New bishop Jimmy Nunn will lead Oklahoma

Installation set Oct. 23 at Tulsa-Asbury

By Holly McCray

On Sept. 1, James “Jimmy” Gregg Nunn of Lubbock, Texas, begins work as new bishop of the Oklahoma Area.

Rev. Dr. Nunn was elected to the episcopacy July 15 at the South Central Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church, meeting in Wichita, Kansas. About 11:30 that night, his assignment to lead the Oklahoma and Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conferences was announced, and he was consecrated the next day.

“I am thrilled,” he said as Oklahomans engulfed him and his wife, Mary, minutes after the assignment was known. “The conference is really strong. There are so many good leaders there.”

Bishop Nunn, 59, had been the director of mission and administration (connectional ministries) for the Northwest Texas Conference since 2011. In that role, he led efforts that resulted in 13 church starts/restarts in two years.

At a press conference, he said 10 of them focused on reaching Hispanic/Latino people, who comprise 38 percent of the region’s population. The Nunns regularly attended one of those new churches.

As director, he also focused on encouraging young adult leaders. Forty percent of the Northwest Texas Conference staff members are younger than 35.

“Young people have energy and ideas, and a spiritual depth sometimes older folks overlook,” he said.

Jimmy Nunn grew up in Abernathy, Texas, with about 2,800 population. His calling to ministry is “rooted in a series of events,” including a youth revival.

He also described getting lost in the mountains of New Mexico during a Boy Scout camping trip. He prayed: God, get me out of this and I’ll even be a preacher. A fisherman returned him to camp.

Nunn later earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

Jimmy and Mary met while attending McMurry University, Abilene, Texas, and married in their senior year. Mary is a piano teacher with her own studio. He enjoys golf; she likes to swim.

Their grown children are Michael and Jaime, who is married to Scott Montgomery.

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The new bishop earned the master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Asbury Theological Seminary, Willmore, Ky., and was ordained as an elder in 1983.

Professions of faith and growth in worship attendance tell the story of his witness for Christ as a pastor, according to his resume. At Jayton, worship tripled and eight people made professions. Serving at Earth, population 1,100, resulted in 32 new Christians. While an associate at Lubbock-First, he welcomed 481; and at Oakwood and Aldersgate, both in Lubbock, 53 each. He also was a district superintendent.

Nunn’s election is a milestone for Northwest Texas because he is the first bishop elected from that conference in at least five decades.

Watch video clips from the SCJ Conference on Facebook at Oklahoma United Methodist Communications.
Left: Church planter/pastor Heather Scherer of Living Water UMC, Glenpool, received the 2016 Frances Willard Award from COSROW (the Commission on the Status and Role of Women) during the 2016 Annual Conference in OKC. Right: Selected for the “Ray of Light” honor in the Northern Prairie District was the Conference in OKC. Right: Selected for the “Ray of Light” honor in the Northern Prairie District was the Conference in OKC.

In January, graduate student Kelsey Ricks traveled to Belize for the first time. She went as a member of Oklahoma City University’s OKVIM* Student Mission Team.

On June 5, she returned to the Central American nation with an open-ended ticket. Originally Ricks had planned to go in 2015 with OCU’s Student Mission Team, but family health concerns prevented that at the last minute.

“Since the ticket was non-transferable and already paid for, I told her to be sure to use it for a personal trip sometime in the next year,” said Charles Neff, OCU vice-president for church-relations and team leader for both mission trips.

“I was surprised when I received a call in October from Kelsey, asking if she could join the 2016 team. She already had the plane ticket, and we still had one seat left in the van, so I said, ‘We’ll make room.’”

Thus Ricks joined the January construction team working at Belmopan Methodist High School. On the last night of that trip, following worship with a Methodist congregation, the missionary owners of the camp where the volunteers were housed asked her to consider returning in the summer.

They asked her to conduct a day camp program for the village’s children.

Email conversations followed and, by April, Ricks was ready to say yes to the opportunity. She graduated in May.

“One opportunity led to another and now here I am, right where God wants me to be,” said Ricks after arriving back at Camalote Camp near Belmopan. “The OCU mission trip in January opened me to a world of new possibilities. I’m excited to see what comes next!”

She is the daughter of United Methodist pastor Ricky Ricks of the Texas Conference.

Oklahoma Volunteers In Mission

OCU expands mission focus

For the 2016-17 academic year, OCU will expand its mission offerings to students, faculty, and staff.

