



Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people, for there is born to you this day a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)

Photo by Holly McCray

In Oklahoma City as we deck the halls, the United Methodist Ministry Center staff members wish you a joyous Christmas. From left are: Lesa Rhoads, Rena Waddelow, Charlie Ludden, Rebekah Hasty, and Kristin Terrell-Wilkes.

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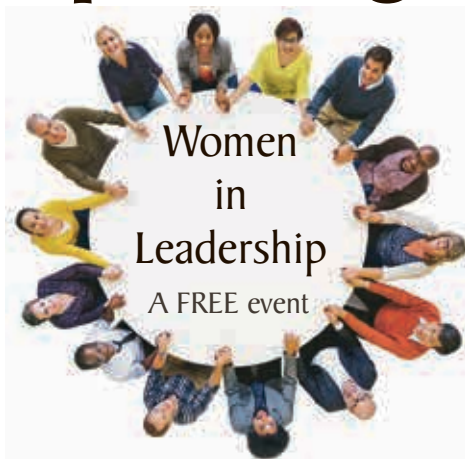
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Upcoming:



Roles of women to be discussed

A workshop titled "Women in Leadership: Taking Our Place, Working Together," is set for Jan. 12 at Tulsa-Faith UMC.

The event, from 7 to 9 p.m., is sponsored by the Conference's Commission on the Status & Role of Women (COSROW).

Presenter Audrey Krumbach, director of Gender Justice and Education for the General COSROW, will address:

- Upcoming opportunities for partici-

pation in Church life through General and Jurisdictional Conferences; and

- How lay and clergy women can work together to support one another, elect delegates, and set an agenda that supports gender equality.

The free event is open to all, but participants are asked to register with Pam Cottrill, 405-842-1486, revpcottrill@gmail.com.

Orders Meeting is Jan. 20

Joy Melton will teach from her new book, "Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World," on Jan. 20 at OKC-St. Luke's during the Orders Meeting for clergy.

The day will start with a Wesleyan Covenant Renewal Service. Bishop Robert Hayes will preach. Lunch will be provided by the Board of Ordained Ministry.

All clergy under appointment are expected to attend.

Mark the milestone moments

Preserving your church's records and history is the topic of a workshop set for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 24 at OKC-Wesley UMC.

Christina Wolf, who is archivist for both

Oklahoma and Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conferences and special collections librarian at Oklahoma City University, will discuss archiving, how to preserve records, and how to use records to celebrate church history.

Cost is \$10 per person, payable at the door with RSVP. To RSVP or for questions, contact Wolf, 405-208-5919, cwolf@okcu.edu.

'I Am Laity' classes set Feb. 7

A workshop titled "I Am Laity" is scheduled Feb. 7 at OKC-St. Luke's.

Sponsored by the Conference Board of Laity, the event will cover multiple topics: "Uncovering the Leader in You," "Being a Lay Delegate to Annual Conference," "Church Council Ministry and Administration," "Missional Area 1," "An Exploration Into God's Calling," and sessions on trustees, finance, how to find grants, and other resources for your church.

Bishop Robert Hayes will preach at 9:30 a.m. Two 1½-hour classes will follow, with lunch provided.

Registration is \$15 per person. Watch for more details on Facebook (Oklahoma United Methodist Laity) or Twitter, #okumcbol.

Employment

Director of Music Ministries/Worship Leader: OKC-First Church. Full-time. Email resume/questions, attention of Mark McAdow, SPRC@FirstChurchOKC.com.

Traditional Worship Leader: Tulsa-New Haven. Contact Cindy Havlik, 918-743-6491.

Contemporary Worship Leader: Tulsa-New Haven. Approximately 10-12 hours per week. Contact Cindy Havlik, 918-743-6491.

Youth Director: OKC-Crown Heights. Part-time. Contact Dianne Peters, Dianne@CrownHeightsUMC.org.

Church Secretary: Nowata-First. Part-time. Send resume to church, P.O. Box 129, Nowata, OK 74048, or call 918-273-1562.

Youth Director: Sapulpa-First. Part-time. Submit resume by email to jeanne@sapulpaumc.org or by fax at 918-227-0646.

Pianist: Tulsa-Aldersgate. Wednesday choir practice and Sunday worship. Contact Pastor Wayne Hayes at 918-627-4165 or email aumctu@sbcglobal.net.

(Submit job openings to Chris Schutz, Conference Communications Dept., CSchutz@okumc.org. There is no charge.)

Skyline director named outstanding OCU graduate

United Methodist clergywoman Claudia Lovelace recently was named a Distinguished Alumna by the Wimberly School of Religion at Oklahoma City University.

This honor was presented at OCU's annual Alumni Awards Dinner, held Nov. 7 in the student center, as part of Homecoming weekend festivities.

Since 2009, Rev. Lovelace has led Skyline Urban Ministry, which assists people in need in Oklahoma City. She is executive director.

Lovelace earned her bachelor's degree in religion from OCU in 2002 and the Master of Divinity at Perkins Theological Seminary in 2007. She was ordained as an elder in 2010.

