Proposal to reduce from 12 to 8 districts

Delegates will vote May 29

By HOLLY McCRAY

Oklahoma Annual Conference delegates now are studying a proposal to reduce, from 12 to eight, the number of districts. They will vote on the recommendation May 29, final day of the 2014 Annual Conference, which meets May 26-29 in Oklahoma City. If approved, this change will become effective on June 1, 2015.

The one-year period will smooth transition to new structures, including district names and boundaries, administrative systems, personnel, and properties.

District Transition Teams, with equal lay and clergy representation, will collaborate with superintendents to make major strategic decisions prior to the implementation date. Superintendents will become more fully engaged as “key missional strategists.”

The draft document can be viewed online at www.okumc.org/annual_conference. It also will appear in the Pre-Conference Workbook.

“This is a working document,” noted Conference Lay Leader Chuck Stewart of Stilwell. “We will live into this.”

During recent meetings, both the Board of Laity and the Council on Finance & Administration affirmed realignment.

The Annual Conference vote will address only the number of districts. See Proposed districts, page 4

Schedule of pre-conference meetings:

Saturday, April 5, Buffalo UMC, 10 a.m.
Sunday, April 6, Stillwater-First, 2:30 p.m.
Saturday, April 26, McAlester-First, 10 a.m.
Saturday, April 26, Ada-First, 1:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 27, Owasso-First, 2:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 27, Fort Gibson UMC, 6:30 p.m.
Thursday, May 1, OKC-St. Luke’s, 7 p.m.
Sunday, May 4, Enid-First, 2 p.m.

www.okumc.org/annual_conference

“Behold, I am making all things new.”
(Revelation 21:5)

By HOLLY McCRAY

On May 26-29, Annual Conference delegates will meet in the state’s capital city to worship and conduct business at two locations: OKC-St. Luke’s United Methodist Church and UM-affiliated Oklahoma City University.

About 1,200 people are expected to attend.

Digital communication is a dominant aspect of the meeting. The Annual Conference information hub is: www.okumc.org/annual_conference

“The planning team is intentionally moving to a more paperless event, for efficiency and environmental reasons,” said Joe Harris, Annual Conference secretary and director of communications.

• Register online to attend

You can sign up now. Go online to the hub and click the “Registration” button.

The form simplifies signing up for any person attending. It’s a one-stop site, with options to make meal reservations, enroll for YAC (Youth at Conference) and childcare, donate to the special offering, and more.

The dedicated team that will process your form encourages your careful attention as you fill it out.

You must make your own lodging plans. Find information on the hub: “Hotel Information” and “OCU Lodging.” Deadlines apply.

The Tower Hotel (formerly Marriott OKC), 3233 Northwest Expressway, is the primary Conference hotel. Another option is OCU, which offers rooms in United Methodist Hall and meal plans.

• Pre-Conference Workbook in digital format

A delegate will not receive a print copy unless ordering it on the registration form. Price is $15. Now in production, the Workbook will be posted online for viewing or downloading to your personal digital device. You may print it if you wish.

• Bring your personal digital device

Wireless connectivity is being expanded for the Freede Wellness Center at OCU, to accommodate the growing preference to connect digitally. Your response to the final question on the registration form will assist that planning.

Open seating at the Freede Center is planned this year, rather than seating delegates in district groups. Designated areas will permit limited “emergency” charging of digital devices.

For those delegates that require printed material, a reserved seating area will be designated, for easier distribution of paper copies.

• Live streaming

Live streaming of the worship and business sessions again will be available. A high-speed Internet connection is crucial. The link will be activated through the hub when Annual Conference begins.

Invite your friends at home to watch and learn about United Methodism during this week! They can join in virtual worship and gain education about Oklahoma UM connectional ministries that make a difference in the name of Christ.

• Clergy, schedule your portrait session now

Go online to the hub and choose “Lifetouch Photos.” The company Lifetouch Church Directories will create a new, professional clergy directory for the Conference.

Photo sessions are for clergy only. All clergy are requested to participate. Each will receive free wallet-size photos and a directory.

• Digitally challenged?

Delegates who have trouble with online registrations or Internet access are encouraged to contact their local-church office or District Office for assistance. Retired clergy who have trouble may contact Jan Polson in the United Methodist Ministry Center, 405-530-2064.
What generation gap?

April 26 event for older adults to inspire new ministries

“Generations2gether”: that’s the unusual title for an April 26 program in Tulsa for all senior adults. Registration is now open.

