



PHOTO BY ANDREW HIMES

CRUNCH TIME — At Canyon Camp, ice and wind uprooted a big tree during a Thanksgiving storm, and it crashed into Cabin 9 near the swimming pool. Numerous other trees throughout the United Methodist property near Hinton also splintered and fell under the ice's weight. At Christmastime, another ice storm struck. Power was restored Jan. 3. Then, floodwaters rushed into Egan Camp near Tahlequah on New Year's Eve, overwhelming and cracking that swimming pool, sweeping away retaining walls along the creek, and damaging a bridge crossing. As *Contact* went to press, Camps leaders were assessing damages and scheduling volunteer groups to help clean up. Story and more photos, page 4.

Clinic makes people look good

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

It takes dozens of people to bring Skyline Urban Ministry's Eye Clinic into focus, said Gail Holcomb, manager of the clinic at 500 SE 15th in Oklahoma City.

Through volunteers' efforts, some 100 people get low-cost or free eyeglasses each month, and about 130 people per month get eye exams.

"Every year it gets bigger and bigger," Holcomb said.

She estimated that 45 volunteers help run the United Methodist-related program, including 21 eye professionals (optometrists, ophthalmologists, and an optician).

Eight doctors see patients in Skyline's clinic, which is outfitted with equipment purchased with grant money. Others perform exams at their own offices in the Oklahoma City area.

The doctors typically provide eight clinics a month at Skyline, Holcomb said.

At this clinic, 45 volunteers assist about 130 people each month. Among those serving are 21 eyecare professionals.



PHOTO BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Gail Holcomb models fun eyeglass frames at Skyline Urban Ministry.

It is gratifying to see patients' reactions after they get their new glasses, Holcomb said. When they put on those glasses, "they just stand and look around."

Safety is a major consideration for some of them. New glasses will help them see road signs and curbs. "If you can't see, it could be dangerous," Holcomb said.

Some patients have remarked that their new glasses will help them read well enough to prepare for the General Educational Development (GED) test.

In addition to eyecare professionals, other volunteers such as Lloyd Leveridge, a member of OKC-Church of the Servant, help schedule appointments. On one recent day, Leveridge was using a computer at the agency, making appointments for people who had called Skyline for eyeglass help.

SEE SKYLINE, PAGE 8

Christmas service custom-made for special needs

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Jingling bells in the pew? That's OK. Exploring the sanctuary during the service? That's OK, too.

Talking to the preacher as she gives the sermon? That's OK, and she might even answer back.

Christmas Eve marked the start of what could become a tradition at Mustang United Methodist Church – a service tailored to families with special needs.

Donna Dodson, pastor of the church, said the idea of the special service came up in discussion at a staff meeting, and it just blossomed.

Rev. Dodson asked her staff to meet with two mothers of special needs children to plan the service, which was held at 5 p.m. Dec. 24, in addition to more conventional Christmas Eve services.

"I wanted to make sure that we did this right," she said.

Dodson said the church also asked for the input of parents who attend support groups, that regularly meet at Mustang UMC, for families dealing with issues such as autism and Down syndrome.

It wasn't a silent night

When the Christmas Eve service started, Dodson assured the congregation of about 55 people that "it was OK to make noise."

Jingle bells were on hand for anybody who felt like ringing them, and it was fine for worshippers to wander around the sanctuary during the service. There was a supply of toys with which to play during the service, too.

"Whatever they chose to do, it was OK," Dodson said. "We just accepted anybody who came in."

One teenage girl talked to Dodson while she was preaching, and Dodson responded.

The service featured gentle music and lighting because of the sensory sensitivity of some in the congregation.

Most of the people who came are not members of the church, Dodson said. One family traveled from Harrah with their foster children.

Dodson said she told a simple version of the Christmas story, illustrated with pictures projected on a screen at appropriate points.

"I just told it. I didn't read it from the Scriptures," she said.

Instead of lighting candles at the end of the service, the worshippers received glow sticks, which they placed in a manger display during the singing of "Silent Night."

Families who wanted to receive a blessing after the service came forward and joined hands with Dodson for a prayer.

Extending a welcome

The pastor said she hopes the Christmas Eve service will lead to something bigger – regular services for special needs children and their families. "That's been a dream of mine," she said.

In the past, families have remarked to Dodson that they had given up on going to regular church services. "When they go and their child makes noise, people turn around and look."

Families were pleased with the service, she said. "They indicated that they hoped we could do it again."



Replace winter cabin fever with party fever by bringing your youths and elementary-age campers to a free Camps Reunion! Invite new friends who haven't experienced camp yet!

They'll reunite with peers from past District and Conference summer church camps, and you'll meet deans and other camp leaders who will answer your questions about Camps ministry.

Each party will feature music, dancing, skits, games, and prizes. Young people must be accompanied by an adult — there will be fun for all ages.

- **Jan. 30 — OKC-Church of the Servant, 3-5 p.m.**
- **Feb. 6 — Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC, 3-5 p.m.**

Suicide is subject of new resources

A set of DVDs and books on how to help students at risk for suicide has been added to the DVD Library at the United Methodist Ministry Center in Oklahoma City.

