

Apportionment percentage holds steady

The percentage of Apportionment money provided in 2015 by Oklahoma's churches very nearly matched that of 2014.

For 2015, Apportionment support was 92.59 percent for the shared ministries within and beyond this annual conference.

The 2014 percentage was 92.66.

Treasurer Brian Bakeman expressed gratitude and surprise. "Our economy in Oklahoma is challenged. The final results were much better than I expected," he said.

"I feel good that the percentages stayed up there."

He made clear, however, the "insignificant" percentage drop doesn't translate as equal in actual dollars.

Fewer Apportionment dollars were sought in 2015, totaling \$15,374,713, compared to \$16,663,047 for 2014.

Tom Junk of Tulsa said he appreciates

the reduced budgeting for connectional ministries. "The people can see that it's not a runaway train," said Junk, who chairs the Council on Finance & Administration.

Bakeman wrote in his February *Treasury Notes*, "I need to say thank you to all the
SEE APPORTIONMENTS, PAGE 8

OKC will host jurisdiction's UMWomen

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

Hundreds of women from eight states are expected to converge on downtown Oklahoma City April 15-17 for the Quadrennial Meeting of United Methodist Women of the South Central Jurisdiction.

Theme of the conference is "A Fresh Wind Blowing." The logo features a pinwheel with a windmill at the center, a cross representation, and an abstract figure of a dove. The theme is drawn from John 3:8: "The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

Oklahoma previously hosted the Quadrennial Meeting in 2000, in Tulsa, Hull said. The South Central Jurisdiction includes Oklahoma, Texas, Missouri, New Mexico, Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, and Nebraska.

Registration for the meeting continues through March 15 for the reduced price of \$200; after that, registration is \$225. All registrations must be made online, said Cindy Hull of Waynoka, UMW president for the Oklahoma Conference.

United Methodist Women of the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference have been helping with the planning of the Quadrennial Meeting.

They include Beverly Parker of Okemah, that conference's UMW

SEE UMWOMEN, PAGE 8



TUG-OF-WAR — Disaster response volunteers put their muscle into making Canyon Camp safe for its guests after two ice storms. They are part of a 22-member Missouri United Methodist team, and the January project wasn't their first one in Oklahoma. See story, page 5. Help also still is needed to repair homes damaged in the state's central region. Learn how you can become involved at www.okumc-dr.org.

PHOTO BY ANDREW HIMES

Bishop names 3 to key leadership

Three key Conference appointments have been announced recently by Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr., episcopal leader of the Oklahoma Conference. They will become effective June 1.

• **Chris Tiger** is being named to the new full-time position of director of New Faith Communities.

Rev. Tiger currently serves as Wichitas District superintendent, based in Lawton. Prior to that, he was senior pastor of Owasso-First United Methodist Church, 1998-2013, leading that congregation to phenomenal growth, the bishop stated.

"Chris has served our Conference with distinction and integrity for many, many years," said Hayes. Tiger was ordained in 1985.

The new director will work with new-church planters, districts' missional strategy teams and superintendents, the Conference's New Faith Communities



Gibson

Nordean

Tiger

Ministry Team, and as part of the Annual Conference Council staff.

• **Connie Gibson** is being appointed as the new superintendent of the Wichitas District, replacing Tiger.

Since 2009 she has been an exemplary pastor at OKC-Southern Hills UMC, said Hayes.

He said about her ministry, "She is one of the most active and visible pastors we have in our Conference. Her work with the Council on Finance & Administration, as co-chair of the worship committee for Annual Conference, a mentor with the

Board of Ordained Ministry, and several other key positions make her uniquely qualified to do the work of a district superintendent."

Rev. Gibson was ordained in 2008.

• **Chuck Nordean** will become the full-time director of Clergy Development.

He currently serves as the director of both Clergy and Congregational Development.

He will work closely with the Board of Ordained Ministry. He will take the lead in recruiting and nurturing faithful, effective spiritual leaders for Oklahoma and in clergy covenant accountability.

Rev. Nordean was Clinton District superintendent, 2005-'13. He led Edmond-First UMC for eight years prior to that. He was ordained in 1977.