Age labels divide Americans into the Greatest Generation, Millennials, Baby Boomers, and Generation X. Yet we unite in Christ. Can’t we all just get along?

William Randolph, an expert on aging, will discuss generations — differences, similarities, and the potential for intergenerational ministries by churches — during the Senior Adult Day Apart at Asbury United Methodist Church.

The event is from 9:30 a.m. to 3:15 p.m. on that Saturday. Registration fee, $15, includes lunch and snacks. Deadline is April 21 to sign up.

The Singing Ambassadors, Asbury UMC’s older adult choir, will perform. Exhibits by several agencies and organizations will be of interest to seniors.

Attendees should expect to interact in small groups, to learn from each other and apply Dr. Randolph’s ideas. The book “Gen2Gen” will be a resource.

Randolph directs the Office on Aging and Older Adult Ministries for the UM General Board of Discipleship. Prior to joining that staff, he was a retirement community chaplain and pastored UM churches in three states. He holds a Doctor of Ministry in aging and spirituality, from United Theological Seminary, Ohio.

According to UM statistics, U.S. church members total about 8 million. More than one-half of them are age 50 and older.

For more information, contact David Thomas, minister to senior adults at Asbury UMC, 918-492-1771. You also may send your registration to him at the church, 6767 S. Mingo Rd., Tulsa, Okla. 74133-3309.

Easter Vigil

Join in this celebration of the resurrection of Jesus!

- Creative worship experience
- Scripture presented by Spirit of Grace liturgical dancers
- Remembrance of baptism
- Service of Holy Communion
- Paschal fire
- Variety of musical styles
- Gospel choir

The Easter Vigil was the most important service in the earliest days of the church. Christians would gather at sundown on the night before Easter and spend the night reading Scripture, celebrating baptism and receiving communion. We give this service a modern interpretation with the Scripture readings presented through dance and drama, and music ancient and new.

Great for youth groups, confirmation classes, church groups and individuals of all ages!

April 19

7:00-8:30 p.m.
Bishop W. Angie Smith Chapel
Oklahoma City University

Kerr receives Milhouse Award

Oklahoma City University recently presented to Lou Kerr its 2013 Bishop Paul W. Milhouse Award.

She was honored at the Board of Trustees meeting Jan. 22.

The Milhouse Award recognizes people who demonstrate outstanding leadership in the community, local church, and Conference, in addition to being an advocate for the partnership between OCU and the Church.

In presenting the award, Vice-President of University-Church Relations Margaret A. Ball noted that Kerr has been active at all levels of the Church over the course of her life. She is a faithful member of OKC-Nichols Hills UMC, where she has been in the forefront of organizing fund-raising campaigns for both programs and facilities.

Most recently, she has been key in the effort to complete renovation of the church’s physical plant and to create new, inviting spaces for worship and ministry programs.

Kerr also has given her time and talent at the general church level, as board chairperson of the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation, which provides significant scholarships for UM students.

Kerr’s service to the broader community is extensive. To list only a few: the Board of Lyric Theatre, Red Earth Inc., Oklahoma City Public Schools Foundation, and chairing the Oklahoma Centennial Commission.

She is a faithful OCU trustee. She has been inducted into the OCU Commerce and Industry Hall of Honor and the Societies of Oklahoma City University. She has provided generous financial support for students and programs. Kerr serves on the campaign committee to fund relocation of OCU’s law school to downtown Oklahoma City.

The University-Church Relations Office welcomes nominations for this annual award, established in 1982.
By BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

I f you want to make God smile, just make plans. The expression reminds us that when we chart a course for our lives — whether for a day, a week, a month, even a lifetime — we tend to forget God also has plans for us.

If you don’t leave room for God’s agenda as you plan your life, the things on your “to-do” list likely will come to naught. You can picture God smiling at your forgetfulness about the Creator’s plans for you.

I call the difference in my plans and God’s itinerary “unexpected detours and interruptions.”

Probably like many of you, each morning I list the tasks I must accomplish during the day. But so often before I can complete any of those, something takes me off course. I can’t begin to count the times I’ve returned home at day’s end having accomplished nothing of what I set out to do.

Diversions seem to come out of nowhere, postponing and sometimes completely derailing our plans. However, there is an important difference between God’s detours and ours.