A licensed practical nurse, she has been a counselor at an alcohol and drug treatment center.

Lovelace also was a 10-10-10 missionary assigned by the UM General Board of Global Ministries. She served in the prison ministries of both OKC-Penn Avenue and Ardmore Redemption United Methodist Churches. Her responsibilities were pastoral care of the inmate congregations, teaching relapse prevention/re-entry classes, and preaching.

Lovelace has been involved in prison ministry since 1996. She said the spiritual development and renewed relationship with Christ she received through Penn Avenue Redemption Church was the foundation for furthering her education and hearing the call to ministry.

Others describe her as one who confirms that "jailhouse religion is real" and "there are no throw-away people."

Lovelace says many people are "locked up" in their daily lives. Just as the incarcerated, marginalized, and homeless need to be empowered to live a different life, she says, all



UM clergyman Mark Davies, who is dean of OCU's Petree College of Arts and Sciences, congratulates Claudia Lovelace.

people need to be empowered to live fully for the Lord.

Sharon Betsworth, director of the Wimberly School of Religion, praised Lovelace. "The School of Religion is pleased to honor Rev. Claudia Lovelace. She truly embodies the servant leadership we seek to instill in our students at Oklahoma City University. While many of us talk about the poor, humbling ourselves, and serving the least of these, Claudia lives this out as an everyday reality."

Lovelace is a member of Phi Etta Sigma, Alpha Sigma Lambda, and Theta Alpha Kappa honor societies. She was elected to *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities & Colleges*.

She was one of seven alumni honored by the schools within the university system. Also recognized were:

- **Alice Azumi Iddi-Gubbels**, who established PAMBE Ghana in 2007. The nonprofit organization promotes bilingual education using a child-centered, experiential approach in northern Ghana.

- **Kristen Bailey** is a registered oncology nurse at Mercy Hospital, Oklahoma City.

- **Melanie Shelley** is associate dean and associate professor in OCU's Ann Lacy School of American Dance and Arts Management. Shelley also serves as costumer for the American Spirit Dance Company.

- **Auda Marie Thomas** is nationally certified in piano, theory, and music education. Thomas is in her 33rd year as organist and choir director at St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church in Harrah. She runs a piano studio and is dedicated to the promotion of arts in education.

- **Jennifer M. Grigsby** is co-founder of Amethyst Investments in Oklahoma City. She previously served as senior vice president of Corporate and Strategic Planning for Chesapeake Energy Corp.

- **Ruth Charnay** is the department director for communications and the arts at Oklahoma City Community College in the Arts and Humanities Division.

(See related story about Skyline on page 4.)





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

One knee up, one knee down

“They entered the house and saw the child in the arms of Mary, his mother. Overcome, they kneeled and worshipped him. Then they opened their luggage and presented gifts: gold, frankincense, myrrh.”
 (Matthew 2:11, *The Message*)

By BISHOP ROBERT HAYES Jr.

So many wonderful segments of the Christmas story have survived the centuries, but the one I like best is the narrative about the three wise men.

Scriptures do not go into great detail about who they were, but there are a few facts that help us fill in the blanks.

We know the wise men (also known as the magi) came from the East, most likely Persia or modern-day Iran. If from one of those, they traveled about 800 miles to see the Christ child.

No doubt they knew of the writings of the prophet Daniel, who had been the chief of the court seers in Persia. In the book of



Bishop Hayes

Daniel (9:24-27), there is a prophecy that gives the timeline for the birth of the Messiah.

In addition, the magi were probably aware of the prophecy of Balaam (Numbers 24:17), which specifically mentions a “star coming out of Jacob.” This stellar event, often called “His star,” guided them to Bethlehem. Some scholars say the wise men could have arrived days, months, or even years after Jesus’ birth; they can only estimate.

One thing we know: When they got there, they worshipped him.

Tradition says their names were Gaspar (sometimes spelled Caspar), Melchior, and Balthasar (also spelled Balthazar). We have no way of knowing whether these were their true names, but we do know their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were very costly.

For me, there is a singularly disturbing thing about the wise men as they worshipped. I wonder if it has ever crossed your mind.

In most Nativity scenes — where everyone including the magi gathers around the Christ child — Melchior is the only wise man with one knee on the ground and the other knee up!

I realize this scene is nothing more than an artist’s visual concept that has endured through centuries.

But that image raises questions that have so much to do with how we mark this Advent

season and worship Christ in our time.

I puzzle about this. Why was Melchior kneeling only halfway — one knee up, one knee down? Could it be that he was only making a gesture of courtesy, just being polite?

Was there a part of him that could not accept that a king could be found in the straw of a stable, surrounded by shepherds, sheep, and other animals?

Or did Melchior keep one knee up in case his presence exposed him to danger, thinking it might be necessary to run?

Could it be that he wasn’t really sure who this child was or what would become of this young life? Did this wise man not know the baby born in that manger would change the world and ultimately give up his life to save all humankind?