• In January 2017, Rev. Neff will lead another construction team to Belize, in conjunction with a team from the OCU Kramer School of Nursing, whose members will focus on community health initiatives.

• In March, Elizabeth Horton-Ware, the new OCU director of religious life, will lead a domestic mission trip.

• And in May 2017, Neff plans to lead a second international mission trip.

For the first time, students can earn college credit for these missions. By participating in a special preparation session before travel and writing a reflection paper after returning, one hour of credit is earned. Students also will have the opportunity this fall to enroll in a course titled “Mission Studies,” worth one credit hour. The class will be co-taught by Neff and Jeremy Basset, director of the Oklahoma Conference’s Office of Mission.

Sign up for Contact Digest, a free e-newsletter, at www.okumc.org.

Send news to editor@okumc.org.

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SCJ Mission Academy

Fayetteville, Ark.

Topics: Connecting neighbors in disaster response, asset-based community response, community-based health care, and long-term recovery

Youth_Children_Academies

Youth Worker’s Academy and Children Worker’s Academy

Track II begins

Aug. 5-7

Canyon Camp

For adults, ages 22 and older, who are called to ministry with youth and children

Dean: Leslie Long

llong@okcu.edu

Register: www.scjumc.org/academy

District workshops

• on 2017 clergy health insurance

Aug. 22-Sept. 13

Contact your district office for dates and places

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The Oklahoma United Methodist Contact

1501 N.W. 24th

Oklahoma City, OK 73106

November 2016

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Communications

Oklahoma United Methodist

Outstanding in Oklahoma

Shidler/Foraker/Grainola charge, with Superintendent Tish Malloy, left; pastor Velma Carriaga; and Troy Big Eagle, Foraker’s church treasurer. One church in each district received this new award from the Conference small-church commission and the UM Rural Advocates & Fellowship.

Kelsey Ricks helps build a high school in Belize, Central America, in January.

Ricks prepares to board a flight from Oklahoma back to Belize in June.
“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.”

(1 Corinthians 3:5-7, NIV)

BY BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

When Methodism was in its infancy, in the late 1780s in America, distinctive beliefs set the faith apart from most Christian organizations.

For instance, our founder John Wesley parted ways with Calvinism and his own Anglican church by introducing transformational ideas that had to do with perfection, sanctification, justification, and regeneration.

I invite you to explore Wesley’s teachings, but for this column I want you to know his creed created an emerging holiness movement that saw Methodism grow faster than any other U.S. denomination for decades.

Among his ideas that distinguish our doctrine is the concept of itineracy, “the act of traveling from one place to another.” Some dictionaries further state that this belief is “the system of rotation governing the ministry of the Methodist Church.”

Methodists did not invent the word, but you can say we perfected it.

The circuit riders who shaped our denomination were the epotome of clergy-on-the-go. Some traveled great distances by foot and horseback, forming religious communities all along the East Coast and later into the heart of the United States.

One story recounts the experience of a settler who left Virginia and ended up in Georgia. Just as he was unpacking his bags, he was visited by a circuit rider representing the Methodist movement. In a fit of rage he exclaimed, “I left Virginia trying to get away from the Methodists and, by God, you’ve found us already!”

We still believe in itineracy. The movement of clergy from place to place to fulfill the duties of leadership, proclaim the Gospel, and be connected and involved with different communities is exactly what those circuit riders accomplished. They sowed the seed that grew into our international denomination.

A bishop many years ago wrote: “There are only two kinds of preachers in the Methodist Church — those that are moving, and those that haven’t moved yet!”

Indeed, the same can be said of bishops.

After 12 wonderful years of being your bishop, the time has come for me to itinerate to retirement. Alongside you, I have been preparing the soil for the next bishop.

In Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth, he explained the special connection of the people to himself and Apollos, the leader who followed him there. He borrowed an image from the world of agriculture (to which we certainly can relate here in Oklahoma) to remind the Corinthian believers that both he and Apollos were assigned differing tasks to build the church.

As the very first preacher in Corinth, Paul said, “I planted, Apollos watered, but it was God who gave the increase.”

In other words, both of them were instruments of God, sent to carry out God’s will and purpose.

Matthew Henry’s Commentary states it this way: “He that plants and he that waters are one, employed by one Master, trusted with the same revelation, busied in one work, and engaged in one design. They have their different gifts from one and the same Spirit, for the very same purposes; and should carry on the same design heartily.”