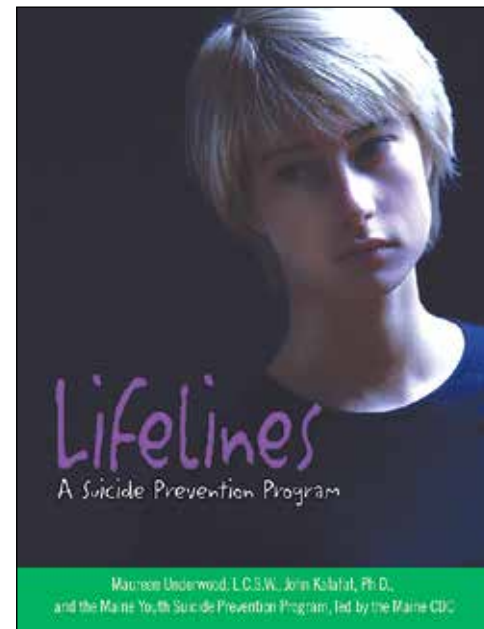
The materials, which were donated by the conference's Youth Ministries, may be borrowed at no charge.

Several church youth directors requested access to the Lifeline materials after they attended an October program on suicide called "Let's Talk," said Diana Northcutt, the Conference's youth coordinator and director of Discipleship Ministries.

The Lifelines collection includes DVDs titled "Not My Kid: What Every Parent Should Know," "A Teen's Guide to Suicide Prevention," and "One Life Saved."

The collection also contains a DVD on intervention for students who appear to be suicidal.

The companion books are: "Lifelines: A Suicide Prevention Program," "Lifelines: Intervention. Helping Students at Risk for Suicide," and "Lifelines: Postvention. Responding to Suicide and Other Traumatic Death."



To request the materials, call communications assistant Chris Schutz at 405-530-2075 or email her at cschutz@okumc.org.

Hundreds of video resources are available for free checkout in the DVD Library. Browse titles and descriptions online at www.okumc.org/dvd_library.



OCU honors Leichter with Bishop Milhouse Award

The Bishop Paul W. Milhouse Award recognizes "those who demonstrate outstanding leadership in the community, their local United Methodist church, and their annual conference, in addition to being an advocate for the partnership between Oklahoma City University and the church." At the University-Church Relations dinner on Dec. 11, this honor was presented to Cathy Leichter, a person who embodies the very definition of the award.

Spend only a little time on campus and you'll see contributions Cathy has made to OCU. Enjoy a moment of reflection in the Naifeh Garden, a project Cathy chaired, at the Bass School of Music. Share a snack during the Oklahoma Annual Conference in the Leichter Reunion Center in the Freede Wellness Center.

You might even observe her teaching a philosophy class as an adjunct instructor.

Cathy serves on the Advisory Boards of the Schools of Arts and Sciences and of Music. She led the campaign that raised over \$1 million for the Ann Hundley Hoover Endowed Chair in the School of Music. Cathy and her husband, Kurt, have

provided money for scholarships that benefit many students.

She holds bachelor's and master's degrees from OCU.

Cathy shares her skills gained through years managing her own marketing company to assist numerous community organizations, including Lyric Theatre, The Tree Bank Foundation, and the Oklahoma City Philharmonic.

This same energy has been offered in service to The United Methodist Church. She helped host Area Night for the 2012 South Central Jurisdictional Conference, in Oklahoma City, and served as a trustee of the United Methodist Higher Education Foundation in Nashville.

She and Kurt also have been very involved in fundraising for youth ministries and missions at OKC-Church of the Servant.

Kurt and Cathy love to travel and use their talents in writing and photographing places they visit. Cathy writes travel articles and Kurt takes all of the pictures; their works have been featured in regional and local magazines.

Cathy recently released her first book, "On God's Polishing Wheel," the story of



From left: OCU freshman Lauren Huntley, who is a Bishop Scholar; Bishop Robert Hayes Jr.; and Cathy Leichter, recipient of the Milhouse Award. A Religion major, Huntley is a student in Leichter's philosophy class.

her husband's escape at age 14 from war-torn Europe to New York and eventually to Oklahoma and a successful career. She is working on two more books.

The University-Church Relations office welcomes nominations at any time for this annual award to a lay person. Contact Charles Neff, vice-president of University-Church Relations, at cneff@okcu.edu or 405-208-5060.

Youth Service Day registration now online

OCU invites church youth groups and their sponsors to attend Youth Service Day on March 5, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. This is a time of worship, community service, lunch, and fellowship with other United Methodist youths. To attend this free event, we do ask that you register online.

Go to okcu.edu/campus/religious-life and click "Registration Form."





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

Are we there yet?

“Hold on to what you have”

— Revelation 3:11

BY BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

Entering a new year and my final eight months as bishop of the Oklahoma Area, I conclude the five-part series in which I’ve been focusing on several aspects of our shared ministry: the expectations of all our churches, the laity, and those called to lead as pastors.



Bishop Hayes

Today I offer what I call the balcony view for our annual conference. Throughout 11 years as bishop, I’ve often asked a question posed by people on long journeys: Are we there yet?

Let me share here with you where we are.