I question why Melchior did not bow on both knees and press his face to the earth in humble submission that, indeed, this was the one whose name shall be called “Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Maybe I seem overly concerned about this simple visualization that has long been recorded. Yet I believe it has more to do with us than you realize.

You see, Melchior’s knees are our knees. We bow — but not fully — before the epitome of love given to us in the form of a baby!

Some people are merely polite when this season makes its annual return. Some go through all the motions of celebrating the Christ child, but do not really hold him close in their hearts.

Each year, people find yet another way to take “Christ” out of Christmas!

People of faith declare this season is all about humbling oneself and remembering the birth of the world’s Savior. Do you? Perhaps you choose instead to give only part of yourself when worshipping the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

I believe many people are afraid they will “get too close” or give too much of themselves. They fear the influence of Christ will overcome their own purposes, and that causes them to be prepared to flee — just in case.

This is truth: You sing carols, decorate your trees and homes, and all the while nothing has changed within you!

Christian, if you wish to truly claim Christmas, you must worship on your knees! You must acknowledge God Himself came to earth in human form, humble and poor.

Unlike Melchior, can you bow all the way? Can you observe Christmas in deep honesty, courageously, instead of politely?

Can you offer your love to Christ as you kneel on both knees?

For Christ’s sake, I pray we all can!

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Photos by Chris Schutz

Above: Brandy Conrad, director of Skyline's Food Resource Center, examines canned food available to clients at the expanded site in Oklahoma City. Right: Dignitaries cut the ribbon Nov. 13 for the center. From left are Conrad; Claudia Lovelace, Skyline executive director; Oklahoma Bishop Robert Hayes Jr.; Jerry Thompson, son of Skyline founder Mac Thompson; and Rodney W. Bivens, executive director of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma.



YouTube video about the Food Resource Center at: www.youtube.com/user/OkumcCommunications

Hungry to Skyline cuts ribbon

By CHRIS SCHUTZ

The needs of a family without enough food or warm clothes become painfully obvious to staff of Skyline Urban Ministry, says Claudia Lovelace, executive director of the United Methodist-related agency in south Oklahoma City.

During one family's visit to Skyline, she saw a child tear hungrily into a slice of bread, relishing it as much as a piece of candy.

She reminds staff members to question any child who comes in on a cold day wearing only light clothes. "Ask him where his coat is."

On a trip to Skyline, a family might leave with a supply of groceries plus a coat for the child.

Rev. Lovelace and her staff are celebrating the recent ribbon-cutting of an expansive new Food Resource Center at Skyline's campus, 500 S.E. 15 St. Completion of this building project, a collaboration with the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, consolidates Skyline's programs under one roof.

The \$933,633 project was funded through a building campaign, a donation from the Oklahoma Conference, and a \$150,000 grant from the Regional Food Bank, said Brandy Conrad, director of the Food Resource Center.

The project added 6,931 square feet to the Skyline facility, bringing it to a total of 10,959 square feet, Conrad said.

Clients previously had to go to a separate site, at 701 N.W. Eighth, to get donated food. Skyline has sold that property, an old church, to St. Anthony Hospital.

The well-stocked Food Resource Center is arranged like a small grocery store, with boxes and cans of food neatly lined up on shelves. Rather than receive a pre-selected box of provisions, clients pick what they need and like to eat. This system is called a "choice pantry."

Clients also can choose from baskets of fresh produce such as jalapeno peppers, onions, and oranges. Frozen foods are displayed in glass-fronted freezer cases at one side of the store.

The arrangement is popular with clients, Lovelace said. "All women like to shop."

Kingswood: center prepares for first class

Enroll now for:

"Addiction prevention and recovery education"

Teacher:

Peter Messiah,
OCU professor and
Conference leader of Prevent/Recover
(formerly Addiction Ministries)

When and where:

Tuesday afternoons, beginning Jan. 13
OKC-Wesley Church, second floor

Contact:

jbasset@okumc.org, 405-530-2028

Institute fuses mission study and field work

By HOLLY McCRAY

Kingswood Institute officially launches Jan. 13 with its first class offering.

This new Oklahoma center for the study and practice of Christian mission is preparing to deliver education in five areas during 2015.

1. Addiction prevention and recovery education, taught by Peter Messiah
 2. Missional communities, by Tom Hoffmann
 3. Cultural diversity and ethnic ministry, by Carlos Ramirez
 4. Young adult mission and service, by Charlie Ludden and Sarah Nichols
 5. Global and community health, by Cherian Thomas
- As students sign up for that first class — addiction education — this institute moves from concept to reality.

Jeremy Basset described Kingswood as "an expression of the Office of Mission" with a larger scope of impact. He is Office of Mission director for the Oklahoma Conference.

"We're helping people understand the deep roots of mission," said Craig Stinson, Conference director of Connectional Ministries.

"This is mission with a capital M. We can imagine many fruitful possibilities."