Both Nordean and Tiger will become part of the extended Cabinet and be supervised by the director of Connectional Ministries, Craig Stinson.



MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT — In Tulsa, Nueva Esperanza UMC reports significant gains in 2015 as a multicultural church. Programming offers opportunities for families to share their ethnic heritage. Clockwise from left: two girls model Mexican clothing, the Won family sings South Korea's national anthem, and Preetedave performs the national anthem of India. Pastor Daniel Llanos Jimenez said the congregation now includes people with roots in nine Latin American nations — El Salvador, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and Cuba — as well as South Korea and India.



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OCU students serve in Belize

Students from Oklahoma City University constructed part of a high school in Belize during the winter break.

Charles Neff, vice president for University-Church Relations, led a group of 11 students and three family members to Belmopan, Belize, on Jan. 2-9.

"Our primary mission was to help construct the second floor of the Belmopan Methodist High School," said Rev. Dr. Neff. The team mixed and hauled concrete by hand, sifted sand, bent and tied rebar to make support columns, and assisted with other jobs as needed.

The team also purchased 100 pounds each of rice, beans, and flour and repackaged them in 2-pound bags for distribution to

the villages surrounding Belmopan.

The OCU team also visited Marla's House of Hope, a girls' home, where the Oklahomans helped the girls with homework, played volleyball, and exchanged stories about life in their respective countries.

In addition to the mission projects, the team also attended worship services at the Belmopan Methodist Church, visited the Mayan ruins at Xunantunich.

They attended classes at the Methodist High School, toured the Belize Zoo, visited Belize City, and finished the week with a jungle zip line and cave tubing adventure.

Due to a generous \$5,000 grant from the United Methodist



OCU students and friends pause a moment from working at a high school.

Woodworth Estate, the trip cost was minimal for students.

This is the second year that Neff has led a trip to Belize over the winter break, and there is hope that it will become an annual event.

Student participants included Rachel Bachhofer, Brade Bradshaw, Brooke Crutchfield,

Lauren Huntley, Katey McMahan, Nathan Moelling, Kourtney Pierce, James Stryhal, Abby Treadway, Hope Wiggs, and Kelsey Ricks. Ranging from freshmen to graduate students, they vary in their fields of study. Family members who attended were Dana and Julie McMahan and John Neff.

Fun, fellowship, worship at 2016 OIMC Day

Over 200 people gathered at OCU on Feb. 6 to celebrate the annual Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) Youth and Family Day sponsored by University-Church Relations.

Members of the OIMC church in Dallas traveled the farthest to attend, and Springfield UMC in Okemah brought the most people, with 33 participants.

The morning was filled with campus tours and a panel of Native American students shared their experiences of college life. After lunch, the Freede Center was home to free-throw contests and spirited 3-on-3 basketball games. The day concluded with worship in the Bishop W. Angie Smith Chapel, led by the youths and featuring tribal hymns.

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

Lord, teach us to pray

“Don’t fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God’s wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It’s wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.” — *Philippians 4:6-8 (The Message)*

BY BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

When the Council of Bishops met at Lake Junaluska, N.C., in November, the group suggested every annual and central conference of The United Methodist Church engage in specific prayer for the upcoming General Conference, which will be in Portland, Ore., on May 10-20.



Bishop Hayes

And so, beginning Jan. 1, the conferences around the world have each been adopting one day to pray in the 131-day countdown.

The prayer vigil date for the Oklahoma Conference is scheduled for Wednesday, March 2, and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) will pray on Thursday, March 3.

In essence, for 48 hours our two conferences will be the center of prayer for more than 11 million Methodists, in

such diverse places as Zimbabwe, the Philippines, Georgia, Alaska, Sierra Leone, Russia, Hungary, Liberia, and more.

The sense of being *connected* to such a movement of the Spirit is truly humbling.

For those of you unfamiliar with the General Conference: It is the only entity that sets the policies that govern our denomination, and those rules then are published in the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*. The General Conference meets once every four years.