I must begin with the very first event at which I spoke as the new episcopal leader in Oklahoma. It took place in the large meeting room at Canyon Camp in September 2004. Various Annual Conference Council representatives, laity and clergy, had gathered to assess their work. What I remember most was the uncertainty and pessimism that I observed in these faithful leaders. There was a glass-half-empty discussion about church work, supplemented by projections of shortfalls and disappointing numbers.

At the meeting’s conclusion, someone noted my attendance, and I was asked to say a few words as the new bishop. I went to the podium.

I talked about a rancher who had decided to sell his farm. He had grown weary of trying to make ends meet, and finally he called a real estate agent to survey his property so it could be posted for sale. The agent came and took extensive notes. After a few days, he called the rancher to report what he planned to

put in the newspaper ad.

The agent read to the rancher: “For sale! Beautiful 380-acre ranch with several sturdy buildings, including a huge barn to store the hay and plentiful crops; a stunning, rustic five-bedroom farmhouse that overlooks flowing wheat fields and several babbling brooks stocked with fish; radiant sunrises and sunsets that can be seen from the front and back porches; gentle rolling hills that offer the perfect complement to the substantial herds of farm animals such as cattle, sheep, chickens, and even geese. Ideal location. All offers considered!”

The rancher asked the Realtor to read the advertisement again to him. After the second reading, the agent heard a very long sigh. Then the rancher said, “You know, that sounds so good I think I’ll keep it. I never realized I had all of those things!”

Before my arrival, I had studied the facts and statistics about this annual conference I had resolved to work to hold on to the vibrant Church life here and use it to grow an even greater annual conference in God’s service.

As a newcomer, my first order of business was to make United Methodists in Oklahoma aware of how fortunate and blessed they were. Despite others’ talking that day about what Oklahoma didn’t have, I concluded my first speech by declaring my excitement and pride in being the newly appointed bishop of this Area.

Those sentiments hold true to this day.

The Oklahoma Conference is one of the strongest in the denomination, consistently ranking in the top 10 of all U.S. annual conferences. Our Methodist roots in this state date back to the early 1800s — almost a century before statehood!

We are in a good place, Oklahomans! But we can reach even greater heights for God if we hold on to what we have and work hard on building upon this foundation.

First, we must hold on to two dynamic features of the people called United

Methodists in Oklahoma.

1 We need to persist in what I call the *unifying spirit* that binds this diverse group of believers in the single-minded mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ. In Oklahoma I have experienced that characteristic in a way that surpasses everything I have seen in other places.

For me, the spirit of a place is much more important than the numbers. If the personality of our people embodies a can-do attitude, then anything is possible.

I have seen this outlook present in the mission teams I’ve joined and on the faces of people I’ve met all across this annual conference. I have experienced this disposition in our campers, on college campuses, and in organizational meetings with lay and clergy. Working together, we believe, we can change the world.

2 We also need to hold on to that *powerful spirit* that makes us the unique body of Christ called the Church. To bring about change in the world, we need to be strong in the God-given knowledge that the Church has something valuable to share with the world through us.

We cannot yet claim to have moved

from good to great. There are areas of concern I must share.

- We must redouble our desire and efforts to reach out to the next generation of believers. This means we must become more creative, more willing to take calculated risks, more welcoming, and more open to change.

- Many congregations are becoming smaller. They must rediscover their purpose for ministry, and some must realize they can do more for the Kingdom by serving with other congregations than by themselves.

- In the next 10 years the face of this annual conference will change. We must pursue more ways NOW to make new disciples, or we will find ourselves in a very difficult place. (Make note: small groups, Bible study classes, Sunday School, and other settings that offer education and information are as important today as ever.)

Are we there yet? No, we haven’t arrived, but we’re getting pretty close to where God wants us to be.

Hold on — keep the faith — and keep advancing.

Bishop’s preaching schedule – early 2016

JANUARY

- 10: Konawa UMC
- 17: Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC
Council Oak District Celebration
Prague UMC
- 24: Apache UMC

FEBRUARY:

- 7: Hydro UMC
- 21: Tulsa-Centenary UMC
Crossroads and Heartland
Districts Celebration
- 28: Cheyenne Valley UMC
Waynoka UMC
Cimarron District Celebration

MARCH:

- 27: Stillwater-First UMC

APRIL:

- 10: OKC-Chapel Hill UMC
Metro Worship Event
at OKC-First UMC
- 24: OKC-Wesley UMC

Sometimes the bishop preaches at several places on the same day. For details, contact the host church or district office.

Child SHARE Family Specialists

Our mission is to provide Christian help, healing, and hope to children and youths through recruiting and supporting Oklahoma foster care families.

There is a child waiting for you, will you help?



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Lawton	580-483-3130
OKC Metro	405-463-6626
Ponca City	405-802-7697
Ponca City 2	405-802-9687
Shawnee	405-693-7795
Stillwater	405-312-6640
Tulsa Metro	918-794-3876
Weatherford	405-308-7715
Toll Free	866-978-2956

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At Egan Camp on Jan. 2, volunteers scrape mud in the tabernacle, power-wash its benches, and haul away flood debris beside the creek.

'Who would have ever thought we'd get 15 1/2 inches of rain in 2 days?'
— Egan Manager
Josh Pulver



Camps rally for comeback after storms' assault

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

Nature played extreme sports at all three Oklahoma United Methodist camps in 2015, but nobody cheered.