According to the center's mission statement, "The Kingswood Institute offers training and hands-on experience ... in taking the Gospel from the church to the world."

The ministry of Methodism's founder, John Wesley, was transformed when he began preaching outdoors to Kingswood coal miners rather than inside England's churches. Thus, the institute's name.

Perhaps you believe God is calling you to ministry in South America. As a Volunteer In Mission, you travel there and engage with the people as you serve in Christ's name. Affirmed by that short-term experience, you pursue more transformative training at Kingswood.

Your own community provides another scenario.

Perhaps you have become aware that addiction is an is-

serve

for expanded food pantry

During a tour of the new space after the ribbon-cutting ceremony Nov. 13, guests noted quart-size plastic bags of dry beans and rice on the shelves. Those represented the work of young volunteers from OKC-Southern Hills United Methodist Church.

The children portioned out the food from 50-pound bags as part of a service project. The rice and bean packaging is one of the few ways children are allowed to volunteer their services, Lovelace said, due to age restrictions.

A Food Resource Center client must show a form of photo identification, along with some type of identification for each person in the household, before shopping. Clients may visit up to six times a year.

Skyline's Food Resource Center serves people from a wide area, but especially those who live nearby in a part of Oklahoma City that is considered a "food desert."

Conrad said a food desert is defined as an area without a grocery store within a 5-mile radius.

The Food Resource Center is open from 1 to 4:30 p.m. on Mondays and Fridays, from 10:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and from 1 to 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Volunteers to help with stocking food and shopping with clients

are always needed, Conrad said.

During a visit to Skyline, clients with referrals can get free clothes at 9 a.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Referrals can be made by a school counselor, church staff, or aid agency personnel on official letterhead of the referring agency.

On other weekdays, a shopper without a referral can select clothes at a price of 50 cents per item, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

"This is a clothes closet for the community," Lovelace said. "It's there to help the community."

Skyline's service extends beyond feeding the hungry. The ministry's key values are: dignity first, end stereotypes, and the Golden Rule, according to its website.

Among other services:

- An eye clinic staffed by optometrists who volunteer. Last year, 1,100 eye exams were performed. The clinic accepts donated frames; lenses cannot be reused, Conrad said.
- A selection of prom dresses for high school students.
- New coats for children, as well as hats and gloves.
- School supplies and uniforms are distributed.

The Prime Timers program offers fellowship and meals for senior citizens.



Circle of Care extends foster services into 4 more cities

A rapid response by generous supporters has doubled a \$69,000 challenge grant for Circle of Care (COC) to recruit and train foster parents in four more parts of Oklahoma.

The recruiters already are at work in Shawnee and Stillwater. Plans are being finalized in Ardmore and Weatherford.

The collective result will be at least 72 more foster homes serving approximately 144 Oklahoma children, within one year, according to Circle of Care leaders.

Funds to match the grant were raised less than three months after the challenge was issued. It was announced Sept. 19 in the *Contact*.

With approximately 12,000 children in the state's foster care system, the need for more foster families is crucial.

When a child is abused or neglected and assigned to state custody, the child is placed in a

foster home if one is available. If not, then children live in county shelters until space opens in foster homes or they are reunified with their families.

Circle of Care has developed a plan to increase the number of foster homes available for children in crisis situations and also make use of the agency's contract with the State of Oklahoma. ChildSHARE is the COC program that especially assists foster families, mainly in major metropolitan areas.

A benefactor urged Circle of Care to add recruiters in other parts of the state, where ChildSHARE does not operate, and pledged matching financial support to raise \$138,000 total. That amount will extend COC's vision to four more communities.

With funding secured, a new staff member will work within a 50-mile radius of each community.

The recruiter-trainers will

maintain offices in local United Methodist churches. Partnerships have been established with Stillwater-First, Ardmore-First, Weatherford-First, and Shawnee-St. Paul's.

Three of the specialists already are at work: Patricia Collar in Shawnee, Julie Miller in Stillwater, and Heather Doherty in Ardmore.

In recognition of his generous support, Circle of Care nominated Paul Milburn for a Social Service Award through OK CARE, an association of residential child/youth service agencies. He was named an award winner at OK CARE's November meeting.

If you live in or near one of these four expansion areas and want to learn more about being a foster parent, you are invited to call Child SHARE's toll-free number: 866-978-2956.

Recruiter motivated to find homes

'Their hearts are broken every day'

Patricia Collar thought only married people could be foster parents.

When she learned differently from a radio report, "I signed up immediately." Since 1999, she's cared for about 40 children.

Now she hopes you, too, will sign up to help the youngest Oklahomans who need loving foster home settings.

Collar is the Circle of Care's new foster parent recruiter-trainer in the Shawnee area.

She said recently, "There's no greater joy than to watch a broken child blossom."

Collar described a 2-year-old girl formerly in her care. Almost three months passed before the tot stopped hitting her and pulling her hair.

"She was just so unhappy," Collar said. "I thought: I don't know that I can do this." But she remained committed.

"One morning the little one woke up and smiled at me. From then on, she was like a different child; she was always smiling."