God’s alternate routes most often lead to opportunities. No one knew this better than Jesus. His life was a study in detours and interruptions. Yet each time he was taken off course, that journey became a testimony to God’s presence in everything he did.

Scriptures tell us that Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” near the end of his life, for he knew his earthly ministry would end in the same city as the ministry of so many prophets. However, on his way to the Holy City, he happened to pass through Jericho.

Note this passage is very clear to declare that Jesus merely “was passing through.” He probably had no intention of a prolonged visit in this town that stood between him and his final destination. Scriptures also tell us Jesus had just healed a blind man. His next planned stop waited beyond Jericho.

But suddenly he encountered a tax collector named Zacchaeus.

The job of a tax collector rated Zacchaeus the same as ofroaths and robbers. By assessing the cruel Roman tax, he was viewed as a traitor to his nation and to God. And, as the passage points out, he was wealthy. It reads tersely, like an epiphany. This man who did the dirty work for Rome and also was rich was surely hated by people.

Yet God has a way of turning epiphanies into possibilities!

Was it conscience or curiosity that brought Zacchaeus to the street curb on the day Jesus passed by? Stories that would stir anybody’s imagination were making the rounds about Jesus. Perhaps there was a hunger within Zacchaeus to find out if the stories were true.

Or, knowing Zacchaeus was so despised by others, could it be that his greatest hunger was to be treated as a human being? There at the curb, Zacchaeus encountered setbacks. The crowd waiting for Jesus was huge. I can only imagine how Zacchaeus, being short in stature, was jostled within that throng. It seems ridiculous that a man of his prestige would allow himself to be in such a position. But these words in the Scripture make it all so very clear: “He sought to see who Jesus was.” I wonder if this was in his mind: “If you will seek the Lord and search after him with all your heart and with all your soul, surely you will find him” (Deuteronomy 4:29).

And find Jesus he did. Up into the high branches of a sycamore tree, Zacchaeus climbed. Passing by, Jesus “looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, ‘Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.’”

Indeed some theologians will say that Zacchaeus’ search for life made the difference. I also will add that God’s search for Zacchaeus saved him!

By knowing the name of this unloved tax collector and inviting himself to the house, Jesus restored the faith of a man cast away by society. And before the end of that day, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “And now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

The great theologian Augustine wrote: “When I first knew Thee, Thou didst lift me up, that I might see there was something to be seen, though as yet I was not fit to see it.”

Therein lies the unique significance of Jesus Christ for human history, for when we talk about finding God in Christ, the greater truth is that, through Christ, God finds us!

Jesus is passing through this Lenten season on his way to Jerusalem and the cross, reaching out to those who seek him. He knows you by your name, and he invites you into a living, loving relationship with him. You may have made other plans but, please, for Christ’s sake, don’t miss your opportunity to be with him. It can make all the difference in the world.

