Just causes
Activism on big issues enhances faithful living for these 3 United Methodists

Leathers’ advocacy rocks
By HOLLY McCRAY
Adam Leathers rocks it, literally and metaphorically.
A keen free climber*, he’s scaled cliffs in Arkansas and Colorado, and in Oklahoma’s Wichita and Arbuckle Mountains. He challenges mountains of injustice because he’s also passionate about working with people who are marginalized. Rev. Leathers became executive director of Criminal Justice & Mercy Ministries (CJAMM) for the Oklahoma Conference in 2013.

His social activism isn’t limited to his job. You will find him standing vigil on the eve of an execution, promoting knowledge about addictions, and seeking out legislators at the state Capitol. He lives in Guthrie.

His first job after college was pivotal, he said. Adam and Virginia Leathers met and began married life while studying at

See Climbing page 4

Youth will lead summit on human trafficking

By CHRIS SCHUTZ
Human trafficking does not only occur in other countries—the exploitation of people happens here, too. That’s the message that youth ministry planners hope to convey when they present a Human Trafficking Symposium to the public on Sept. 26 at Oklahoma City University.

Youths from churches around Oklahoma have been immersed in the topic for much of the year, including a United Nations/ Washington, D.C., educational tour that took place during Spring Break.

Josie Worthington of Tulsa said symposium preparation has been extensive by the 12 youths selected by their churches for the UN/DC tour. The group read books on the topic of human trafficking, wrote essays, and decided whom to invite to speak.

People don’t know enough about the subject, Josie said. “I just want people to know what’s happening and put a stop to it.”

She also wants people within The United Methodist Church to know that “young people are going out and trying to change things.” She is now a freshman political science major at the University of Tulsa.

Primary speakers for the symposium are:
• Barbara Amaya, who is the author of “Nobody’s Girl,” which is described as a memoir of lost innocence, modern day slavery, and transformation; and
• Susan Greer Burton, director of Women’s and Children’s Advocacy for the denomination’s General Board of Church & Society (GBCS), based in Washington, D.C.

Amaya tells how she was manipulated, abused, and exploited for over a decade by traffickers in Washington, D.C., and New York City. She has become an advocate for the rights of human trafficking victims and all victims of abuse and exploitation.

Burton is program director for Seminar Design, Education, and Leadership Formation with the GBCS. Since joining the board’s staff in 2001, Burton has encouraged seminar participants to deepen their faith,
Clergy will hear McNeal

Sept. 22 is Bishop’s Day Apart

Realigning the church’s mission with God’s ultimate Kingdom agenda will be the topic of author Reggie McNeal’s Sept. 22 talk at Bishop Robert Hayes’ annual Day Apart for clergy.

The bishop invited McNeal, author of “Kingdom Come: Why We Must Give Up Our Obsession With Fixing the Church and What We Should Do Instead,” to speak at the event, 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. at OKC-St. Luke’s.

Hayes will offer morning and afternoon devotions.

McNeal, who serves as Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network of Dallas, will address some of the challenges facing the 21st century church.

Is God speaking to your heart?

Sign up for September ministry rally

Have you responded in some way to a call to ministry? Do you want to find out more about what it takes to become a lay, licensed, or ordained minister in The United Methodist Church?

If you answer yes, register now to attend a Call to Ministry Rally and Retreat on Sept. 12 at OKC-Wesley United Methodist Church, NW 25th and Classen.

And if you know someone who is pondering God’s call to become a pastor, tell them about this rally and help them sign up. The invitation is for people who are in high school or older.

Last fall, more than 100 people participated in the inaugural rally/retreat.

The Sept. 12 free event will be 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Lunch will be provided for all who register.

Welcoming and worship will open the gathering. You will experience great music, inspirational preaching, and the sacrament of Communion.

The morning will be filled with learning, inspiration, and group building. You will hear from others who have experienced God’s call in their lives.