Collar's dream of motherhood began when she herself was a child. The opportunity to foster has blessed her in that role many times over. Patricia and Herbert Collar also have two adopted children.

She is glad Circle of Care is branching into more of the state. The United Methodist-related ministry provides great additional support for foster families, she said, help that is unavailable from the Department of Human Services.

Collar previously worked as a court liaison and a behavioral health specialist.

First steps in her Circle of Care job include connecting with Shawnee churches, not only United Methodist. She had

recruited and was training two foster families by late November. Training has been streamlined, and the goal is certification within 60 days.

"It was God's time. He knew when the doors would open," Collar said of her new role. "I have always felt moved by Him and wanting to do His work here on earth."

Foster parenting is a calling, she declared. "There's no question your heart will be broken. I realize it isn't about me; it's what's best for the children. Their hearts are broken every day."

Collar said she maintains "wonderful relationships" with several families whose children she has loved. "It's wonderful to know you planted a seed."

Want to know more about foster parenting? Contact her: Patricia.collar@circleofcare.org, 405-693-7795. — Holly McCray

in January

sue in your town and want your church to be part of a ministry to make a difference. You enroll in a Kingswood class to learn more and help your church shape a truly effective ministry.

"We don't want people to start programs; we want them to start ministries," Rev. Basset said.

"Ministry is expression and response to a need. Ministry is what you do until the need stops. A program is what you do until you get tired."

Kingswood has secured a location: the second floor of OKC-Wesley United Methodist Church, near Classen/Northwest 23rd intersection.

The largest class spaces are named the Aldersgate and Epworth Rooms. Equipment has been installed for live-stream learning.

Oklahoma City University and Saint Paul School of Theology at OCU have formalized partnerships with the institute, in addition to the collaboration with OKC-Wesley.

Directors have been elected, bylaws approved, and legal work completed for this separate, nonprofit entity. Kingswood, a 501(c)(3) organization, is funded by designated gifts and does not receive Apportionment support, Basset confirmed.

Some classes will offer academic credits, Continuing Education Units, or special certifications. Thus enrollment costs vary.

GCORR grant to help assess race awareness in church

A \$35,500 grant will fund a new effort to increase intercultural knowledge among Oklahoma United Methodists, thanks to the denomination's General Commission on Religion & Race (GCORR).

Goal for the *Oklahoma Intercultural Strategic Plan* is "to change the DNA of the Conference," said Carlos Ramirez.

That's a bold statement. But achieving that objective is crucial to a viable United Methodist witness, he said, amid the state's increasingly diverse population.

"We need to start to think multi-ethnic, multi-generation," he said. "I refuse to think God is done with us because we cannot relate to the poor and other ethnicities."

He envisions new churches emerging in places of great diversity, as well as leadership operating in a climate more conducive to ethnic minority participation.

"The pastor of the future is not bilingual, but intercultural," Rev. Ramirez said. "He or she can minister to all, whatever ethnicity or culture."

Ramirez is steering this new initiative, birthed from his research on Hispanic/Latino populations. Through the Conference Office



'The pastor of the future is not bilingual, but intercultural'

— Carlos Ramirez

of Mission, he coordinates ministries in that area, and he is deployed here as a General Board of Global Ministries missionary.

Describing the initiative, he uses examples from that perspective, but this effort will involve multiple ethnicities and cultures.

"What do you mean when you say Hispanic people?" Ramirez asked.

Studies report 67 percent of state Hispanic residents were born here.

"It's not only undocumented people."

Are the words *Hispanic* and *Latino* interchangeable? *Hispanic* generally refers to Spanish-speaking people, and *Latino* to those who speak Portuguese, Ramirez said.

"There are nuances" within the ethnic group generally called Hispanic, he noted, as in all groups. (Among Anglos, for in-

stance, *cowboy* and *biker* convey different identities.)

The *Oklahoma Intercultural Strategic Plan* has parallel components and has a partner in Saint Paul School of Theology.

- The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) will measure Oklahoma UM leaders' knowledge, and cultural walks will help them grow personally. In addition to Ramirez, other trained IDI administrators include Elaine Robinson, Semaj Vanzant, Roger Parker, and Wendi Neal.

The Cabinet has completed the IDI assessment. Major boards will be next.

- Outreach will include DNA testing and settings in which to discuss race and the diversity of The UMC. A website and online class will help people continue to grow their intercultural skills.

The General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) recently awarded almost \$1.3 million in grants to fund such initiatives by local churches, annual conferences, jurisdictions, seminaries, and central conferences, to increase intercultural competency or vital conversations about race, cultural diversity, and systemic equity, leading to action.

These awards mark the first time that dedicated GCORR Action Fund grants have gone to central conferences projects (those outside the U.S.). The application packet was developed in French, Spanish, and Korean, in addition to English.

Oklahoma Conference leader Joseph Harris of Oklahoma City, who is vice president of the GCORR Board of Directors and chairperson of the Action Fund committee, said 128 grant applications were received for the 2014-16 funding cycle. For fairness, he recused himself from the group reviewing the Oklahoma request.