The bishop who follows me will have gifts and graces unique to that person. That leader will arrive here in Oklahoma to continue work that began in the early 1800s, with the arrival of Methodism among Native Americans and early circuit riders.

That person will walk in the footsteps of the first bishops assigned to Indian Territory and the new state of Oklahoma in 1907.

That bishop will water the seeds that I and others planted.

Whatever success those who came before me had and whatever I have achieved for Christ during my time here, it is God who has sustained us, pulled us, pushed us, carried us, and united us in one common ministry: To make disciples, transform the world, and build God’s Kingdom in every corner of Oklahoma.

Embrace your new bishop as you have loved and affirmed Dee and me.

Extend the hand of fellowship.

Let the love of Christ be transparent and evident in everything you do.

And always remember that you are the instruments God has so honored to do this great work! I love you all.

By Bishop Robert Hayes Jr.

Strength for the journey: A collection of ideas and thoughts from our bishop

The seed has been planted

By Christopher Fenoilio

Kaycee Quarry looked at her son sitting at the kitchen table, thumbing through his United Methodist Hymnal. She asked, “Warrick, what do you plan to do when you grow up?”

Warrick looked up, flashing a toothy grin, and said, “What do you think? Choir director!”

His mother smiled and said to herself, “I thought so.”

Most of the congregation at Poteau-First United Methodist Church thinks so, too. They have watched Warrick Quarry in and around the choir for most of his young life.

When he could stand on his own as a toddler, Warrick sat in the second row next to his grandmother during worship while his mother worked in the nursery. He stood in the pew and swayed to the music.

A little older, he left the pew and stood in the church aisle, dancing as the choir sang. At 8 years old, Warrick began to notice the choir director using hand gestures. That was all he needed to see; he began “directing” the choir from his seat on the second row.

One Christmas he was chosen (along with seven girls) to sing for the church’s youth program. He told his mother, “Mama, I’m not singing with all of those girls. I’m going to direct instead!”


On the day before that Christmas program, the boy received a gift of an old baton from a high school band director. When the program began, there was Warrick in front of the seven girls in the preschool choir, waving his baton just like the director. He even gave them a sharp cutoff at the end.

Fast forward to 2015, when the church choir began rehearsing for the Christmas cantata.

Eight-year-old Warrick often spent weekday afternoons with his mother at church. They began staying later on Wednesdays, listening to the choir practice. Soon Warrick was sitting in the midst of the choir for the entire practice.

He decided that he wanted to sing the cantata as a member of the choir.

On the day of the cantata, his mother chose the smallest acolyte robe and used safety pins to make it fit her son just right. She even found a purple sash for his small frame.

That morning, the organ began to play and the choir members took their places. Joining them was the tiny boy at least 30 years younger than them. He stepped up on a wooden box and sang like a seasoned veteran.

“Where some kids have Batman or Superman or baseball players as their heroes, the people in the church choir are Warrick’s heroes,” said Mary Lynn Perkin, director of music at Poteau-First.

“He memorizes and internalizes everything about worship each Sunday. He can even tell you what anthem we sang the last time I wore my pink shirt. But it’s not his crazy knack for remembering things that makes you love him. It’s the passion he has to serve through music and song.”

His passion for music moves some church members to tears when they thank him for singing in the choir.

“We all need a little bit of that passion at times,” said Perkin. “It’s a young, enthusiastic boy who reminds us why and who we serve each Sunday. Any choir is blessed to have someone that loves God so strongly, no matter what age they are.”

Warrick continues to attend practice most weeks and sings with the choir every Sunday. According to his mother, many thanks go to the director and choir members who encourage him every day.

“I can’t tell you how happy and proud this makes me,” said Kaycee Quarry. “Warrick has such a great love for church and his choir. He could teach others a few things.”

(Published June 23, 2016, by UMC.org)
Parents of 5 answer call for foster families

By Sally Asher
Enid News & Eagle

Jack and Becky Stowers of Enid have raised five children of their own, but young children were not out of their lives when their last son walked out the door after high school.

The Stowers felt a calling from God to become foster parents, Becky said. They fought it for a while.

“We thought of every reason we couldn’t, wouldn’t, shouldn’t,” she said.

“But every time I thought, ‘I can’t because of this reason,’ God would shut that door.”

Then Jack and Becky ran into a friend at church who fostered.

