, United Methodist deaconess, said the program “helps people recall the times in nature when they felt close to God and were in wonder at creation, and offer ways that individuals and churches can cut their carbon footprint.”

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Hundreds attend training

Bishop Grant Hagiya of the California-Pacific Conference told 750 church leaders — including some Oklahomans — attending the Council of Bishops’ Extended Cabinet Summit to lead with courage for the sake of the future of the Church.

The Nov. 2-4 summit in Jacksonville, Fla., was held just as the Council of Bishops’ Extended Cabinet Summit to lead with courage for the sake of the future of the Church.

CIRCLE OF CARE SUNDAY

December 18

Your church can help increase awareness and support for children and families in crisis. Contact us today for a free media kit in preparation for Circle of Care Sunday across Oklahoma on December 18.

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Regional Tuition won’t change

Tuition and fees at United Methodist-affiliated Oklahoma City University will not increase for the 2017-18 academic year, OCU President Robert Henry has announced.

“We understand the positive impact that financial flexibility has on our students and families, and are pleased to be able to keep tuition and fees flat next year,” he said.

OCU is ranked as one of the “100 Best College Buys,” listed among “American’s Best Christian Colleges,” listed in the top tier of regional master’s-level universities by U.S. News and World Report, recognized as one of the “Best Values in Colleges” by Kiplinger’s, and among the Princeton Review’s “Best Regional Colleges” for the Western Region.
WITH the end of the year approaching, a charitable gift can help you support your favorite United Methodist ministry and receive welcomed tax benefits.

In 2016, Jim and Sharon sold a portion of the stock that Sharon had inherited from her grandmother years ago. The stock had increased in value, and their CPA informed them that they had a capital gain of nearly $120,000. Their CPA reminded them that if they made a gift of this stock before the end of the calendar year, they would receive a charitable income tax deduction on the gifted shares. This deduction would help offset the capital gains tax on the stock they sold. They had always planned on making a gift to their church’s endowment fund, and this seemed like a great time to make the gift.

**GIFTING VS. SELLING STOCK**

Jim and Sharon were still holding $80,000 in the same highly appreciated stock and did not intend to sell, primarily because of the substantial capital gains tax they already faced. A gift of the stock at year end would help lower their taxes this year.

By giving the $80,000 in stock, they received two benefits. First, they avoided a large capital gains tax on the stock. Second, they received a charitable income tax deduction. The deduction offset the capital gains from their prior stock sale of $120,000.

They are very pleased with the double benefits of their gift and are delighted that they have been able to make a nice charitable contribution to their church’s endowment fund.

If you would like to learn more about end of year charitable gift planning, please contact David Battles, CPA, at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org.

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**Ancient:**

The artifact “is so fragile,” said Hirsch. “It had even deteriorated since 2009,” when the photos were made. “We are so lucky to have those images” to study.

They determined its age through handwriting analysis in addition to carbon-dating.

Watt said, “There are even different spellings for (King) David over time.”

The OCU team concluded the fragment is part of Psalms 11:1-4. It predates by more than 1,000 years the Masoretic biblical texts, long considered the authentic Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible and written between the sixth and 10th centuries.

The team found one variant, and collectively the Scholars Initiative identified three, between the artifact and Masoretic text.

However, “none made any difference whatsoever to the meaning of the Psalm,” the professor said.

Despite 1,000 years’ difference, the texts are similar. “The stability of the text is an important discovery for all the Bible,” she summed up.

With the research now published about artifacts that had been in private hands, largely unresearched, “scholars from now on can work on Psalms 11 and translate it, discuss it.” Wolfe contributed a chapter in the new book.

Watt, now age 25, toured Israel with his mother right after his graduation from OCU. He got to visit one of the caves where the scrolls were found. Today he leads the youth at Duncan-First United Methodist Church.

“Now I have a great narrative to tell my youth,” he said, “of the fight it was for knowledge and preservation of the Old Testament so we could progress into the New Testament. Youth might not understand the history for this culture was extremely tough to get through. We are so lucky today to be able to refer to something so old that can really stand the test of time.”

Hirsch graduated in 2015. Age 23, she also works with church youths, in Edmond.