Torrential rain, flooding, ice, and wind competed, scoring damage at Egan, near Tahlequah; Canyon, close to Hinton; and Cross Point, beside Lake Texoma.

On the final day of the year Canyon sat powerless, even the camp manager's home. Ice varnished the hillside access road. Broken trees littered the property.

In Egan, fast and heavy rainfall pushed the creek well beyond its boundaries. The floodwaters overwhelmed and severely cracked the swimming pool, tore chunks from the creek banks, and kept rising.

But the game of life outlasts a season. As *Contact* went to press, Camps supporters were gamely responding with can-do spirit.

They soon will even the score.

Recall when Spring's record rainfall swelled Lake Texoma, submerging the road into Cross Point. The lingering high water cut off that camp access for 10

weeks. The innovative solution: a summer of "island camps," never to be forgotten, moving people and supplies by canoes and pontoon boats.

Camps' Executive Director Ed Parker said on Jan. 4, "We're moving full speed ahead. We plan on operating our camps at capacity this summer."

Canyon Camp Manager David Combs reported electricity at that site was restored Jan. 3. He now is encouraging volunteer work groups to call the camp and schedule mission service days.

He looks forward to the arrival of 160 youths and adult sponsors for Camp Spark in mid-January. It is a joint program of Heartland and Crossroads Districts.

"Heat is a wonderful thing," he said. "We've been nomads." The Combs family stayed with family and friends during two separate weeks of power outages since Thanksgiving.

That weekend's storm caused Canyon major damage. It brought ice — lots of it. Numerous trees throughout the grounds

shattered under the weight. And Cabin 9 is considered a total loss after a large tree lost its grip on the earth and fell onto that building, Parker said.

Egan Camp Manager Josh Pulver said on Jan. 5, "We're marching forward on the medical station, so we can have the dedication on March 5." Doors were being installed that day, with plumbers due the next day.

Engineering professionals also were to arrive that first week of January, to assess the bridge damage and land erosion that the flooding caused at Egan as 2015 ended. Pulver said the structural damage was along the creek, with only minimal building problems.

"Who would have ever thought we'd get 15 1/2 inches of rain in two days in December?" he asked.

Now "we're trying to establish Spring Break as our mission time," he said.

By then "we'll have



projects groups can work on together, and fellowship."

Pulver said dozens of volunteers helped muck out the open-air tabernacle and clear creek debris on Jan. 2.

He posted on Facebook: "We are overwhelmed by the support shown today by our United Methodist sisters and brothers, as well (as) folks from other local churches around the Tahlequah area. Over 85 people, of all ages, came and helped us clean up from the flood. They went above and beyond and helped us with some other projects as well. Thank you, to each of you, for blessing this place with your hard work and love!"

Oklahoma's camps do have property insurance, but deductibles range from \$10,000 to \$100,000 depending on the cause of damages, according to Conference Treasurer Brian Bakeman.



Canyon Camp's trees bowed and broke from heavy ice and wind in late November.

PHOTO BY DAVID COMBS



UMW members make Christmas merry

United Methodist Women cut Christmas cookies and decorate for NSO's Neighborhood Santa Operation in Oklahoma City. Over 100 UMW members participated in the Dec. 5 workday. They also wrapped gifts and decorated small Christmas trees to be delivered to single mothers, and they decked the halls at homes where Neighborhood Services Organization provides living quarters for chronically homeless clients and their children. The UMW members came from across the state to "make sure all of our clients have a great Christmas," said Stacey Ninness, NSO's president. Ninness said the annual service day was beloved by Joanne Kurklin, NSO's late board chairperson and a former Oklahoma Conference UMW president. She died Dec. 12. The workday also gave the women a chance to view NSO's new headquarters at 431 SW 11th St. Top: The baker at center is Coe Ann Patton. Right: Adding garland to a home's Christmas tree is Kathy Caldron, left, a former Conference UMW president.



Appointments

EFFECTIVE IN JANUARY 2016:

- Jacki Banks**, from Morning Star to Lindsay (Jan. 1).
- Pam Cottrill**, from OKC-Selecman to Lexington/Washington (Jan. 15).
- Ernest Jackson**, from Washington to OKC-Selecman (Jan. 1).
- Ronald King**, from Lindsay to Mannsville (Jan. 1).
- Carol Cook Moore**, from Wesley Seminary, Washington, D.C., to Alva-First (Jan. 1).
- Frank Simpson**, from Mannsville to Not Appointed (Jan. 1).
- Ted Uhlig**, from Lexington to Hydro (Jan. 1).

EFFECTIVE IN DECEMBER 2015:

- Darrell Cox**, from Chelsea-Epworth to Not Appointed (Dec. 31).
 - Mary Beth Foye**, from personal leave to Norman-St. Stephen's associate pastor (Dec. 15).
 - Nicholas Lee**, from Ada-First associate to OKC-The Christ Experience pastor (Dec. 15).
 - Semaj Vanzant**, from OKC-The Christ Experience church to Discontinued (Dec. 1).
 - Waylon Dancer**, from Wilson to Wilson/Courtney (Dec. 1).
 - Travis Ewton**, new, to Tulsa-St. Paul's associate (Dec. 1).
 - Carolyn Higdon**, from Courtney to Discontinued (Dec. 1).
- ALSO:
- Lisa Crone**, from Epworth Villa chaplain to Transitional Leave, effective Nov. 12, 2015.