“She had just gotten these little twin boys, who were 5 years old, the night before,” Becky said. “They looked so lost at children’s church, and me and my husband just sat through church and bawled. And it wasn’t a sermon you would bawl through.

“We said, ‘OK, God, we got it.’”

Becky wanted their youngest son to finish high school before bringing more children into their home. Three years ago, as that son was heading toward graduation, he left June 7 at 10 a.m. for boot camp, she said. “At 11 a.m. that day, graduation, I called (Department of Human Services) and said we were ready. They didn’t call, and they didn’t call… I was getting a little impatient.”

Their son graduated and joined the Army Reserve.

“He left June 7 at 10 a.m. for boot camp,” she said. “And it was just what we felt like God was telling us to do.”

The Stowers finalized the adoption of Jay, Jackson, and Jackson, 3, earlier this year.

In April the family moved into the Holsinger Home for Children, on North Oakwood in Enid.

Holsinger Home is part of the Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care for Children and Youth.

Juanita and Gabe Holsinger donated their wealth to build the home for foster children with the idea that large sibling groups could be placed together and not among several homes, Becky said. The six-bedroom house is handicap accessible and housed its first foster family in 1999.

Holsinger Home allows the Stowers to better care for the children, Becky said.

“I have more room here, and the support of Circle of Care and the resources to help me with the children.”

Carl Kindred and Becky Hightower are family care specialists with Circle of Care; both are retired DHS employees.

“Our main job is to recruit foster homes,” Kindred said. “We work the Ponca City-Stillwater-Enid triangle.”

She said the Stowers provide valuable mentoring to biological parents. “They do an excellent job of teaching good parenting skills.”

The couple builds such good relationships with both foster children and biological parents that they often remain involved after the children go home.

“We had two little girls in January and we still see them,” Becky said. “They just come over. They’re kind of part of our family now. The mom has a new baby, and we are honorary grandma and grandpa.”

On Christmas, all the parents of foster children in the Stower home go there for lunch. “The parents are normally really thankful to have that kind of time and communication with their children and the foster parents,” she said.

Most Oklahomans don’t understand the foster care crisis in the state, said Hightower. “There are not enough foster homes. These kids are getting moved more often. We have met the children and then they’re with a stranger now.”

Becky sees how traumatic it is for the children. “Especially with the young kids, they don’t understand what’s going on and you can’t explain it to them. They just know they’re with a stranger now.”

There’s only one thing to do when a young child is scared and doesn’t understand what’s going on and you can’t explain it to them. They just know they’re with a stranger now.”

There’s only one thing to do when a young child is scared and doesn’t understand what’s going on and you can’t explain it to them. They just know they’re with a stranger now.”

Play the number in your area.

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Stillwater 405-312-6640
Tulsa Metro 918-794-3876
Weatherford 405-305-7715
Toll Free 866-978-2956

Giveaway extends Tulsa ministry after closing

Tulsa-Rose Hill UMC recently donated $8,000 to ChildSHARE and Pearl’s Hope, programs within the Circle of Care, to enhance services for homeless children and youths.

The gift was the result of the dissolution of the Stork’s Nest, a longtime ministry of the church that provided items from diapers to toys for families in need.

Originally a joint partnership with Tulsa’s Junior League, the ministry was funded many years by the United Methodist Women of the Tulsa District.

Remaining inventory also was donated — children’s clothing, handmade blankets, and more — and it filled two trucks.

Pearl’s Hope Director Brenda Gill spoke to the Rose Hill congregation in a worship service, when the check was presented. She said not only will the inventory clothe and comfort youngsters, but also the funds will expand support to more families.
Missionary becomes U.S. citizen

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

The Fourth of July was a special one for Fuxia Wang, a missionary and the international director at the Wesley Foundation at the University of Oklahoma in Norman.

After 20 years in the United States, this was Rev. Wang’s first Independence Day as a U.S. citizen.

Eleven days earlier, the native of China had recited the Pledge of Allegiance, waved a small flag, and taken the oath that concluded a years-long journey to becoming a citizen.

For her, the moment signified a new kind of independence — a guarantee that she can preach and worship the Lord.

“You cannot do what I’m doing here in China, publicly,” she said. She wants people to appreciate that the United States is blessed.

For her, a passion for hospitality involves connecting with people who need driver’s licenses and Social Security cards in order to be able to work. She preaches in Chinese and English.

Domestic violence is focus of program

An upcoming United Methodist Women’s workshop will teach a faith-based response to domestic violence.