In the afternoon, participants will learn about the Candidacy Process, be introduced to Group Mentoring, and clergy mentors will be assigned. Members of each new small group will get acquainted, select future meeting dates, and work together on first steps. Those in high school will meet as an informal group.

Reservations are needed to ensure sufficient materials and food. Sign up by 4:30 p.m. Sept. 5; contact Connie Barnett, cbarnett@okumc.org, 405-530-2006.

Reserve group seats to see the Stars

From champion athletic teams to award-winning performances, OCU students excite, inspire, and entertain all year long! Come and see for yourself!

OCU again is offering free tickets for church groups to attend home sporting events and theater, musical, and dance performances during the school year. Tickets are available on a first-come basis.

Find event schedules on the school’s website: www.OKCU.edu.

To reserve seats, contact Rita Himes in the University-Church Relations Office, 405-208-5060, rhimes@okcu.edu.

Nominations open for Milhouse Award

The OCU University-Church Relations Office is seeking nominations for the 2015 Bishop Paul W. Milhouse Award. Established in 1982, this award recognizes United Methodist laity who show outstanding leadership in community, local church, and the annual conference, and who advocate for the partnership between OCU and the Church.

To nominate someone, contact Charles Neff, cneff@okcu.edu, 405-208-5060. Deadline for all nominations is Oct 1.

Sister Nyirumbe to visit campus Sept. 23

Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe of Uganda, named by Time Magazine as one of the 100 Most Influential People in the World, will spend Wednesday, Sept. 23, at OCU.

She will give presentations about her humanitarian work among women and children displaced by the violence of the Kony militia.

• Clergy members of the Oklahoma Conference are invited to a free luncheon that day from noon to 1:30 p.m. in the McDaniel student center. (RSVP required; call 405-208-5060.)

• All are welcome to a community forum at 7:30 that evening.

Nyirumbe, a member of Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, directs St. Monica Girls’ Tailoring Center in Gulu, Uganda. The girls learn to support themselves and their families through such trades as sewing and cooking. Her work is the subject of the book “Sewing Hope” and a documentary of the same name.
William F. Jr., and William Francis Chissoe III. My father was William F. Sr. My son is William F. IV, and my grandson is William F. V.

I jokingly tell folks that we are secretly starting our own dynasty. The fact that my grandson carries my name, which was also the name of my grandfather, is a constant reminder that I have received a legacy and I am handing on a legacy.

But a legacy is defined by more than just a name. A synonym for legacy is inheritance. While the two words can be used interchangeably, in my mind, there is a difference.

An inheritance typically refers to tangible assets such as money, a house, or a business. A legacy, on the other hand, refers to intangibles: values, attitude, character traits, and matters of faith.

A legacy does not guarantee adoption by the next generation, but it is the foundation from which that generation will build its legacy.

An ancient writer said, “We are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants. We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours” (emphasis mine). Some time later, Isaac Newton expressed the same idea as “standing on the shoulders of giants.”

We all stand on somebody’s shoulders. To me, legacy is like a long ladder. Each generation contributes a rung to the ladder, and the succeeding generation stands on it to create another rung. We all will leave a legacy to our descendants.

But what will it be? You and I need to consider seriously the legacy we are passing on to our children, and the sooner, the better. I believe the Bible gives us some guidance on this.

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Continued from page 1

Alamosa, in Colorado’s San Luis Valley. They “saw a lot of poverty” in the valley, Adam said. Its key industry, farming, employed numerous migrant field workers. A nonprofit radio station billed as “a voice for the migrant worker” offered Adam a job after graduation.

When growers required more work by the migrants but refused to pay higher wages, “it was my first time to really see injustice,” he said.

“I see people who work hard and aren’t able to get ahead. That’s not fair.”

That radio job launched his activism.

The couple lived in greater Kansas City on the Saint Paul seminary campus while Adam pursued a clergy career.

Living in the inner city, “we saw the cycles of crime and poverty,” he said. Again, we saw people working hard, but they weren’t rewarded for it.