As you might imagine, when nearly 1,000 elected delegates from around the world gather to determine the systems and procedures that shape how we live together as the people called United Methodists, there are disagreements and, at times, heated debate.

Already people are extremely anxious about those 10 days in Portland, wondering what the outcome will be.

There is great need for prayer.

And so today I choose to give my attention to how we pray, rather than focus on issues that seem to be prominent.

Prayer has been described in many ways. It opens the channels by which God’s restoring grace flows to us. It is humankind waiting to receive as God stands waiting to give, and it also is humankind waiting to give as God stands ready to receive.

For me, prayer brings contact and cooperation with God, who wills our wholeness.

One writer said, “Prayer is the practice of the presence of God.”

We are sometimes like the early disciples. We misunderstand three vital ingredients of prayer:

- 1) what it is to pray;
- 2) what to pray for; and
- 3) what we should say.

When the disciples heard Jesus praying, no doubt it sounded as though two friends were talking. Wouldn’t you want to know how to do that?

Often we heap up demands and requests to God, looking for immediate answers. We spend less time praying and more time worrying about things over which we have little or no control.

Eugene Peterson’s translation of Philippians 4:6 provides good advice for all of us. Let our petitions and praises shape our many worries into prayers.

To help make the General Conference prayer vigil a meaningful and significant event in our annual conference, I’ve enlisted the services of Ginger Howl, a retired deacon in Oklahoma, who has God-given

Liturgy, page 7

talent for putting into words what our hearts feel. This liturgy can be used that Wednesday in small study groups and choir rehearsals. Use it individually, as a devotion to greet the morning or as evening prayer and praise before going to bed.

Will you truly let go of what causes you anxiety or fear by giving it over to God through prayer? Or will you continue to carry it yourself, waiting to hear what you want God to say?

J. Arthur Rank, a wealthy English industrialist of the 1930s, had an unusual way of dealing with worry. He invented what he called his “Wednesday Worry Box.”

Throughout a week, Rank put all of his doubts and troubles into that box. On Wednesdays, when he opened his box and reviewed its contents, he found the majority of them had been solved by God.

As the Oklahoma Conference’s designated day approaches for the prayer vigil, I’ve made up my mind that I won’t allow General Conference issues to take away the sense of wholeness, the peace that comes over me because of my praying. I will not give in to apprehension or fear about the meeting or potential outcomes.

Instead, this prayer vigil renews my reasons to talk with God far beyond March 2, incorporating into my prayer life any of my worries and praising God for restoring me every day.

Let’s all be in prayer together, giving praise for the wonderful things that happen when Christ displaces worry at the center of our lives.

Saint Paul seminary president steps down

Citing medical concerns, Saint Paul School of Theology President Sharon Howell will step down from her leadership post, effective March 1.

Although passionate about the United Methodist seminary’s mission and future, Rev. Howell said she made her decision at the urging of her physician.



Howell

“This is a tough moment for me. There is no other institution that could have called me out of retirement,” she said. “I step back into retirement knowing that Saint Paul is positioned for future growth.”

She was named president in 2014. The seminary has two campuses, at Oklahoma City University and at Church of the Resurrection in greater Kansas City, Mo.

In her February president’s e-newsletter, Howell noted the seminary is in its eighth year at OCU and its second year since gaining full accreditation to offer all classes there. One-third of total enrollment

is at the OCU location.

Saint Paul at OCU also is the new home for the denomination’s deaconess and home missionary core studies program, affiliated with United Methodist Women.


Howell praised the “amazing collaboration” the seminary has with OCU, the Oklahoma Conference, and the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference. The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation provides significant scholarship support, which includes the first funding for a Saint Paul-Oklahoma Fellow.

She wrote, “Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr. has been and is a strong advocate for Saint Paul. The bishop and district superintendents have worked to provide student appointments and other ministry opportunities. It has been delightful to be on the OCU campus, working with President (Robert) Henry and his fine staff and faculty.

“I anticipate the collaboration will continue to grow and expand. I’ll watch with you from a distance,” Howell concluded, “but I’ll treasure these new friends forever.”