Titled “It Happens in Church,” the program will be Aug. 13, hosted at Sunny Lane UMC in Del City.

Publicizing the social justice event, a UMW flier gave statistics from the National Domestic Violence Resource Center.

• One in every four women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime.
• More than three women and one man are murdered by their intimate partners in the United States every day.

What can we do? The program will offer several education and advocacy sessions, a mission opportunity, and worship. Cost is $20.

Grant deadlines noted

Application deadlines have been announced for two grant programs.

• Women who are ministry students in this Conference may qualify for scholarships awarded annually by the Commission on the Status & Role of Women (COSROW). Sept. 1 is the deadline to apply.
• Rural churches with 50 or fewer people in worship can apply for grants through the Marjorie Van Sickle Small Rural Church Fund. Deadline is Dec. 15 to submit requests for the 2017 grant year.

Forms and instructions are available online at www.okumc.org/awards.

Briefly

Welcome to a place where life is lived to its... ...fullest.

At the Federal Courthouse in Oklahoma City, Fuxia Wang waves a flag June 24, the day she took the oath of U.S. citizenship.

An invitation to a Chinese-language Bible study followed. But Wang was an atheist.

“I didn’t have any kind of church experience,” she said. That began to change when she went to the Wesley Foundation for a free meal.

Someone said grace before the meal, ending with “Amen.” She asked what that word means.

The answer: “Go ahead and eat.”

Wang learned quickly about United Methodist hospitality.

“When two or three of us gather together, there is food,” she said.

The way “to everybody’s heart is through the stomach.”

She learned that campus ministry at UCO specializes in offering “radical hospitality” to international students, who may not be religious.

Radical hospitality is what gets them interested in coming to worship, she said.

For her, a passion for Christianity took hold at UCO.

She chose to enroll at the International Theological Seminary in California. Then she returned to Oklahoma and in 2006 was commissioned as a provisional elder of the Oklahoma Conference.

She was ordained in 2010.

She was appointed as an associate at the campus ministry in Norman, serving with Wesley Foundation director Daniel Dennison.

Wang became a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries in 2010. Her Advance number is 3021191.

The Wesley in Norman continues to be her base as she practices UM radical hospitality, especially connecting with students and families from China.

For her, hospitality involves meals that remind the students of home and helping them with getting an apartment, buying groceries, and cellphone services.

She assists some who need driver’s licenses and Social Security cards in order to be able to work. She preaches in Chinese and English.

Thechristexperience.tv or call 405-424-2800.

Pre-school Director: Tulsa-Will Rogers.
Part-time. Email: bjohns@willrogersumc.org

Two jobs: Bristow-First. Church Secretary (part-time) and Youth Director (part-time).
Resume to bristowumc@sbcglobal.net

Administrative assistant: Broken Arrow-St. Stephen’s. Part-time. Send resume to St. Stephen’s UMC, 400 W. New Orleans, Broken Arrow, OK 74011 or ssuccoa@ssuccoa.org

Prison Ministry Director, Operation Hope in Tulsa. Full-time. Email resume to: operationhope@ohpm.org

Byline: Sunday, July 24, 2016
Passages


He served as superintendent for both the Ada and Woodward Districts. He pastored at Verden, Lawton-Cameron, Temple, Grove, Yukon-First, Tulsa-Centenary, OKC-Mayfair Heights, Alva-First, Tulsa-University, OKC-May Avenue, and Tahlequah. His ministry career stretched from 1949 until retirement in 1991.

Among survivors are his wife of 68 years, Rose Marie Leveridge, sons Marc and James, and daughter Jacque Fiegel.

Service was July 11 at OKC-Quail Springs UMC. Memorial gifts to: Skyline Urban Ministry or Quail Springs UMC Building Fund.

NORRIS — Rev. Douglas Patrick Norris, 73, of Tulsa, died June 17, 2016.

A Local Pastor, he served at Davidson and Colbert/Calera in the late 1970s. Earlier in his career he pastored in Nebraska and Kansas. He officially retired in 2005.

Among survivors is a brother, Donald Norris.

Funeral arrangements were by Moore’s Eastlawn Chapel in Tulsa.

LEAMING — Juanita Mae Johnson Leaming, 87, of Conifer, Colo., died June 25, 2016. She was the wife of Rev. Dr. Marcus Paul Leaming, retired.

They helped launch St. James UMC in Tulsa.