“We also saw the Church by and large not responding in ways we hoped. I was raised United Methodist, and we were supposed to do that. It was embarrassing.”

He volunteered for a homeless ministry and pastored a congregation of mostly homeless people.

Adam also made an Oklahoma connection. A seminary class on restorative justice, taught by Stan Basler (an adjunct professor and CJAMM’s first executive director), impressed him greatly. The class included a prison immersion experience.

The Leatherses moved to Oklahoma when Virginia was accepted to the University of Oklahoma and Adam was appointed pastor at Wellston UMC.

He also volunteered for New Day Camp, an extension of CJAMM’s ministry, for children whose parents are incarcerated.

One of those children, now grown, served as a New Day Camp adult leader this summer. Knowing the young man’s background, Adam was excited to learn of his interest in the ministry.

Oklahoma United Methodism is “out there in the streets and doing good,” Adam said.

“If you want to be in the mission field for justice issues, this CJAMM is far and away No. 1 in all of Methodism. We have amazing volunteers and employees. This feels like the place where we need to be to make effective change.”

Born in Colorado, Leathers grew up on outdoor adventures and healthy living practices. He recently combined his social activism and his love of rock climbing. His physical effort raises funds for worthy causes.

In April, he rappelled down a 30-story Oklahoma City skyscraper for a campaign that targets addiction. And in the fall, CJAMM will benefit from pledges he earns in a 24-hour rock-climbing contest. He hopes to complete a vertical mile.

(*Free climbers wear ropes and harnesses for safety but do not use them to assist their progress on the rock.)*

Pastor looks to Jesus and family

By HOLLY McCRAY

Semaj Vanzant’s smile grew bigger Aug. 4 as he spoke about the Back2School Bash, a ministry by The Christ Experience United Methodist Church, which he pastors a few blocks from Oklahoma’s Capitol.

On the previous weekend, the church had provided backpacks and lots of supplies to schoolchildren. Rev. Vanzant clearly was pleased by the members’ efforts and by the number of inner-city students they helped. He highly values education.

Educators are prominent in generations of Semaj’s family, including a New Orleans school superintendent and a principal. They’ve led in advocating for education. They’ve built relationships with civic leaders.

Growing up, Semaj recalled, “I was always in the company of a lot of legislators” in Louisiana. In high school, he helped create a civic program for New Orleans teens.

His family legacy also includes a vibrant church life and helping “the less fortunate,” he said.

“With joy” because they could help, his family gave food and car rides to people.

Some church friends lived in government housing just 2 miles from the middle-class family’s home.

“We were never sheltered. Nobody was ever too dirty for us to hug,” Semaj said.

They also were active in black fraternities/sororities, which are “always advocating against inequalities and for justice,” said Semaj, an Alpha Phi Alpha member.

Not surprisingly, political science was his major at Gannon University in Pennsylvania.

He grew as a leader and activist through student government. Semaj said he was Gannon’s first African-American student government president. He campaigned as “the choice for your voice.”

“I’ve always had a natural desire to help other people and a lot of them,” he said. Working to change systemic issues has the widest impact, he noted.

Deep into a July night in 2005, God called Semaj’s name and said, “It’s your time to serve.”

“I woke up that next morning overwhelmed with this spiritual awareness that I was not who I was before I went to sleep,” he said.

He cried as he ironed a shirt for worship, and “hated the fact that I cried — I’m a football player!” He cried during worship. During the invitation, he went forward.

He had planned a career in politics. Instead he entered seminary.

Studying at Princeton Theological Seminary, Semaj...
Pastor looks to Jesus and family as models for his social justice advocacy

...and equality for all comes through my race because I know it the best.”

In January, an Oklahoma lawmaker proposed a ban on wearing hoodies in public, citing criminal cases. Joining other African-American pastors who objected, Semaj rallied his congregation to wear hoodies for Sunday worship, and he preached while wearing one.