Birth

Austin James Boyer was born Dec. 17, 2015. He is the son of Lacy and Rev. Tim Boyer, pastor at Heavener and Hodgen churches.

Call for disaster help in Tulsa

The Andrews family is among those in west Tulsa who lost homes in tornadoes last year. Living with the couple in their mobile home were the elementary-age daughter, a nephew, and grandmother.

The home suffered a direct hit, and all their belongings also were lost. Without insurance or savings, the family despaired of recovering through its limited resources.

Then management of their case was picked up by Oklahoma United Methodist Disaster Response Ministry.

On Nov. 14 volunteers from Tulsa-Faith UMC arrived to help the family, which had moved into an aged mobile home in need of much repair. They coated the roof of that home with waterproofing, built a front porch, made electrical repairs, removed and replaced insulation and drywall, and repaired floors.

The deeply grateful family worked alongside the volunteers all day.

The Faith UMC team was so moved by the encounter that the church committed to further help the Andrews family, completing more repairs and providing funds to service the home's heating unit and install a new water heater.

They truly blessed the Andrews' family and made Thanksgiving and Christmas especially enjoyable.

Faith Church's spirit of helping and giving also blessed the Disaster Response Ministry. We thank its people for



In the Tulsa area, Disaster Volunteer Days have been scheduled Jan. 23 and 30 by the Oklahoma United Methodist

Disaster Response office. People of all skill levels are welcome. Work will range from debris pick-up and demolition to renovation inside homes. Sign up at <https://okumc-reg.brapp.com/DisasterResponseVolunteerDay>.

contributing to this success story.

Weather extremes in 2015 left so many Oklahomans in need of help, and the Disaster Response Ministry is staffed and ready to support hundreds of volunteers. Project managers and volunteer coordinators are trained, experienced, and equipped to support them in service to disaster survivors.

The vast majority of this ministry's work is with survivors who live on the fringes of economic survival and thus are in greatest need of support.



Please take a moment and discern how God has positioned you to help. Then connect with us at www.okumc-dr.org/ contact.


— By Disaster Response Ministry staff

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Save the date

• Jan. 19

Orders Meeting for clergy

OKC-St. Luke's Church
Presenter: Tom Albin,
dean of the Upper Room Chapel,
Nashville, Tenn.

Topic: "Deep Spirituality
in the Wesleyan Tradition"

www.okumc.org/newsdetail/orders2016-3137868

• Jan. 30

VIM Team Leader Training

Mustang United Methodist Church
9 a.m.-4 p.m.

www.okumc.org/VIMTraining

• Feb. 1

OKC Thunder basketball

Chesapeake Arena, OKC
Purchase tickets from
UM Youth Ministry
to help Youth Service Fund
405-530-2199, www.okumc.org/youth

• Feb. 4-5

Lead II for clergy

Oklahoma City University
3 p.m. Thursday-3 p.m. Friday
Questions? diannerpeters@gmail.com
or www.okumc.org/lead

Passages

DILL – Olive Jane Dill, 80, who was the wife of Rev. Tolbert Dill, retired, died Dec. 24, 2015, in Henderson, Texas. Her service was Jan. 2 in Henderson.

She was born April 17, 1935, in Canadian County. She was a retired special education teacher.

Survivors also include a son, Michael Charles Dill, and a daughter, Diane Marie Dill.

STEWART – George Frank Stewart, 77, who was the husband of Pamela Jean (P.J.) Stewart, pastor of Sulphur UMC, died Dec. 22, 2015. His service was Dec. 26 at Sulphur UMC.

He was born Nov. 11, 1938, in Tulsa. He worked for Allied Bearing Supply Co in Tulsa.

Survivors also include sons Craig and Patrick Stewart and stepsons Danny and Chris Thompson.

- Dorothy Wood, 91, died Jan. 2, 2016. She was the stepmother of Revs. Michael Wood, pastor at Bethel (Lawton) UMC, and Roger Wood, retired.

- Stephanie Jane Whited, 80, of Bixby died Dec. 1, 2015. She was the mother of Rev. Tracy Hoskins, associate pastor at Grace Point UMC (Cleora/Ketchum).

- Norma Faye Patman, 92, of Ardmore died Nov. 25, 2015. She was the mother of Rev. Dan Patman, retired.

- Christina Marie Watson, 80, of Shawnee died Nov. 16, 2015. She was the mother of Rev. Mark Watson, pastor at Shawnee-Wesley UMC.



PHOTO BY PAUL JEFFREY, GENERAL BOARD OF GLOBAL MINISTRIES

A young refugee walks across the border into Austria near the Hungarian town of Hegyeshalom. Hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants, including many children, have flowed through Hungary on their way toward western Europe from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. (This photo appears in the GBGM slideshow "Journey of Hope: Refugees in Europe." Missionary Paul Jeffrey took the photo for ACT Alliance, which is supported by UMCOR.)

2015 Denomination news

Racism voted top story

BY VICKI BROWN
UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

The continuing struggle against racism in the United States — which occupied United Methodists in protests, prayer, and peacebuilding — was the biggest story in the denomination in 2015, according to a United Methodist News Service poll of UM communicators in the U.S., Africa, and Asia.