Among survivors are his husband of 65 years and three daughters, Rebecca Hackworth, Michelle Short, and Heather Leaming.

Service will be held at St. James later this summer. Memorial gifts to: United States Foundation for the Children of Haiti.

SOUDER — Fredonia Souder Draper, 96, of Tulsa, died May 9, 2016. She was the widow of Rev. Franklin C. Souder.

Among survivors are sons Franklin and Sherman and daughter Margaret Moore.

Service was May 16 at Biglow’s Chapel of Remembrance in Muskogee.

Adoption

• Evelyn Anderson of Kearney, Neb., died June 30, 2016. She was the mother of Rev. Lisa Anderson, pastor at Manchester and Wakita.

• Alice White of Oklahoma City died June 23, 2016. She was the mother of Rev. Jacki Banks, pastor at Lindsay.

Appointments

• David Wheeler, from associate pastor at OKC-Church of the Servant to personal leave, effective July 1.

Youth Force Ada

Mission service gives students way to help others

Alyssa Flesher sat on the porch of an Ada home on a June morning, cutting a piece of siding to fit above the door.

Other students hustled around her, installing J channel — a plastic or metal device to support building trim material — and performing other tasks. The sounds of hammering and small talk filled the air as they worked.

Flesher, 19, is an eight-year veteran of Youth Force, a mission program for students sponsored by the Oklahoma Conference of The United Methodist Church. Churches across the state host the program, which gives students a chance to grow in their faith as they repair people’s homes.

Flesher, a college freshman who attends Duncan-First UMC, said she was a sixth-grader when she first participated. As a newcomer, she spent a lot of time waiting for older students to guide her.

She keeps coming back because the program gives her a chance to help other people.

“I love just touching the lives of homeowners and really just shining a light in the community and spreading the word of God through the work of our hands,” she said.

Youth Force launched in 1987 as a way for students to give something back in communities across the state, according to the website. It is open to those who are entering seventh grade through recent high school graduates.

Working in “God Squads” of six to eight students and two adults, the volunteers repair homes for needy and elderly families.

The goal is to make the students stronger disciples of God as they work, live, and worship together for a week.

This summer Ada-First UMC hosted a Youth Force group for the first time, said student pastor Ryan Kilby. He said many of the students who participate play key roles in youth programs at their home churches across the state.

“You want leaders,” he said. “You want students that are plugged into your program, plugged into being like Jesus when he said, ‘I came not to be served, but to serve, and to give my life as a ransom for many.’”

On June 20, God Squads began working at 12 job sites across Ada. They handled a variety of assignments throughout the week, including trimming overgrown shrubbery so they could work on the homes, installing siding, and building wheelchair ramps.

Kilby said some people who needed help with home repairs asked Youth Force to lend a hand, and leaders learned about other homeowners through word of mouth. Leaders interviewed people and looked at their homes before deciding which ones would be repaired.

“It had to be a situation where it was going to be a blessing to the family,” Kilby said. “There were some things that were wants, and some things that were needs, and we felt like the ones that we went to were needs.”

The program paid for all materials, so homeowners didn’t have to spend a dime.

Kilby said the house where Flesher was serving needed new siding and a paint job. The God Squad had to insulate the entire home before installing the siding.

The volunteers had to finish repairs on the house by late afternoon June 23. After work, they were scheduled to meet with the homeowners for dinner and a worship service, then visit the Lazer Zone Family Fun Center in Ada for a chance to relax.

Kilby said students who join Youth Force learn to be part of a team, and they grow closer to God by serving other people.

“You just feel really good,” he said. “You feel blessed.”

Hearing other people praise Youth Force prompted Bixby student Bryan Sellers to sign up the summer before he entered seventh grade. Five years later, he said the program has taught him to work well with others.

“I remember my first year; I didn’t hardly talk to anyone,” said Sellers, 15. “Now I think I’m pretty outgoing in talking with everyone, getting along with everyone. So I’d say it’s definitely made me more outgoing, more sociable, easier to get along with.”

Student Megan Johnston of Yukon said the young volunteers get to talk to the homeowners, dine with them, and worship together. “It seems like a lot of hard work, which it is, but it’s amazing.”

(Reprinted with permission, The Ada News, June 24, 2016)
Delegation leaders report

At the 2016 Oklahoma Annual Conference on May 31, physician Don Kim and pastor Linda Harker reported on the denomination’s General Conference (GC), also held in May. Respectively lay and clergy, they were the first-elected GC delegates from Oklahoma. This is from their report.