Anonymous (x13)
Kay Adair
Bill & Karen Anderson
Harvey & Alene Arnold
Donald & Cheryl Baker
Randy & Editta Barker
Don & Lynn Batson
David & Janet Battles
Erline & Wanda Baumont
David & Laura Beal
Wesley Fellowship -
Boston Ave. UMC Tulsa
Clara Brown
Spencer & Mary Brown Jr.
Trav & Kara Brown
Cheryl Burnet
Mary Butler
Ivan Byx
Michael & Leanne Chaffin
UMW - Claremore FUMC
Ralph & Midge Coffman
Randall & Kathryn Coit
Lloyd Cole Jr.
Edgar & Betty Collins
Mike & Mary Collins
Robert & Debbie Craine
CC & Anna Marie Crooch Estate
John & Jamie Crooch
Michael & Janet Crooch
Philip & Lisa Crow
Curts & Patricia Crowe
Anna Cypert
Bobby & Shirley Darnell
Marsha Davis
John Dixon
William & Donna Dodson
Robert & Brenda Duran
Gregory & Mary Ann Edwards
Barbara Eskridge
Don & Wanda Fischer
Jo Fowler
David & Cindy Frieza
Mike & Elaine Frizzell
Jerry & Jane Gamble
Jeaninne Gibbens
Robert & Prudy Gorrell
Jim & Elaine Gragg
But & Jane Grif
UMW - Grove FUMC
Earl & Marlene Haggard
George & Jo Hall
Marie Hancock
Rudolph & Madelin Hargrave
Ralph & Linda Harker
Valerie Hatley
Bob & Dee Haynes Jr.
John & Anne Heathon
Billy & Ann Hebbelthwaite
Jono & Jenny Helmich
Highland Park UMC
Jim & Mary Nel Holder
Mark & Cindy Howard
Ross & Jane Hutchinson
Robert & Ann Ivester
Mr. & Mrs. Ivan Keatley
Keith Kennedy
Steve & Susan Knight
Brian & Julie LaPat
Greg & Anita LaPat
Centenary UMC Lawton
Robert Lee
Ed & Melissa Livermore
Ralph & Elaine Lockstone
Mr. & Mrs. Hal Long
Joe Lucas & Kay McSpadden
Bryan & Vicki Manning
Emery & Lisa Mason
Dwight Maudling
Irma McCaskill
Dick & Lavon McKnight
Bob & Doris McKown
Burrell & Jo Ann McNaught
Billy & Lora Meade
Lou & Pat Meadors
Paul & Ann Millburn
Larry & Sandy Mocha
Kirt Moeling
Mary Moeling
Mike & Christy Mordy
David & Laura Morris
Ted & Laura Mosteller
Jim Neel & Jan King
Stan Nichols
Thrift Store-Nicoma Park UMC
Chuck & DeeAnn Nordean
Clark Nutting
Pathfinder SS Class -
Grace UMC (OKC)
St. Andrew’s UMC (OKC)
UMW - Okmulgee UMC
UMW - Okmulgee UMC
Dee & Barbie Paige
Bob & Peggy Peters
Lenert & Bobbie Pfeiler
Allan Rau
Donald & Valerie Reeves
Anna Richardson
John & Helen Riley
Joe & Judy Robinson
Joy & Shirley Rolston
Gary & Sharon Roth
Gale & Martha Sadler
Mike & Shandra Naikindra
Stanley & Sherry Selvidge
Logan & Donna Sharpe
UMM - Wesley UMC Shawnee
UMW - Wesley UMC Shawnee
Arden & Rita Ruth Smith
Bill & Martha Smith
Craig Stimson & Krista Jones
Carolyn Taylor
Andrew Tievzing
Ken & June Tucker
J.M. & Patricia Vanderweele Jr.
Jim & Vickie Wagner
Charles & Ila May Watson
Bob & Kathleen West
Robert & Karen Williams
David & Suzanne Wolf
Bill & Lisa Wright
Donald & Barbara Wright
Earnestine Wright
Karen Young
Steve & Ann Zenthoefer
Circle of Care Staff

To make your pledge today, please call 405-530-2078 or visit our website at: http://www.circleofcare.org/1000.html

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Page 3
Proposed districts:

Continued from page 1

of districts. The bishop and Cabinet determine boundaries, according to the Book of Discipline.

Informal discussions about districts have been ongoing since Bishop Robert Hayes Jr. began his assignment here, in 2004, he remarked.

“We are ready now to make an informed and intelligent decision,” said the bishop.

“I believe the Conference should do the same thing we’ve asked the churches to do: Take a long, hard look at how we are doing ministry and move toward having the structure that will assist us in accomplishing our mission.”

The Church’s mission is to make disciples who transform the world, understanding that mission is best achieved at the local-church level (Book of Discipline, paragraph 120). The Oklahoma Conference Strategic Plan, approved in 2008, provides a framework for fulfilling that mission on all levels.

Mission at core of change

“View every area of the Church’s ministry as flowing from that mission,” urged national church consultant Lovett Weems. He has met with the Conference corporate board and presented Nov. 5 at the “Day With the Bishop” for clergypersons.

By “reframing the work of every group, from silo mentality to where everyone is looking at the same goal, you begin to get synergy,” he explained. “One strengthens the other.”

Dr. Weems said a number of annual conferences have considered district realignments in recent years. To succeed, such change must be for missional reasons, not merely to save money.

“If money is saved, it is a benefit to free resources for Conference or local use,” he said.

Oklahoma leaders agree this district proposal also will result in a reduction in Apportionment dollars for the local churches.

Shifts demographics

The draft document acknowledges, “Due to changes in demographics and membership losses, it seems time to make a change in our structure.”

On April 25, 1981, Oklahoma’s state population shifts also were listed among reasons to realign districts.

That year, in a special called session of Annual Conference that day, 73 percent of delegates voted to move from 14 to 12 districts. Altus and Alva Districts were discontinued. Conference Archivist Christina Wolf assisted in researching this history.

Recently, the Texas Conference downsized from 12 to seven districts.