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Edmond First completes big building expansion

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

In each of three worship services Jan. 31, the people of Edmond's First United Methodist Church happily spent time consecrating their new building. They sat together for a First family meal, and then they toured every floor of their church.

Much has changed since ground was broken in 2012 beside the sanctuary building at the corner of Hurd and Jackson Streets — and not only the physical structure.

First UMC welcomed 68 new members last year. A total of 23 students, and 21 of their parents, are taking Confirmation classes. An alternative worship experience launched in December, and 112 people attended it on Jan. 31.

Total attendance that grand morning neared 700.

Senior Pastor Sam Powers declared, "We've dealt with a lot in getting this building done. God continues to work through our church!"

"Rejoice that God so moved the hearts of people that this house has been built for praise and prayer," Crossroads District Superintendent Rockford Johnson read from the liturgy.

Andrew Schaeffer, the director of music ministries, later said he saw God that day "in the choir members' smiles." Organ and choral music are regarded highly



PHOTOS BY HOLLY MCCRAY

The newest portion of Edmond-First, with a covered portico, extends right in this scene as people exit worship to tour.

in the life of First UMC, established in 1889.

Edmond's young families "yearn in the midst of new building for a church that really treasures time-honored expressions of worship," Schaeffer said. "People want authenticity. There's something so special about older churches."

The sanctuary building is almost 90 years old, yet the exterior of the new construc-

tion matches well, said a pleased JoAnn Logan, who chaired the New Building Committee.

Flooding interrupted the work three times, but First UMC prevailed and the basement now is sealed, she said.

At 13,000 square feet, the new building has a spacious, ground-level foyer with covered portico; multipurpose Wesley Hall, which seats up to 200; and nine more classrooms.

Digital technology has been installed throughout the church, and worship is streamed live on the Internet. First Church also now has four elevators and a lift.

Among renovations, the nursery was relocated very near the sanctuary. Logan said surveys show that is a top-10 requirement for young families.

The project cost about \$3.8 million, according to church officials.



From left, United Methodist Men Dennis Murray and Joe Emperly tell Senior Pastor Sam Powers their group served barbecue to about 700 people .

Churches shifting gear to grow in 2 districts

The two superintendents sensed the enthusiasm as they welcomed about 100 people, undeterred by snow, to discuss revitalizing their churches.

SHIFTS networking got off to a great start for 19 churches in Crossroads and Heartland Districts in January.

Over 13 months, a team from each church is defining and implementing changes in four areas specified by Shifts. They seek to move:

- from fellowship to hospitality;
- from worship as an event to worship as a lifestyle;
- from membership to discipleship; and
- from serving self to engaging with all.

Phil Maynard wrote "Shift: Helping Congregations Back Into the Game of Effective Ministry" and developed resources.

"We can't keep doing things the same way. We've got to help churches reconnect, most importantly, to the gospel of Christ," said Superintendent Greg Tener of Heartland.

Statistics that show ongoing declines in that district alarm him. The role of a superintendent includes that of key missional strategist. He longs "to help churches gain momentum, new energy, new vision."

Superintendent Rockford Johnson of Crossroads said, "We can't start enough new churches to advance the Kingdom; we have to revitalize churches."

Joining to dream, plan

So the two leaders convened clergy from both districts for conversation on that goal. The districts share a border that runs right through the middle of Oklahoma City.

A strategy to use Shifts

emerged from that gathering of pastors.

Then the superintendents identified churches at a five-year plateau in worship attendance and invited those with 100-199 in worship or with 200-plus to take part in "Companions of Life Cycle Renovation."

19 churches take part

Among the 19 congregations that accepted the invitation are Chickasha, Jones, Guthrie-First, Choctaw, Moore-First, and OKC-Chapel Hill.

All the teams will attend five seminars led by two Shifts-certified coaches, from Louisiana, at Oklahoma City University. Between sessions, subgroups of teams meet online. Throughout, they learn from the coaches and one another, sharing stories of challenges and triumphs, glean- ing ideas and resources, adapting rather than reinventing wheels

in some cases. Each team has homework — engaging action in that church.