Ranked second in the poll was the denomination's response as hundreds of thousands of migrants continued to flee into western Europe, followed by the denominational debate over sexuality. The lingering Ebola epidemic in Africa was fourth, and the rise of licensed local pastors in The United Methodist Church rounded out the top five stories.

No. 1: The struggle against racism

In cities around the U.S. — including Baltimore, Cleveland, North Charleston, Staten Island, and Chicago — where young African-American men died at the hands of police, United Methodists called for justice and an end to racism.

"It is not enough for us to remain silent. We're dealing with principalities and powers, I believe," Bishop Warner Brown Jr. told the Council of Bishops in May in an emotional address. The council unanimously issued a pastoral letter

'Let's Do Something About It' in Oklahoma

On Feb. 27, the audience at a program about racism in Oklahoma will hear from Jabar Shumate, a community diversity leader for the University of Oklahoma, and two more presenters.

"Let's Do Something About It" will be 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at Oklahoma City University's School of Business building.

After a racist video involving OU students appeared on social media last year, the college took action that included hiring Shumate, a former state senator, as OU's vice president for the university community.

Also speaking at the event, in a setting similar to TED Talks, will be:

- Elaine Robinson, academic dean of Saint Paul School of Theology, with locations at both OCU and in greater Kansas City, Mo. Rev. Dr. Robinson is author of "Race and Theology."

- Carlos Ramirez, who is helping Oklahoma Conference groups develop greater intercultural awareness after securing a grant for this work from the denomination's Commission on Religion and Race (CORR). Rev. Ramirez is a missionary assigned to direct the Conference's Hispanic/Latino Ministries, within the Office of Mission.

Some of the grant funding underwrites the February program. Register by Feb. 20.

<https://okumc-reg.brtpapp.com/LetsDoSomethingAboutIt>

affirming that "all lives are sacred and that a world free of racism and xenophobia is not only conceivable, but worthy of our pursuit."

Cynthia Moore-Koikoi joined other clergy in a march for peace on April 27 as riots broke out across Baltimore after Freddie Gray died of a spinal cord injury suffered while in police custody.

"When we pray, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' we are committing ourselves to the work of community building," said Rev. Moore-Koikoi, a superintendent in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

United Methodists mourned the massacre at Mother Emanuel African

SEE PAGE 7

Racism:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Methodist Episcopal Church by a young man who told police he hoped to ignite a race war. South Carolina Bishop Jonathan Holston represented The United Methodist Church at the memorial service, where U.S. President Barack Obama eulogized Pastor Clementa Pinckney and eight church members.

No. 2: Migrants and terrorism

Methodist leaders in Europe called on their countries to welcome refugees.

“The right of individuals from all countries to ask for asylum is under threat,” said Bishop Rosemarie Wenner of Germany. “We as people of faith have to make use of the fact that the reality proves the failure of the current regulations to work not only for humanitarian aid but also for more just procedures for those who come to Europe.”

After Nov. 13 terrorist attacks in Paris killed 130 people and provoked a political backlash against refugees, including efforts by some U.S. governors to block resettlement of Syrian refugees in their states, United Methodists called for compassion.

Bishop Gary Mueller of the Arkansas Conference said of efforts to ban Syrian refugees that it “solves nothing to categorically exclude a group of people whose lives have been torn apart.”

In the Great Plains Conference (Kansas and Nebraska), at least 35 churches each agreed to sponsor at least one Syrian refugee family, while church efforts to resettle refugees in New Jersey continued.

Bishop Patrick Streiff, who oversees the small number of United Methodist congregations in France as the episcopal leader of central and southern Europe, pointed to his horror over “the depth of violence despising human lives” and to his conviction of the need to follow the model of Christ as peacemakers.

No. 3: Sexuality debate intensifies

The denomination’s debate over sexuality intensified in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex civil marriage in all 50 states.

While the ruling did not change Church law, which prohibits pastors from conducting and churches from hosting “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions,” it fueled the debate at annual conferences.

The Great Plains Conference voted to ask the 2016 General Conference to acknowledge there are “diverse beliefs regarding homosexuality,” as well as to eliminate restrictions on homosexual clergy and penalties for officiating at same-sex marriages. Pastor Rob Schmutz of Park City United Methodist Church, Kan., spoke against the petition and surrendered his ministerial credentials to Bishop Scott Jones after it passed.

Baltimore-Washington, Virginia, Northern Illinois, Greater New Jersey, and the Desert-Southwest Conferences voted to delete from the *Book of Discipline* language saying homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. These and other annual conference proposals could be considered by General Conference when it meets in Portland, Oregon, on May 10-20.

A complaint against retired Bishop Melvin Talbert for officiating at a same-sex union ended with a just resolution (*paragraph 363, Book of Discipline*). Other resolutions on same-sex marriages in 2015 included two clergy in Virginia who were suspended. Cases also were resolved in Tennessee and Iowa without trials.

But in Michigan, Michael Tupper refused to sign a just resolution, saying he would plead guilty at a church trial and would not contest any penalty determined by a jury of his clergy peers. He hopes that his case will spotlight what he sees as an unjust church law.