The Memphis (Tenn.) Conference will vote in June on realigning from seven to four districts. A financial shortfall is forcing reductions in several areas for that annual conference, according to the Jan. 27 issue of the United Methodist Reporter.

“Bishop William McAlilly confessed these challenging decisions are indicative of the importance in moving toward the downsizing of districts and Cabinet so that funding might be freed up without compromising ministry and mission opportunities and goals,” stated the Reporter story.

According to Oklahoma’s bishop, re-

SPECIAL MEALS: ‘Breakfast with UMCom’ is new

Start your final day of Annual Conference at the breakfast seminar offered May 29 by the Department of Communications.

“Breakfast With UMCom — Tools for Increasing Your Church’s Vitality” will be presented by Caitlin Congdon from Nashville, Tenn. She serves as training manager for the denomination’s media ministry, United Methodist Communications.

The presentation begins at 6:30 a.m. in the Great Hall of OCU’s McDaniel Student Center. Sign up when you register online for Annual Conference. Price is $9.50 for the buffet meal.

The seminar will examine five common behaviors of highly vital congregations: spiritual pastoral leadership, lay leadership development, worship, small groups, and service and missions. It will provide practical tools.

The class is based on the book “Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World,” by Jorge Acevedo.

In the book, the author tells about touring the New Room in Bristol, England. Another tourist asked if the pews attached to the floor were original furnishings. The curator responded, “Oh, no! In my time, we used wooden chairs or benches so that, after our service, we could push them to the corners of the room and use it for a medical clinic or food ministry.”

Congdon challenges: What would happen in your church if you told the congregation that you were removing the pews? Are you ready to remove those pews? Come to breakfast May 29 to learn more.

More special meals

Find details online about these and the retired clergy meals. Go to the Annual Conference hub, www.okumc.org/annual_conference. Choose which meals you will attend as you fill out the Annual Conference registration form online.

• Monday: Candler School of Theology Luncheon, Bedlam Appreciation Dinner

• Tuesday: Laity Luncheon; Saint Paul School of Theology Luncheon; Phillips Theological Seminary Alumni Luncheon; Oklahoma UM Historical Society Luncheon; OCU Alumni, Students, and Friends Luncheon; Asbury Seminary Luncheon

• Wednesday: Missions@Daybreak, Christians Engaged in Faith Formation (formerly CEF) luncheon, Clergy Spouse Luncheon, Perkins School of Theology Luncheon

• Thursday: Breakfast With UMCom, UM Rural Fellowship Annual Meeting and Awards Luncheon

MISSION OPPORTUNITIES

During Annual Conference, the Office of Mission will collect UMCOR Sewing, Layette, and Bedding Kits.

Donations of kits will be received at a designated truck parked May 26 in St. Luke’s south lot and parked May 27 in the OCU Freede Center’s north lot during morning registration.

Also bring $1 per kit to assist with shipping costs.

If you have questions, contact the OKVIM office, ktherrell-wilkes@okumc.org. 405-530-2029.

Key steps

Assemble the kits prior to delivering them. All items must be new.
alignments by some other annual conferences have created districts of 100 or more churches.

In a new video message, Bishop Hayes emphasizes, “Oklahoma is blessed. Unlike conferences that have had to do this out of necessity, we are proposing to do this from a position of strength.”

New names for districts

If the proposal is adopted, districts will get new names, none of which mirror city names.

The total number of congregations in a district is expected to range between 55 and 75 churches, according to the draft document.

At this time, the average number of congregations is 43 in each of Oklahoma’s districts. Ardmore has the fewest, with 39. The highest concentration of congregations, 51, is in South OKC District.

The Cabinet has been mapping new district names and boundaries; that work is not finalized. Some preliminary boundaries follow major highways.

In the Cabinet’s initial planning, not completed, boundary lines bisect Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

• Within Tulsa, the boundary between the Green Country and River Valley Districts is expected to follow Interstate 44.

• Within Oklahoma City, the boundary line for the Central Area North and Central Area South Districts is expected to flow along: I-40 West, I-44 North, Northwest 23rd Street, I-35, and I-40 East.

More proposals await votes

The district misional realignment proposal is one of three major proposals scheduled for action on the final day of the 2014 Annual Conference.

1. The New People New Places fund. Grants will be available to local churches and more, if delegates approve this new budget item.

2. Changes in administration of the health benefits system for retired clergy. Retirees and their spouses will continue to be insured.