Each team must include the pastor and at least four lay people. Cost per church was \$1,800; the district paid \$800 of that. A \$200 district incentive is available to each church at the conclusion.

"We have a process, but each church is going to discern their own path," Rev. Tener said.

Shifts coaches guide teams to evaluate church life, think creatively, and move in new directions fitting for each congregation.

Rev. Johnson said, "They're not told what to do, but they're coached to use best practices. You have to define how you're going to make those shifts (such as) from 'serve us' to 'service.'"

Accountability is key

"How do you implement?" he asked and answered by describ-

ing a strength of Shifts: the coach holds the team accountable for implementation. Some church-growth tools offer only diagnosis, Johnson said.

The initial large-group meeting of teams, in January, included encouraging testimonies, the superintendents agreed. Several people posted photos from the day on social media.

Tener said, "The whole day was a movement of God's spirit. It was good to say to each other that we are having this conversation about our congregations not just for survival but for us to say we want to make new disciples of Jesus Christ."

Johnson concluded, "When you have that many people show up from that many churches, ready to find a way for the Church to gain new life and growth, it's not just an energy. It's the energy of the presence of God." — *Holly McCray*

Missouri volunteers answer prayers

Down in Canyon Camp, chainsaws roared as 22 United Methodist volunteers from Missouri cleared hundreds of broken trees during a week in January.

“They’re an answer to prayer,” said Canyon’s manager, David Combs.

After two damaging ice storms, “we were hoping for and praying for help. I definitely think it’s a God thing that they’re here.”

DIRT, the Disaster Response Team from Liberty (Missouri) United Methodist Church, is led by Kevin Fisher. It’s his primary job at the church.

Established about a dozen years ago, the group is fully equipped for disaster recovery work.

The team has a bucket truck, a skid-steer loader with a grapple, and more than 20 chainsaws.

“We can do an awful lot of work in a short amount of time,” Fisher said.

At Canyon they removed the dangling tops and splintered branches of 300-400 trees, he estimated.

More than 100 other trees were so badly damaged they “weren’t going to make it,” and those were cut down.

Big brush piles took shape alongside the main camp road, to be hauled away later by other volunteers.

“We have plenty of wood to haul. Any help we can get will be much appreciated,” Combs said. “We welcome any group — for a day, overnight, five days or 50 — to help us get to this before spring rolls around.”

He said the Missouri DIRT volunteers “are doing a great favor to us. It’s important to have a safe environment; that’s primary” in Camps ministry.

Canyon staff prepared meals for the team, and the volunteers stayed on site.

They did not tackle the large, uprooted tree that crushed Cabin 9. The cabin was deemed a total loss. Both tree and building will be removed in future as one big project, after decisions by the Camps Board of Trustees and Canyon’s site board, Combs said.

The DIRT Team has served in Oklahoma “six or seven times” since it formed, Fisher said, including in Altus and two central Oklahoma missions in 2015.



Above, a DIRT bucket truck lifts a volunteer to trim some of the highest limbs on a tree while piles of cut branches grow larger beside the main road in Canyon Camp.

PHOTOS BY ANDREW HIMES

Ten people from Liberty UMC and 12 other Missouri United Methodists worked at Canyon.

They are self-contained, to especially help with early response after a disaster, including securing roof tarps. They volunteered after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy and in Colorado. They spent several months in Joplin, Mo., after a tornado there.

In total, the men and women have traveled to more than 70 disaster sites, Fisher said.

They deploy about a half-dozen times each year. “A good number” are retired; some take vacation from jobs. When they’re not traveling, a core group volunteers in Liberty every week, building wheelchair ramps and roofing homes.

— Holly McCray

Grants help teams deliver food, companionship

The Oklahoma City Community Foundation Trustees recently awarded \$28,075 in grants to 60 Mobile Meals providers, including 14 United Methodist churches in Oklahoma County, to help offset the cost of food and transportation.

“Mobile Meals is a vital service for homebound individuals in our community,” said Nancy Anthony, president of the Oklahoma City Community Foundation. “In addition to providing warm meals, the personal contact by caring volunteers is also very important to many of those served through the program.”