"GCORR is proud to fund projects worldwide that will lead to greater intercultural competency throughout our denomination, as well as strengthen and grow relationships between local churches and the communities they are called to serve," Rev. Dr. Harris said.

"We received requests totaling more than \$6 million. Can you imagine the impact that these initiatives could have worldwide had we been able to fully fund all the requests?"

The GCORR Action Fund is supported through Apportionment giving to the denomination's World Service Fund.—*Holly McCray*

Weatherford 1st marks a golden anniversary

Multiple generations of Weatherford families are celebrating this year's 50th anniversary of the construction of Weatherford-First UMC's sanctuary.

Pastor Lynn Brack said that part of this year's celebration was a sermon in worship Nov. 23 by Kenneth Tobler of Tulsa, who was pastor of the church from 1974 to 1979. Tobler had presided at the dedication service in 1977 when the mortgage debt was retired.

The process of building had started with a meeting of the Methodist Men and their wives in 1959. The group unanimously recommended appointment of a building com-

mittee and establishment of a building fund.

In 1960, the church voted to buy 10 acres of land on North Seventh Street for the sanctuary. A floor plan was drawn up in 1962, and the church building committee approved a \$300,000 bond issue in 1963.

Groundbreaking was in April 1963, and the church sold its former site at Custer and Franklin Streets in March 1964.

The first service in the new sanctuary was a service of consecration on March 1, 1964. Nightly services celebrating the opening continued through March 6.

Cost of the sanctuary was \$385,636.40.



The most recent building project by Weatherford-First UMC was this new parsonage, completed in 2012.

The congregation is proud of its status as a "generational church," with families worshipping there across more than a century.

Dating back to the church's inception in 1898 is the family of Ed and Winnie Ola Berrong Sr. The baptism of Nyla Isabella Berrong represented the fifth generation of that family at Weatherford-First.

Several generations of the Everett and

Bernice Hamburger family have also attended First UMC.

Samantha Hamburger is a student at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford and an intern at the Wesley Foundation there. She represents her family's fourth generation at Weatherford-First. Arlen Hamburger has served as church treasurer for more than 50 years.

Pastor uses cellphone to help mother make graveyard connection

By CHIP HALE

MOBILE, Ala. (UMNS)—My sister and I accepted the responsibility for our aging father and mother in Mobile.

After my father's death, we sat down with our mother to have "the talk." She had recently fallen, hitting her head and breaking her pelvis. The incident frightened all of us.

We said something like, "Mother, after your fall, and as you get older, we think it is time for you to move into a retirement community in Birmingham, near your daughter." The negotiations got difficult.

I told Mother I would do whatever she asked, if she would make the move. She finally acquiesced.

Just before her move, Mother asked me to take her to Dad's grave. And at the graveyard she asked me to kneel beside her

as she said her goodbyes and prayed. Just after her "amen," Mother asked if I would promise to call her from Dad's graveside on my cellphone, every week or so, in her exile city of Birmingham, so she could talk to him.

Riddled with guilt and wanting to make her happy, I agreed. That moment began a strange comedy of attempting to live out my faith in a very unusual way.

As clergy, I continue to officiate at funerals at that graveyard. After my final condolences on many of these occasions, I began to make a hasty detour by my father's grave to make the phone call to Mother so that she could talk to him.

Each time, I was carefully instructed to hold the phone over the grave, and not to eavesdrop as she talked to Dad.

In spite of my promise to her, it became

impossible not to eavesdrop.

She often included hilarious stories from her life at the retirement village. Sometimes I had to stifle a laugh; sometimes I had to choke back tears. The conversations were poignant and beautiful.

She told him about my sister and her family, and she included stories about my life with my wife and children. In essence, she kept my father informed about everything that occurred to her.

Bless her heart, she was especially long-winded when the weather was below 30 degrees or above 90. For six years, this favor to my mother was what I deemed "Conversations with the Dead."

Mother became increasingly frail.

A week before she died, I was doing a funeral at the graveyard. Before I left, I

called. "Mother, would you like to talk to Dad?" I had tears in my eyes, suspecting this would be their last conversation in this way.

I knelt over my father's grave and held the cellphone down to where I supposed his head would be. Then I turned on the speaker phone so I could hear her words.

She said, "Charles, I think I am at the end of my life." There was a long pause.

She continued, "Charles, if you are in heaven, tell Jesus to come get me."

She paused again, and then, with trepidation, added, "If you are not in heaven, don't mention my name to anyone." In my preacher's suit, I fell to the ground laughing.

God gave us the great privilege of expressing our faith by loving best our families. How precious those memories are to me now.

(Hale pastors at Ashland Place UMC, Mobile.)



Cash plan for surgeries could save big

By **HOLLY McCRAY**

The Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits expects to save big money after recently green-lighting a 2015 program that will pay costs in cash for a range of non-emergency medical procedures.