Opportunities to learn details

Prior to May 29, several opportunities are available for lay and clergy delegates, retired clergy, church financial officers and other leaders, as well as other interested persons, to ask questions and gain clarity on all three proposals.

[See list, page 1.]

• Pre-conference meetings already are under way.

• A roundtable session during Annual Conference begins at 2 p.m. May 28 at OKC-St. Luke’s UMC.

• Information is being shared online at www.okumc.org/annual_conference and through the Contact newspaper.

PORTUNITY: Donate UMCOR kits

Since strict rules govern product entry into countries, kits must contain only the specified supplies — nothing more. Do not include money, notes, or any other items. Additional items must be removed, thus delaying shipping.

Your careful attention to the details about each item and kit assembly is crucial to the efficiency and overall success of this mission project.

Sewing Kit
Do not wash fabric items.
3 continuous yards of new, solid-color fabric — only cotton or cotton-blend
1 pair fabric scissors
1 package hand needles, in original packaging
1 spool thread, medium- to large-size spool, no travel-kit thread
Five to eight buttons, 5/8ths-inch size or larger, on original cards or fastened together — no loose buttons
One sealable, gallon-size plastic bag
To assemble: Place all items in the plastic bag and seal.

Layette Kit
Do not wash fabric items.
6 cloth diapers
2 infant shirts (undershirts or onesies)
2 infant-size washcloths
2 baby gowns or sleepers
1 baby sweater or jacket (must open at front; may be knitted, crocheted, or sewn; hooded sweatshirts are acceptable)
2 diaper pins with protective plastic closures
2 receiving blankets, sizes 28-by-28 inches to 32-by-32 inches — no crib blankets
To assemble: Lay out one of the receiving blankets on a table. Set aside the diaper pins. Place all other items in the center of the opened blanket. Fold the blanket around the items, and secure the bundle with the diaper pins.

Bedding Kit
Do not wash fabric items.
2 flat, double-size sheets (no fitted sheets)
2 pillows
2 pillowcases
The website for the United Methodist Committee on Relief provides more details and further information.

Coming in the next issue:
Proposal about retired clergy health benefits

SPECIAL OFFERING
PHILIPPINES

1/2 of the special offering will go to:
ASBURY COLLEGE
Where missionary Marsha Alexander of Oklahoma serves

1/2 of the special offering will go to:
TYPHOON RELIEF
UMCOR recovery work
The global church

More than 25 years ago, a congregation in Shick-shinny, Pa., used a family recipe and made Easter eggs to sell. Today the enterprise helps First UMC pay bills and enables continued service. The church expects to sell 16,000 eggs this year. (March 19, United Methodist News Service)

A recent national survey showed female UMC pastors are finding more acceptance and more reasons to stay in local church ministry. However, women — especially racial-ethnic women — are more likely to move into ministries beyond the local church, citing lack of support by bishops and Cabinets and underuse of their ministry gifts. (March 21, UMNS)

The Missouri Conference gave a check for $150,000 to Rebuild Joplin, to help more families affected by the catastrophic 2011 tornado. The Rebuild Joplin development director told Fourstateshomepage.com the gift is a game changer to clear the waiting lists for homes. (March 24, UMNS)

Children in the Alabama-West Florida Conference set up an impromptu lemonade stand, which was advertised by their mothers via Instagram, to raise money for Imagine No Malaria. They raised $61 — enough to pay for six insecticide-treated bed nets for families in Africa. (March 21, UMNS)

Composer Phoebe Palmer Knapp played a melody composer Phoebe Palmer coordiated by Kristin Terrell-Wilkes in the Office of Mission. The Conference’s Justice and Mercy Ministries provided transportation in the city.

On behalf of the Conference’s Office of Mission, Carlos Ramirez invited the National Hispanic/Latino Plan missionaries to come to Oklahoma.

So more than two-dozen leaders traveled to Oklahoma City for the first-ever meeting of the full group, said Rev. Ramirez.

They came from Florida, California, Arizona, Louisiana, Kansas, Texas, New York, etc. Ramirez coordinates Hispanic ministry in Oklahoma.

Deployed through the General Board of Global Missions, all these leaders connect digitally. Some had met in person, such as when Ramirez attended a School of Congregational Development, in Colorado.

Yet the vision grew to come together at one location for networking, education, and support.