African bishops called on the denomination to hold the line on church teachings that affirm sexual relations only in monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

No. 4: Deadly disease lingers

First Guinea, then Liberia, were declared free of Ebola. Then, on Nov. 7, Sierra Leone was declared free of the deadly virus that had killed more than 11,300 people since it began. But Church and health officials cautioned that watchfulness is still needed. Guinea reported a new case in October, and Liberia had three new cases in November.

The effects of Ebola are lingering, too. With a disproportionate number of health care workers among the dead, there could be a



Children orphaned by Ebola play “patty cake” at a private orphanage founded by the Kambui Advocacy Group for Women and Children in Kenema, Sierra Leone. Many such orphans live on the streets or in hospital compounds. An estimated 12,000 children in western Africa were orphaned by Ebola. (This photo is from the UMNS slideshow “Ebola in Sierra Leone: Eyewitness One Year Later.”)

PHOTO BY UMNS

sharp rise in maternal and infant mortality.

Liberia began reinstating routine vaccinations of children, suspended during the outbreak for lack of resources. The United Methodist Church in Liberia launched a campaign to monitor Ebola orphans, who are at risk for human trafficking.

In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, Church officials worried about the disease re-emerging as well as how the Church helps in recovering from an outbreak that closed schools and devastated the economy.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief and its partners are now working to address the long-term effects of the epidemic by strengthening the healthcare capacity in west Africa.

No. 5: The rise of Local Pastors

Local Pastors — non-ordained and, in most cases, without a seminary degree — are growing in number and taking on more roles in The United Methodist Church.

United Methodist News Service examined the overall trend, including the rapid growth of part-time Local Pastors, the use of Local Pastors in Hispanic outreach, and the challenges faced by



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE, UMNS

Local Pastor Bradley Barton serves Macedonia UMC, near Parsons, W.Va., and also is a corrections officer. He often travels directly from his job at a regional jail to worship and so preaches while still in his lawman’s uniform.

Local Pastors in the central conferences.

The upward trend with Local Pastors comes as ordained elders are becoming rarer.

The denomination’s General Council on Finance and Administration reported that, from 2010 to 2015, the number of ordained elders and provisional member elders serving churches dropped from 15,806 to 14,614. Though the denomination’s membership was shrinking in the United States, the number of Local Pastors appointed to churches climbed from 6,193 to 7,569 in that time. Both full-time and part-time Local Pastor numbers grew, with the latter growing faster.

Seminary Lite invites laity to deeper study

Four upcoming courses of Seminary Lite will help laity go deeper in faith and service as disciples.

Seminary Lite is offered by Saint Paul School of Theology in collaboration with Oklahoma City University and St. Luke’s UMC.

Those who complete three courses earn the Certified Lay Servant certificate.

All classes are 6:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesdays at OKC-St. Luke’s.

Contact Rachel McClain, 405-208-5757, OCUevent@spst.edu.

And find registration info online at www.spst.edu/laity (Scroll to “Seminary Lite in Oklahoma”).

• **Jan. 20 and 27, “Introduction to Worship,” taught by Rod Newman.**

Description: This course provides an introduction to the theology and practice of worship, from what it is to why we do what we do. It will look at traditional and alternative patterns of public worship, special services throughout the Christian year, and creative ways to engage people across age groups. Suggested reading: “Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century,” by Ruth Duck.

• **Feb. 17 and 24, “Intro to Christian Theology,” with John Starkey.**

Description: Theology is “talking about God” or the study of the teachings of the Christian faith, asking such questions as: What is faith? Who is Jesus Christ? In our time together, we will discuss some of the basics of Christian theology and how we are able to know about and understand God. Suggested reading: “Theology: The Basics,” by Alister E. McGrath (any edition).

• **March 2 and 9, “Introduction to Church History,” by Rev. Newman.**

Description: This course will explore the key questions and concerns of the larger periods of church history — the Early Church, the Medieval Church, the Church of the Reformations, and Modern Church. Participants will connect their own experiences to the larger church’s story. Suggested reading: “Church History: An Essential Guide,” by Justo Gonzalez.

• **March 23 and 30, “Introduction to New Testament,” taught by Sharon Betsworth.**

Description: This seminar will explore the historical literary contexts of the New Testament, the Gospels, Paul, and the Book of Revelation. Bring a Bible to class! Suggested reading: “Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but not Literally,” by Marcus Borg.



Legacy Planning using the IRA Charitable Rollover

CONGRESS HAS EXTENDED THE IRA CHARITABLE ROLLOVER AND MADE IT PERMANENT!

If you are 70 ½ you can benefit from a gift from your IRA (up to \$100,000 per year). These gifts are not reportable as taxable income and qualify for your required minimum distribution (RMD). In addition, you can benefit from an IRA charitable rollover gift if...

- You wish to make a significant gift without using cash or other assets.
- You do not need all or a portion of your IRA income (RMD).
- You are paying too much in taxes and are looking to reduce your income.

- You do not itemize deductions. Because a rollover gift can reduce your income and taxes, you can still benefit from charitable giving even as a non-itemizer.

- You want to give over and above your normal giving. An IRA rollover gift does not count toward the 50% annual limitation on charitable gifts.