In summary:

- Zero out-of-pocket costs for patients
- Advance agreement on total cash price for various procedures — from a diagnostic service such as a CT scan or breast biopsy, to hernia repair, tonsillectomy, rotator cuff repair, coronary bypass, and more

- Prices reportedly as much as 80 percent lower than charges by regular providers

- Prompt cash payment from the Conference to the medical providers

- Lower expenses for the Conference self-funded health insurance plan

The Kempton Group Premier Providers program earned approval by the Conference board on Nov. 11.

The unusual program begins Jan. 1 and is for people enrolled in the Oklahoma Conference Health Benefits Standard PPO Plan.

Thus it mainly applies to active clergy and lay employees and their dependents. (Retirees are insured by Medicare and its supplemental plans.)

Premier Providers is an optional program. It does not replace existing Blue Cross Blue Shield coverage for participants. It offers a choice.

A case study

To grasp how it works, consider the case of “Mr. John Wesley.”

His regular doctor determined Wesley needed knee joint replacement.

Wesley called Premier Providers to learn if that procedure qualified for coverage. The answer: yes.

Premier Providers helped Wesley make

arrangements to undergo the surgery in a physician-owned facility.

Wesley woke up after the successful procedure knowing that it was fully paid for by the Conference. His deductible, co-pays, and coinsurance were waived — and the Conference saved by paying up-front in cash.

Ultimately, the patient and the Conference were good stewards of the financial contributions from people in the pews to the Church in Oklahoma.

That’s the big-picture view of Benefits Officer Stephen Mitchell.

Know costs in advance

Transparency in pricing is uncommon in the U.S. healthcare market. But The Kempton Group Premier Providers place high value on that.

The Kempton Group is the third-party administrator for the Conference Health Benefits



THE KEMPTON GROUP
PREMIER PROVIDER™

Plan. Premier Providers, composed of a growing number of physician-owned facilities, is under that umbrella.

“We reduced claims costs by nearly \$5 million in less than three years for non-emergency procedures while simultaneously reducing patient out-of-pocket expenses,” stated Jay Kempton, president/CEO of The Kempton Group, in a company publication.

“The proof that free-market, transparent healthcare works is proven by looking at the dollars saved.”

Mitchell said doctors at an Oklahoma City surgical center get the credit for initiating this approach, which is spreading nationally.

About five years ago, the two doctors began posting their guaranteed prices online, according to a KFOR news story.

The national Free Market Medical Association met in Oklahoma City this fall.

Where are Premier Providers

Oklahoma facilities currently in the Premier Providers program are located mainly in the three largest metropolitan areas. Some of them are: Oklahoma Surgical Hospital (Tulsa); Oklahoma Heart Hospital and McBride Orthopedic Hospital (Oklahoma City); and Lawton Imaging (Lawton); but also Cancer Specialists of Oklahoma (multiple locations).

Yet Conference Health Benefits Plan participants live throughout the state.

Mitchell said Premier Providers will serve a concierge role also, helping arrange for people to access care at the designated centers.

The money saved is that substantial, he explained, for both the participants and the Conference.

“It’s in your hands to decide where to go,” Mitchell stressed. “It’s voluntary. You don’t have to use it.”

But he hopes participants will watch for and read program materials sent by mail from the Conference Benefits Office. Seek more information at www.KemptonPremierProviders.com. An online video offers testimonials. You also can call toll-free, 866-898-7219, for information.

The Kempton Group reports costs can vary up to 400 percent among healthcare providers.

In 2015, the Conference Apportionment is \$1,273,000 for the Active Clergy Health Fund. That does not include the monthly premiums paid by participants. And the combined out-of-pocket maximum for an individual in the Conference’s Standard PPO Plan is \$4,650 in-network.

“We need to care, need to know what we’re spending our money on,” Mitchell said. “We’re connected here. It’s a benefit for you, but it’s really going to benefit the Conference — and the Conference is you because we’re self-funded.”

Retired clergy signing up for supplemental insurance plans

Enrollment has passed the halfway mark as the Conference’s retired clergy transition by year’s end to individual supplemental health insurance plans.

On Nov. 9, One Exchange reported 56 percent of retirees had completed the sign-up process.

That’s 271 of 483 participants. Another 147 people had been contacted by One Ex-

change but not yet enrolled. Work was under way to reach 65 others.

In May, Annual Conference delegates voted resounding approval for this change.

Each retiree chooses a supplemental plan that best fits him/her. The Conference Benefits Office puts funds in a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) for that retiree, who may use the money to pay the monthly premiums

for the supplemental insurance or for other healthcare needs.

One Exchange assists each retiree by phone in selecting and signing up.

The November update by One Exchange showed 1,160 calls, with an average time of 34 minutes, 5 seconds.

Medicare is the primary insurance plan for all people age 65 and older.

Briefly

UMMen contest open

Churches with chartered units of United Methodist Men may enter a competition to honor significant ministries to men and youth.