Thus in late January at the United Methodist Ministry Center in Oklahoma City, the missionaries studied changing demographics and deepened their personal spiritual growth. They trained in using digital technologies.

They learned about Native American expressions of faith while visiting an Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

Ramirez said the event validated his objective to put more emphasis on reaching second- and third-generation Hispanics in Oklahoma.

Hospitality for the special event was coordinated by Kristin Terrell-Wilkes in the Office of Mission. The Conference’s Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries provided transportation in the city.

Oklahoma hosts Hispanic missionaries

Projects Transformation continues in 7 cities

Churches in seven cities will welcome elementary-age students for Project Transformation 2014, which begins June 2 and concludes July 24.

Theme for the day camps this summer is “Oh, the Places You’ll Go,” based on the book by Dr. Seuss. The faith-based literacy program operates Mondays through Thursdays.

These are the host churches: Bartlesville-First UMC, El Reno-Wesley UMC, Mangum-First UMC, Moore-First UMC, Muskogee-St. Paul’s UMC, OKC-Chapel Hill UMC, and two Tulsa churches: Southern Hills UMC and Metropolitan Baptist Church.

Young adult interns lead the programming, which includes education and self-esteem components, meals, and field trips for the children. The interns begin training on May 21. They lodge together, and on Friday mornings they participate in volunteer and learning opportunities for their own age group.

Volunteers from many places, not only the host churches, fill many support roles.

Project Transformation Executive Director Sarah Nichols welcomes your interest in assisting with PT. Contact her at snichols@okumc.org, 405-530-2008.

http://www.projecttransformation.org.oklahoma

Passages

Molly Elizabeth Holder, 58, of Mustang died March 16, 2014. She was the wife of Rev. Lawrence W. Holder, pastor of Mustang UMC.

Molly Mahone was born Aug. 29, 1955. College sweethearts, Molly and Larry married in the summer of 1979.

On behalf of the Conference’s Office of Mission, Carlos Ramirez invited the National Hispanic/Latino Plan missionaries to come to Oklahoma.

So more than two-dozen leaders traveled to Oklahoma City for the first-ever meeting of the full group, said Rev. Ramirez.

Carlos Ramirez leads a song during closing worship.

http://www.projecttransformation.org.oklahoma

With his guitar, Carlos Ramirez leads a song during closing worship.

Opportunities


Accompanist: Part-time. Andy James, pastor@choctawumc.com, 405-390-8151, 1200 N. Choctaw Rd, Choctaw, OK 73020.


Director of Youth Ministries: Part-time. Sayre UMC, Margo Vestal, 580-928-2161, methodist@cableone.net.

Youth Director: Full-time. Shattuck UMC, Rick Trobaugh, 580-938-2186, retrobaugh@gmail.com.

Choir robes & stoles: 29 gold robes & 30 stoles. Pay only shipping or pick up. Beaver UMC, 580-635-4514, bunc@ptsi.net.
Downtown church to mark 125 years

First United Methodist Church in downtown Oklahoma City will celebrate its 125th anniversary on Palm Sunday, April 13.

Bishop Robert Hayes Jr. will preach during the 10:45 a.m. worship. Following that, there will be a catered luncheon and viewing of an anniversary video in Fellowship Hall.

First UMC was officially established on April 28, 1889, the first Sunday after the Oklahoma Land Run of April 22. A call went out for all Methodists to meet at a site just south of the church’s location today. By June 1889, the church had purchased a corner lot on Northwest Fourth and Robinson, which has remained its location for 125 years, surviving two world wars and the urban flight of the 1960s.

On April 19, 1995, First Church vaulted to worldwide attention with the tragic bombing of the Murrah Federal Building. First Church was heavily damaged, and the congregation was forced to relocate for three years; a new sanctuary and then an educational building were constructed. The First Church family members give special thanks to Trinity Baptist Church, also downtown, for hosting them during those three years.

Within 36 hours of the bombing, a banner was hung from the church, declaring the members’ can-do spirit for the entire world to see: “OUR GOD REIGNS AND WE WILL REMAIN!”

The first Sunday in the newly constructed sanctuary was Easter 1998.

The defining essence of this church is captured in the stained-glass window of its Chapel. Salvaged from the bomb-blasted fragments, the window places Christ at the center of all and declares: “The Lord takes broken pieces and by His loves makes us whole.”

For First UMC, these words are more than a motto; they are a promise of His healing grace.