- You find that certain deductions are being phased out or certain itemized

deductions cause you to be subject to the federal alternative minimum tax (AMT).

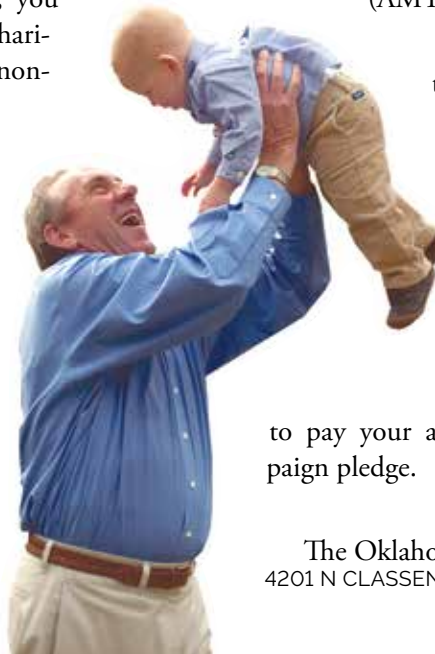
With the IRA charitable rollover, you can make a gift from your IRA account to support your favorite United Methodist ministries as follows:

- You can use your IRA charitable rollover to pay your annual or capital campaign pledge.

- You can establish an endowment and make annual gifts from your IRA.

- You can use your IRA charitable rollover to support the various institutions and agencies of the Oklahoma United Methodist Conference.

If you would like to learn more about the IRA Charitable Rollover and how it might work for you, please contact David Battles, CPA, at dbattles@okumf.org or 800-259-6863.



The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation
4201 N CLASSEN BOULEVARD, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73118-2400
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Skyline:

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Skyline's medical computer system was provided by the Health Alliance for the Uninsured, Holcomb said.

After an eye exam at Skyline, a patient who needs glasses will meet with an optician to pick out frames in a display room not unlike one at a conventional eye clinic. Nearby, a closet holds donated eyeglass cases, both new and used. Some are hand-sewn.

Wednesday is ordering day for the new prescriptions. Pickup is on another Wednesday.

Patients receive glasses with new frames and lenses; the clinic cannot reuse eyeglasses. "We cannot give someone someone else's prescription," Holcomb said.

Old frames will not be sturdy enough, she said. People who want to donate used glasses can give them to the Downtown Lions Club, which sends them overseas.

Patients are charged \$30 for single-vision glasses and \$55 for bifocals. Students from kindergarten to 12th grade can get free vision exams and glasses, Holcomb said. Adults who cannot afford to pay can get assistance from Skyline.

Skyline also looks for ways to reduce the cost of glasses and exams for college students, Holcomb said.

"All types of people use our services," she said.

Patients qualify for free exams every two years.



PHOTO BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Volunteer Lloyd Leveridge helps a caller schedule an eye exam at Skyline Urban Ministry.

Patients with diagnoses such as glaucoma or cataracts get referred to the Dean McGee Eye Institute.

Holcomb said there is always a need for more volunteers, including eye doctors. Another way to help patients of the clinic is to provide bus passes, since there is a constant need for transportation assistance, Holcomb said.

Employment

Program Director: Oklahoma Conference Camp & Retreat Ministries. Full-time. Job description available at www.okcamps.org under the "About Us/Jobs" tab. Send resume or inquiry to campjobs@okumc.org

Youth Director: Ada-First UMC. Full-time. Send resume to Donna Jamar, donna@fumcada.org

Administrative Assistant: OKC-Douglas Boulevard UMC. Part-time. Contact Crystal Hughes at pastor@dbumc.com

Two positions: **Music Director** and **Children's Ministry Director:** Clinton-First UMC. Both part-time. Call 580-323-3179 or email resume to ryoungberg@cableone.net

Two openings: **Nursery Worker** and **Nursery Director:** Owasso-First UMC. Both part-time. Email resume to ellenwehn@fumcowasso.org

Treasurer: OKC-Southern Hills UMC. Part-time. Email resume to Connie Gibson, conniejgibson@att.net

Children's Director: Tulsa-New Haven UMC. Part-time. Email resume to Cindy Havlik at cindy.havlik@newhavenumc.org

Three openings: Tulsa-Faith UMC. All part-time. **Children's Ministry Associate:** Email resume to Laura

Eldridge at leldridge@faithtulsa.org.

Children's Ministry Associate and Contemporary Music Assistant:

Email James at jlambert@faithtulsa.org.

Three positions: OKC-Nichols Hills UMC. **Director of Children's Ministry**, part-time. **Nursery Attendant**, Sundays and Wednesdays. **Childcare Teacher for The Learning Center**, 35 hours weekly. Contact Trevor Smith at 405-842-1486. Send resume to revtrevor@gmail.com or 1212 Bedford Drive, Nichols Hills, OK 73116.

Director of Children's Ministries: Norman-St. Stephen's UMC. Part-time. For information email revjeankc@aol.com

Chief Executive Officer: Mount Sequoyah. At least 10 years' leadership experience and proven fundraising ability required. Send resume to NPexecsearch@gmail.com. For more information, go to <http://mountsequoyah.org/>

To announce job openings, contact Chris Schutz in the Communications Dept., Cschutz@okumc.org, 405-530-2075. There is no cost.