REV. HARKER: You were faithfully represented by a strong delegation that worked hard on your behalf. They waded through over 1,500 petitions.

When this journey began a year ago, I began to pray daily for one thing: that whoever was watching us might be able to say, “Wow, look at those Christians; see how they love.” I don’t know what people saw. However, I can say that was what others experienced through your delegation.

General Conference was difficult. At times it was frustrating and baffling. Many times we were moved to tears, not necessarily by the decisions made, but by the way those decisions occurred.

I learned that we could spend an inordinate amount of time discussing whether iPads or bright yellow placards were the appropriate tool for recognition to speak from the floor, and that everyone should be grateful Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the 10 Commandments rather than Robert’s Rules of Order.

By a narrow margin, GC voted to set aside all petitions regarding sexuality. A commission will be formed by the Council of Bishops. There is a possibility for a Special Called General Conference, to discuss a way through what seems to have become an impasse in our worldwide church.

(See story below)

We did agree on Four Areas of Focus in the next four years:
• We will engage in ministry with the poor;
• We will work to improve global health;
• We will develop principled Christian leaders around the world; and
• We will create new/renewed congregations.

I want to remind you, as Bishop (Gregory) Palmer did, we are “prisoners of hope.” That phrase has ruminated in my spirit. It has taken up residency in my soul.

We left with some God-sized goals, including 1 million new disciples and 400 vibrant new faith communities by 2020.

DR. KIM: Worship kept us focused in all the work that we did, helping us realize that work was for the purpose of serving God and not ourselves. We had many pause-for-prayer moments.

We took time to lament a historic tragedy, the 1864 Sand Creek Massacre. I was especially moved by Mr. William Walks Along of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, a descendant of survivors, who said, “We now extend our hand in friendship to the Methodist church” and “we have developed a measure of trust, respect, and honor for each other.” I felt like this was the kind of trust that we needed at the General Conference.

It was exciting to know this GC marked the 40th anniversary of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference being granted voting rights. GC also celebrated the 60th anniversary of full clergy rights for women and 150 years of United Methodist Women in ministry.

We will get a 21st-century technology boost in our new hymnal. It will be internet cloud-based and print-on-demand, the first high-tech hymnal for a mainline denomination.

Global Ministries sent out more than 29 missionaries, from 11 countries, to serve in 16 lands. Other missions action:
• Authorizing five new bishops in central Africa, the fastest-growing area of The United Methodist Church.
• Voting to double the Central Conferences’ Theological Education Fund to $10 million, which supports United Methodist schools, pastors, and pastors-in-training in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

We still remained close to the 2012 budget, approving $604 million for the next quadrennium. This translates as each U.S. church, on average, retaining slightly more than 85 cents of every dollar collected in the offering plate.

Jeremy Rosado, a top-12 contestant on TV’s “American Idol,” debuted “God is able,” a song commissioned for the Imagine No Malaria campaign. It has raised more than $68 million of its $75 million goal. We will turn next to Imagine Abundant Health. Worldwide, 6 million children die every year from preventable diseases.

Imagine Abundant Health seeks to engage at least 10,000 U.S. churches to reach 1 million children by 2020 with life-saving interventions through prevention, treatment, communication, and education.

Serving in missions to Mongolia for the past 14 years and as a physician, this is something I can sink my teeth into. Your church should be thinking about how you can be a part of this.

REV. HARKER: We can wring our hands and worry about our future, or we can roll up our sleeves and do what Jesus commanded us to do: Go, therefore (the theme for General Conference). We have good news to share and good work to do.

No pause by United Methodists on sexuality debate

A n agreement reached at the 2016 General Conference didn’t inspire compliance among U.S. United Methodists on matters of human sexuality.

On July 15, delegates at the Western Jurisdictional Conference elected Karen Oliveto of San Francisco as the first openly lesbian United Methodist bishop. She has been legally married for two years to another woman.

Within minutes of her election, delegations at the South Central Jurisdictional Conference — which includes Oklahoma — voted to ask the Judicial Council for a declaratory decision regarding gay and lesbian church leaders. The Judicial Council is the denomination’s supreme court.

Some annual conferences pledged “non-conformity” with the Church’s stance on LGBT people, following the international meeting in Portland, Ore.