The anniversary events on April 13 are free and open to the public. First Church invites new friends and those from the past to join the celebration. Commemorative items also will be sold, including a glass block that bears an etching of the Church, a leather bookmark, and a DVD of the church’s history.

Stephen Ministry forms in retirement community

The hymn “Seek Ye First” echoed during the Vespers Service at Epworth Villa. This was no ordinary gathering. On March 6, the stained-glass chapel was packed with residents of the United Methodist-related retirement community and their families.

They watched as nine residents were commissioned into the Stephen Ministry, a lay ministry that provides emotional and spiritual care for individuals facing crises or difficulties.

“We are intentional about creating a caring community. It means we empower staff and residents to work together as a team, lifting up those who are experiencing difficulty,” said Lisa Crone, an Epworth Villa chaplain and UM clergywoman.

Epworth Villa President John Harned encouraged Rev. Crone to start Stephen Ministry after hearing about the ministry’s success in other retirement communities.

Each of the Stephen Ministers received 50 hours of special training to provide confidential, one-on-one Christian care to people on the Epworth Villa campus who are experiencing grief, loneliness, divorce, hospitalization, disability, and other life difficulties. They listen, encourage, and provide emotional and spiritual support.

Each minister meets with the person receiving care at least once a week for an hour and also as needed. They sharpen their skills with monthly continuing education and peer supervision.

Pastors often serve on the front lines of care. This new team of laypeople further extends that faith-based connection.

The nine Stephen Ministers who were commissioned at Epworth Villa are: Dot Blew, Joy Ansley, Johnnie Martin, Jessica Tanner, Jimette McLean, Winona Madison, Marilyn Williams, and Elaine Reid. Not shown is Sharon Wetwiska. Seated from left are Chaplain Lisa Crone, President John Harned, Matt Meinke, and Stephen Leader D.H. Ford.
Statue dedicated
Gift creates special place to pray at Egan

By HOLLY McCRAY

At the base of the forest trail that rises to the large cross at Camp Egan, Jesus relaxes on a park bench. There’s room for you to sit with him.

“Come to Me” is the name of this life-size, bronze representation of the Savior, dedicated March 8 at the camp near Tahlequah. It is a gift from Tom and Barbara Naugle of Tulsa and artist Stephen LeBlanc.

“What touches me is that Jesus is relaxed,” said Camps Director Randy McGuire, viewing the sculpture. “Our goal at Camps is for campers to get away from the hubbub going on in the world, find a place to relax, and find Jesus.

“I think this Jesus is the picture we want our campers to go home with: a Jesus that I can sit with, that I can talk to.”

Senior Pastor Bob Feist of Tulsa-Christ UMC led the dedication ceremony. He read Matthew 11:28-30 (“so very fitting for what this statue represents”) and Mark 10:13-16.

Men of Christ UMC were at Egan for their seventh annual retreat there. Among them was Tom Naugle.

Naugle said he began attending Christ Church more than a dozen years ago when a stepson invited him to a Sunday evening program there. He volunteers for Upward Basketball, Meals on Wheels, and Tulsa-St. Luke’s Redemption UMC meals.

However, he insisted, “I’m a behind-the-scenes guy.” He offered as an example picking up chairs after the basketball games.

Originally from Garber, Naugle earned degrees in chemical engineering and business administration. Most of his work career has been in management and has included international assignments.

Today he describes himself as “mostly retired. I’m through being a general; I want to be a private.”

At NatureWorks, a Tulsa art show, Naugle first saw a miniature of the sculpture now installed at Camp Egan and met artist LeBlanc of Colorado (www.leblancsculptures.com). “Have You Talked With Me Today” was the title of the desktop piece.

The artist told him about a life-size version in a church. LeBlanc had learned that children run to it after Sunday School and declare, “Jesus, look what I painted today!”

The Naugles and LeBlanc collaborated to place one of the life-size statues at Tulsa Boys’ Ranch.

Last year, Naugle met Camp Egan Director Josh Pulver through Rev. Feist, during the Christ Church men’s retreat.

Naugle wondered if the sculpture would be meaningful for campers.

“I started to have a feeling about this camp,” Naugle said. “I thought Jesus on the bench would be a good thing to have out here.”

The Naugles’ deep love for children and youths and passion for helping them “is very apparent through everything that they do,” said Pulver. “We are very thankful they allow God to work through them to bless so many people.”

Sign up for summer camp!
Registration is now underway at www.okumc.org/camps.

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