The proposal did not pass at the Capitol.

Also that month, Semaj was keynote speaker at a Tulsa vigil on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He told that audience, “Stand up against those things that are wrong, and stand in solidarity with the less fortunate,” according to a report by the University of Tulsa Collegian.

In 2014, The Christ Experience Church hosted a social justice seminar presented by the Conference United Methodist Women. Semaj has also welcomed local police officials to the congregation to wear hoodies for Sunday worship, and he preached while wearing one.

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In September, a series of events will celebrate the 125th anniversary of OKC-Quayle United Methodist Church, 5001 N.Everest Ave.

The church traces its start to 1890, when a small group of spiritually-minded people, with missionary zeal and a sense of civic pride, became the nucleus of the church.

Prior to 1901, the group met as a prayer band at 320 E. Grand St. Worshipers gathered for 10 years before formally organizing as a church.

Today the congregation is active in ministry areas that address homelessness, literacy, substance abuse, prison outreach, youth mentorship, health, and more.

In marking this grand anniversary, the church begins with prayer. Quayle and sister church The Christ Experience UMC are planning tent revivals at 6 p.m. Sept. 11 and 12 at Glen Ellyn Park, located at NE 23rd and Glen Ellyn Street.

A prayer conference is planned from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sept. 12 at Quayle. Guest evangelist will be Bishop Raphael Green of Metro Worship Center in St. Louis, Mo. Registration for the conference is $25.

On Sept. 13, joint worship services are planned by Quayle and The Christ Experience at 10 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., also at Glen Ellyn Park.

Quayle’s members are asked to consider giving to the church a special gift of $125, “one dollar for each year that God has allowed us to grow and give,” said Victor McCullough, senior pastor. UM deacon Erica Thomas is Quayle’s associate pastor.

Other opportunities linked to the anniversary are included in this story:

• A commemorative book is being compiled. Members who are age 70 or older are invited to share their memories of Quayle and how it helped them in their spiritual walk with Christ. The book will include memories, honors, photos, and tributes.

• A blood drive from 10 a.m. to noon Sept. 19 in Quayle’s fellowship hall

• An anniversary musical at 4 p.m. Sept. 20 will feature the Cherub Choir, Young Voices for Christ, and Adult Mass Choir.

• A banquet at 6 p.m. Sept. 26 at The Bryant Center, 2200 Bryant Ave. Tickets are available; contact the church office.

• Anniversary T-shirts are being sold.


A reading specialist, Donna had a long career as a teacher in a number of Oklahoma schools. She also served for a time as a social worker in the state.

Among survivors are daughter Deborah Jean Wallace and son Charles “Chip” Wallace Jr. Service was Aug. 18 at Arlington Memory Gardens, Oklahoma City.

BULLOCK — Vera Bernice Kelso-Bullock, 89, of Weatherford died Aug. 3, 2015. She was the widow of Rev. Bob Bullock, who died in 2012.

She worked as a nursing professional for over 50 years. Vera and Bob married on Feb. 2, 1991. Vera was an active church member, certified lay speaker, a Volunteer In Mission, and a United Methodist Woman. Among survivors are daughter Faye and sons Tom and Steve.

Service was Aug. 8 at Weatherford-First UMC, where she was a member. Memorials to: Circle of Care, VIM, UMW, or Weatherford-First UMC bell choir.

MATHES — Charbell Burks Mathes, 92, of Oklahoma City died June 25, 2015. She was the widow of Rev. W.C. Mathes, who died in 1999.

Charbell and W.C. married on Christmas Day 1943. They helped raise over 100 children during the seven years he served as superintendent of the Methodist Children’s Home, Tableegh. W.C. also was superintendent of Tulsa and Woodward Districts.

Among survivors are her sister June Mathes and son-in-law Delbert Clancy.

Service was Aug. 17 at Ewportfolio Villa, Oklahoma City. Memorials to: Circle of Care Children’s Home or OCU’s W.C. & Charbell Mathes Endowed Religious Scholarship Fund.