GC2016 ended May 21 with delegates voting to give the Council of Bishops time and authority to form a commission that would prayerfully consider full inclusion for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in every aspect of the Church’s ministry.

In its lawbook, the Book of Discipline, The United Methodist Church declares “the practice of homosexuality incompatible with Christian teaching.”

The Discipline bars openly gay people who are not celibate from being ordained as clergy or becoming bishops.

The rules prohibit clergy officiating at or participating in same-sex weddings, and annual conferences cannot fund LGBT programs or events.

Also since GC2016 concluded:
• The New York annual conference ordained four openly gay clergy.
• The Rocky Mountain Conference passed a resolution that sexual orientation and gender identity should not be a bar to election to the episcopacy.
• The New England Conference was first to approve a resolution titled “Action of Non-Conformity with the General Conference of The United Methodist Church,” which stated that annual conference would not comply with provisions of the Discipline that discriminate against LGBT persons. Three more conferences also passed similar non-conformity resolutions.
• California-Nevada also passed an “aspirational resolution” calling for the Book of Discipline not to be followed as it relates to items concerning LGBTQIA persons and ceasing judicial processes in matters related to prohibitions against such persons. (LGBTQIA stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual.)
• In the Iowa Conference, pastor Anna Blaedel came out as gay, and three clergymen filed a complaint against her.
• The Oregon-Idaho Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) joined the Northern Illinois, Baltimore-Washington, Pacific Northwest, and New York BOMs in declaring they will consider all candidates for ministry without regard for their sexual orientations and gender identities.

Other related action since GC2016:
A number of annual conferences offered encouragement and prayers for the Council of Bishop’s “An Offering For A Way Forward” as the group starts the process of appointing the special commission.

Some annual conferences were in session June 12 when a gunman killed 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Fla. Minnesota passed a resolution that offers repentance of the Church’s stands toward LGBT people while also praying for the Council of Bishops and its commission “to the place where God is calling us today.”

• The United Methodist Church in Estonia passed a resolution that “human sexuality belongs only within the bonds of marriage between a man and a woman.”

• The South Georgia Conference passed a motion asking its resident bishop not to receive any clergy who have publicly stated their intent to disregard the current language of the Book of Discipline.

• In the Great Plains Conference, charges involving clergyperson Cynthia Meyer, who has said she is in a committed homosexual relationship, have been referred for a Church trial.

Fifteen new bishops were elected by the five U.S. jurisdictional conferences the week of July 11. The Council of Bishops executive committee was scheduled to meet July 19-20 in Chicago.

(Follow denomination news online at www.umc.org/news-and-media)
Deacon revisits journey to clergy status

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

In telling her ministry story May 30, Emma Mae Richardson spoke for 23 people — the first group of ordained clergy deacons in the Oklahoma Conference, in 1997.

Rev. Dr. Richardson was an honored guest at a luncheon, during the 2016 Oklahoma Annual Conference, that marked 20 years since deacons were officially recognized as full clergy members in The United Methodist Church, by action of the 1996 General Conference.

As a high school senior, Richardson said, she knew she was called to a Christian vocation, but not to be a pastor. She grew up in New Mexico and heard that church, we were seen as clergy,” Richardson recalled.

Deacons work in hospitals, social-service agencies, mission agencies, schools, counseling centers, and other settings as well as in congregations, according to the website www.gbhem.org.

After that historic 1997 ordination, Richardson’s title became associate pastor at Boston Avenue, where she ministered until 2008.

She also was the first deacon to chair Oklahoma’s Board of Ordained Ministry. Now retired, she lives in Texas.

Retired Deacon Ginger Howl of Oklahoma City, also in that 1997 group, was the first chairperson of Oklahoma’s Order of Deacons. When she was ordained she felt her call to ministry was fully validated after years of being “just a worker in the church,” she said.

Missionary Marsha Alexander also was a member of that first class. Since she was serving in the Philippines at the time, a bishop there ordained her.

Deacon and Conference Treasurer Cali Eck is Oklahoma’s newest deacon, ordained at this year’s Annual Conference. She ministers at OKC-New Hope.

Brian Bakeman shared a 2016 General Conference update with the luncheon crowd at OKC-St. Luke’s. He said deacons provided strong leadership in the GC worship planning.

He also cited two changes to the Book of Discipline of special interest to deacons. Bishops now can authorize deacons to serve the sacraments in their ministry places, and deacons as well as elders shall spend a week each year and a month each quadrennium for spiritual enrichment.