Grants were awarded to these UM churches that provide Mobile Meals in Oklahoma County: Chapel Hill, Choctaw, Church of the Servant, Cornerstone, Crown Heights, Douglas Boulevard, Jones, Grace, Linwood, Putnam City, Southern Hills, St. Luke’s, Village, and Wesley.

A total of 58 faith groups are part of Mobile Meals of Oklahoma County.

Employment

Site director for Cross Point Camp: Oklahoma Conference Camp & Retreat Ministries. Full-time. Job description at www.okcamps.org under “About Us/Jobs.” Send resume or inquiry to campjobs@okumc.org.

Two part-time positions: OKC-Nichols Hills. **Director of Children’s Ministry and Nursery Attendant.** Send resume to Trevor Smith at revtrevor@gmail.com or 1212 Bedford Drive, Nichols Hills, OK 73116.

Youth Director: Pryor-First. Full-time. Send resume to Rick Robart, rick.robart@yahoo.com

Contemporary Worship Leader: Sand Springs. Part-time. Email resume to office@sand Springsumc.org.

Director of Children’s Ministry: Tulsa-St. James. Full-time. Resume to Gary Harber at garyharber@sbcglobal.net or mail to St. James UMC, 5050 E. 111th Street South, Tulsa, OK 74137.

Administrative Assistant: Tulsa-Memorial Drive. Full-time. Call 918-835-8426, or email resume to t.tull@cox.net.

Two part-time openings: Tulsa-Faith. **Children’s Ministry Associate:** Email resume to Laura at leldridge@faithtulsa.org. **Contemporary Music Assistant Leader:** Email resume to James at jlambert@faithtulsa.org.



Minister of Music: Cordell-First. Part-time. Call 580-832-3343 or email resume to cordell1umc@cableone.net



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Briefing spotlights issues for 2016 General Conference

BY UNITED METHODIST NEWS SERVICE

In a January gathering that repeatedly stressed church unity despite passionately held differences, United Methodists received a preview of some issues the 2016 General Conference will debate when that top policy-making body of the denomination meets in Portland, Ore.

Oklahoma Conference will have 14 votes.

Delegates attending the preview from Oklahoma were laity Don Kim and Bill Junk and clergy Linda Harker and Joseph Harris. They were elected first and second, respectively, by their peers at the 2015 Annual Conference.

Steven Lewis of Portland urged delegates to remember who they are as they debate issues and resolutions and set budgets for the general agencies. "Few will read what we write, but millions will watch what we do," he said.

More than 400 delegates, communicators, and others attended the Jan. 20-22 briefing at the Oregon Convention Center. Most will return for the assembly May 10-20.

Many United Methodists expect the most passionate debate to deal with how the denomination ministers with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

This is a look at some of the issues presented.

1) Bishops would no longer be elected for life, ordination of clergy elders and deacons would be faster, and a first step would be taken to do away with guaranteed appointment under legislation being proposed.

Bishop Grant Hagiya, Greater Northwest Episcopal Area, a member of the 2013-'16 Ministry Study Commission, said the commission proposed ordination when a candidate is approved for provisional membership, although conference membership would come only after the provisional period was completed.

Other proposed changes would allow a bachelor's degree to fulfill requirements for Course of Study for local pastors and eliminate commissioning.

Lonnie Brooks of the Association of Annual Conference Lay leaders gave highlights of the association's package of 15 pieces of legislation. "We think there is nothing in the Church outside the responsibility of lay people, since we pay for what the Church does," Brooks said.

The lay leaders proposed seven points of reform for bishops, including term limits.

2) As the U.S. economy has recovered from the 2008 crash, the denomination as a whole has seen its financial health improve.

Moses Kumar of the General Council on Finance & Administration reported that a record 26 conferences paid 100 percent to the general church Apportionments in 2015 — the highest number in at least 16 years.

The General Council on Finance & Administration's board and the Connectional Table are proposing a budget of \$611.4 million for general church funds in 2017-'20. That's about a 1.4 percent increase above the 2012 budget.

3) One of the frequent complaints about General Conference is that delegates spend much of the 10-day global meeting on issues that strictly focus on the United States.