The General Commission on UMMen will recognize 30 local churches. The top three will be spotlighted at a March meeting of conference UMMen presidents.

Entry deadline is March 1. Send descriptions of the ministries to rpeck@gcumm.org.

Note award deadlines

Among upcoming dates to submit names and apply for several Conference yearly awards is the Jan. 15 deadline for the Harry Denman Evangelism Award.

Details about this and other honors: www.okumc.org/awards.

OCU earns recognition

The U.S. Department of Education recently named Oklahoma City University to its 2014 President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll.

All OCU undergraduates must take at least one service-learning course in order to graduate. The program’s value already tops \$2 million worth of community volunteer hours.

Passages

FLETCHER – Rev. Juanita Bailey Fletcher, 71, of Duncan died Nov. 24, 2014. She was the wife of Rev. Daniel Fletcher, retired.

Juanita was born Feb. 28, 1943, in McAlester. While on mission in New Jersey in 1968, Juanita and Dan met; they married in 1969.

As a Local Pastor, she served at Kiowa, Pittsburg, Savanna, Boswell, Soper, and OKC-Wickline between 1996 and 2005.

Among survivors are her husband and children John and Elizabeth. Service was Dec. 2 at OKC-Epworth UMC.

LYONS – Bobbie Jean Lyons, 79, of Edmond died Nov. 25, 2014. She was the wife of Rev. Jack Eugene Lyons, retired.

Bobbie Jean was born Sept. 10, 1935, in Saucier, Miss. She married Jack on May 26, 1951. She was a member of Edmond-First UMC.

Among survivors are her husband, sons Tom and Mike, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Service is pending through Hahn-Cook/Street & Draper Funeral Directors, Oklahoma City. Memorial gifts to: Edmond-First.

• Colleen Tully, 85, of Shawnee died Nov. 18. She was the mother of Rev. Kevin Tully, pastor at Bartlesville-First.



Photo by Haley Pitts

IMAGINE WHAT'S NEXT — More than 680 UM young adults, including 25 from Oklahoma, attended a recent discernment event in Denver, Colo. They learned about fields for ministry such as mission/justice, music/arts/world, and experimental church. The Wesley Foundation praise band from the University of Oklahoma led worship one evening. From left are OU students Taylor Smith, Bridget Taylor, Brett Carson, Carter David, Ryan Kiel, Stephen Bumgarner, and Sydney Arrendell. This group performs weekly at the OU campus ministry's "2.42" worship service. At NEXT in Denver, Bridget Taylor said, "I'm fairly new to the church. We talked a lot about individual, personal struggles. Being surrounded by people who aren't judging you to discuss what's going on in your life was an amazing feeling." A Florida college student shared how it took only one campus minister to listen and to appreciate her to bring her back to the church. Social media was used extensively in the event; the Livecube app's total reach was 678,250. NEXT was sponsored by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

Glean advice for going digital

The November-December issue of *Interpreter* magazine is dedicated to how and why congregations are using digital technology to reach members and serve people outside church.

Among the stories: smartphones and youth ministry, technology ownership | information access, technology + education + mission, and ideas for ministries via cellphone.

You can read *Interpreter* in print or online, and even download it in PDF format for offline reading. Free subscriptions are offered. Learn more at www.umcom.org/news/please-subscribe-to-interpreter-today.

Interpreter is produced by United Methodist Communications, the denomination's media agency.

Urgent: update your church officer list

Deadline is Dec. 15 for each church to add or update all officer names and their contact information in the Oklahoma Conference database.

It's crucial to check and update these details. Email addresses especially can change frequently. Accurate information is vital to the United Methodist connection at all levels.

One example: distributing the *Contact* newspaper. Whether delivered in print to a U.S. postal address or as the *Contact Digest* to an email address, help us be sure the news reaches you. There is no charge.

Go to: <http://www.okumc.org/LocalChurchOfficerUpdateInformation>.

In The DVD Library

"The God We Can Know: Exploring the 'I am' sayings of Jesus" is the title of a new DVD that has been added to the United Methodist Ministry Center's collection.

The video, which was filmed in the Holy Land, is based on Rob Fuquay's book of the same name. The seven-week study released by Upper Room Books follows Fuquay on his journey from the Judean wilderness to the Galilean hills and into the heart of Jerusalem.

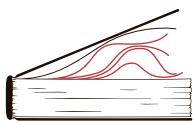
For information on borrowing resources, free of charge, from The DVD Library at the ministry center, 1501 N.W. 24th St., Oklahoma City, email Chris Schutz at cschutz@okumc.org or call 405-530-2075.

We welcome your recommendations on resources to include in this library. To make a suggestion, go to http://www.okumc.org/dvd_library.

Your **TRIPLED** gift will change lives!

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Thanks to the generosity of two of our Foundation trustees, your donation will be **TRIPLED!** We have until December 31, 2014, to reach our \$3 million goal. Please complete the attached form today and mail it with your check to: **The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation, 4201 N. Classen Blvd, Oklahoma City, OK 73118.**



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