The Oklahoma United Methodist Contact August 28, 2015
Elderly residents talk to teens about bullying

By CHANDLER KESSLER

On July 19 in Oklahoma City, St. Luke’s United Methodist youth group gathered with new friends at Epworth Villa, a nonprofit UM-related retirement community, and discussed the topic of bullying.

Both the youths and elders shared past personal experiences with bullying. It was interesting to know older generations went through the same problems that we still face today.

Devan Wells, a 16-year-old, bravely shared his testimony first on that Sunday afternoon.

“When I was younger I used to always get bullied for my weight,” he said. “It wasn’t always easy, but I learned to take that anger and turn it into something more positive.”

Another teen, Caleb Jones, said he has been bullied simply because of what he enjoys doing. “I would be called names because of my hairstyle and for my love of the violin,” he said.

A very different perspective was shared by Wilma Reppert, an elderly Epworth Villa resident.

She admitted that she had been a bully! The room became silent as the teenagers listened to her touching story.

“We would do horrible things to someone we don’t know will make a remarkable difference to someone.”

All the elders had some collection of being bullied. It was apparent that the bad memories can fade, but they never disappear.

Thanks to Epworth Villa for sharing such valuable life lessons with us.

(Kessler, age 15, is part of St. Luke’s youth group.)

Collaboration offers help with addictions

“What difference can one local church make in this huge issue of addiction?”

Office of Mission Director Jeremy Bassett asked Peter Messiah that question on the 2015 Annual Conference stage.

Dr. Messiah directs Prevent/Recover, a ministry collaboration by the Conference and Oklahoma City University.

Messiah noted that churches’ leaders want to do something but may lack the resources and knowledge of how. Prevent/Recover can help with that.

This ministry is vital in Oklahoma, and not only for obvious reasons, Messiah said.

He called “astounding” statistics that show, as a direct consequence of drug use, 687 people died in Oklahoma in 2009 (the latest data reported by the U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy).

Compared to those in the state that year who died from vehicle accidents (743) and firearms (482), “it is clear that prevention and recovery should remain at the forefront of our collective mindset,” Messiah said.

Things aren’t getting much better, he said. Addiction-related costs total a whopping $7.2 billion annually for Oklahoma and its residents, according to “Oklahoma Drug Abuse: State of Addiction,” a more recent news media series.

“These statistics may be easy to brush away with deflective phrases like not my child or not in my house, maybe even not in my church,” Messiah stated.

However, he said, it becomes harder to delegate prevention and recovery as “someone else’s problem” when you learn that:

• 60 percent of youths identified as bullies in grades 6-9 are incarcerated by their mid-20s;

• Many of that incarcerated group have multiple felony convictions; and

Prevent/Recover

www.okumc.org/prevent_recover

76 percent of bullies as well as victims of bullying are more likely to become involved in drug and alcohol abuse.

Messiah went on to share, “Researchers have found that middle and high school students who bully their peers or who are bullying-victims are more likely to use alcohol and other drugs than students who aren’t involved in bullying.

“Prevention should be our shared concern when we know our youth are hurting.”

His passion for prevention and its universal need was clear when he also noted LGBT people are more likely to turn to drugs and alcohol to numb feelings of rejection, and that churches must practice welcoming all.

Messiah urged a congregation to focus its addiction ministry on what that church can do. (“Don’t be a counselor if you are not one.”)

“Providing prevention and recovery services can be an overwhelming task for the local congregation. Many vendors will try to force a program or product on you. Well-meaning individuals will want to establish an opportunity within the life of the church.”

Using his own name as a pun, the Prevent/Recover director offered hope. “If you find yourself wanting to do something, but don’t know how, I encourage you to get on your knees first and pray to Jesus, then get on your phone and call the Messiah.”

To contact him: Pmessiah@okumc.org, 405-530-2036.

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John, who is 65, and Susannah, 60, own a farm in western Oklahoma. John farms and teaches business in a nearby college. They have two children and four grandchildren, who all live in North Carolina.

John plans to teach for five more years, and then he and Susannah plan to retire in Asheville, N.C.

Recently, John and Susannah met with the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation. Their goals are:
1. To supplement their retirement income;
2. To provide a bequest to their children; and
3. To provide a bequest to their church.

The fair market value of their farm is $1 million. If John and Susannah sell it, the capital gains tax will be over $200,000, leaving about $800,000 to meet their goals.

The couple wondered if there is a better option than selling the farm. The Foundation had answers for them.

One solution would be to combine a Charitable Remainder Unitrust and an insurance trust. Under this “Unitrust and insurance trust” plan, John and Susannah would transfer their farm to the Unitrust. At the same time, they would establish an irrevocable life insurance trust (ILIT). The insured would be John and Susannah.

By transferring the farm to a Unitrust, they would receive 5 percent annually of the fair market value of the trust, avoid the capital gains tax, and also receive a charitable income tax deduction.

During the first five years of this plan, they would contribute over $2 million annually of the ILIT to pay the premium on a second-to-die life insurance policy. Based on their life expectancy of 28.8 years, the ILIT would receive insurance proceeds of over $800,000. Those proceeds would be distributed to their family members as an inheritance according to the trust’s terms.

Since the ILIT is owner and beneficiary of the insurance policy, those proceeds would not be subject to income or estate tax. There is an additional provision for taking advantage of the gift tax annual exclusion.

John and Susannah would receive an income net of premiums estimated at over $1.6 million during their lifetimes, for a total of $2.4 million from the Unitrust and the insurance trust.

And their United Methodist church would receive an endowment of over $1.7 million from the remainder.

John and Susannah were very pleased with the results of the “Unitrust and insurance trust” plan. They decided to move forward with it as their legacy.

The various methods of legacy planning using a farm or ranch, discussed in this four-part series, have the common thread of benefiting families now and The United Methodist Church after their lifetimes.

Every farm or ranch family’s goals are unique. However, it is important to be aware of the options available to achieve those goals.

The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation is a resource to assist you in exploring those options.

Please contact David Battles, CPA, at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org to learn more. There is no obligation, and inquiries are confidential.

Legacy Planning Using a Farm or Ranch – Part 4

Youth: Continued from page 1

seek vocational discernment, and grow in understanding of the biblical mandate to “do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.”

Josie said learning about “people being treated so inhumanely” was an eye-opener. Information about human trafficking led to her decision to major in political science, with the goal of going into advocacy and nonprofit work.

She learned that human trafficking “is not just women, and it’s not just sexual,” she said. It can involve anyone of any age, gender, or race. Victims also can be forced to perform labor.

Degradation of human rights is “hard to wrap your mind around,” Josie said.

Through the tour, Josie said, she gained “a better understanding of how the Church tackles these huge issues of human rights.”

Some of the youths will teach parts of the symposium.

Josie’s talk is titled “Journey of a T-shirt,” in which she will address trafficking through consumerism. Each T-shirt in a store is “touched by so many people,” and the workers may not have fair wages, hours, or working conditions, she said.

Tour member Blake Lemmons of Hennessey plans to teach a role-playing game in which people find out what it’s like to be stranded in a foreign country, without knowing the people or the language, and being taken advantage of in various ways. The game is well-suited to youth groups, he said.

While in D.C., the group met with the staff of U.S. Sen. James Lankford of Edmond to discuss concerns about human trafficking and how it is being dealt with in Oklahoma.

Josie said she would “love to see more action being taken” in Oklahoma. An example would be “how police handle situations that could be human trafficking situations.”

To register for the Sept. 26 summit, go to www.okumc.org/youth. Cost is $15 per person, and scholarships are available.

In addition to the Council on Youth Ministry, sponsors are the Board of Church & Society and Discipleship Ministry Team.