Participants at the January preview heard about two plans to address this concern by creating a central confer-

ence or similar body to encompass the entire United States.

Currently, the denomination has seven central conferences in Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. Each has authority under the denomination's constitution to make "such changes and adaptations" to the *Book of Discipline* as missional needs and differing legal contexts require.

3) Frederick Brewington of the Connectional Table pointed out that a number of formal and informal proposals regarding the denomination's structure and connection will come before the General Conference.

One of those proposals is "Plan UMC Revised."

Clayton Oliphint explained that this plan removes provisions ruled unconstitutional by the Judicial Council after the 2012 GC adopted "Plan UMC," a compromise proposal. Many involved in the restructuring work were frustrated by the top court's last-minute ruling, he said.

Under Plan UMC Revised, the current Commission on Religion & Race and Commission on the Status & Role of Women would be merged into a committee on inclusiveness. The plans also would fold the Commission on Archives & History into the denomination's finance agency.

4) The 2016 General Conference will consider amendments to more than 70 social justice petitions, ranging from climate change to human trafficking.

- Christine Flick of Germany talked about a petition calling for a reduction of carbon footprint with regard to travel related to the denomination's church meetings.

- The United Methodist Board of Pension & Health Benefits and its Wespeth division have implemented a human rights investment guideline that identifies 11 high-risk countries and 39 companies with significant investments in those places, reported another presenter.

- A draft of a new general, or global, *Book of Discipline* will be presented for affirmation, said Bishop Patrick Streiff of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters.

- A petition for a comprehensive collaborative plan for Africa would increase the episcopal areas in that region from 13 to 18.

- A proposal for a digitized, customizable *United Methodist Hymnal* would include a cloud-based library.



PHOTO BY MIKE DUBOSE, UMNS

Josephine Deere, left, and David Wilson, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference's delegates, pray for Oklahoma clergyman Tom Albin, dean of the Upper Room Chapel, who co-leads the prayer ministry for the legislative meeting in Portland.

Meeting previews upcoming debate on homosexuality

BY HEATHER HAHN AND KATHY GILBERT, UMNS

For Dorothee Benz, the debate is about "whether and how The United Methodist Church will continue to discriminate."

For Bill Arnold, the debate is about what church unity looks like and how the denomination lives into its mission statement. "I consider institutional unity a minimum," he said.

Their conversation was a preview of what many United Methodists expect to be the most passionate and difficult debate in mid-May at the 2016 General Conference — determining how the denomination ministers with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Rev. Arnold and Benz were among the speakers at a pre-General Conference briefing on Jan. 20-22 in Portland.

During that gathering, participants also tested an alternative process proposed by the Commission on General Conference for discussing legislation dealing with tough issues.

The commission and others in the Church are trying to find a different way to build consensus in the debate that has raged in the denomination for more than 40 years.

The *Book of Discipline*, the denomination's book of law, since 1972 has proclaimed that all people are of sacred worth but that the practice of homosexuality is "incompatible with Christian teaching."

The denomination bans the performance of same-sex

Free guide available online

The General Conference Guide contains 52 pages of helpful information about the Church's legislative assembly. Download it as a PDF:

www.umc.org/topics/general-conference-2016

unions and "self-avowed practicing" gay clergy.

The debate has intensified in recent years as more jurisdictions and nations, including the United States, legally recognize same-sex marriage. More UM clergy, including a retired bishop, have officiated openly at same-sex weddings, and some United Methodists have raised the possibility of a denominational split.

At the same time, African bishops have explicitly called on The United Methodist Church to hold the line on its teachings regarding sexuality, especially the one that only affirms sexual relations in monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

At the 2016 General Conference, delegates can choose to apply an alternative "Group Discernment Process" to any of 99 petitions on the subject.

Benz spoke of a Nigerian gay man who found asylum in the United States after being threatened by his brother and tortured by police. She told of a 14-year-old boy who

sent an anonymous e-mail to a UM pastor. The boy wrote that he was considering suicide because he could not shake his attraction to boys and believed God hated him.

"What we do as a church, what we do as General Conference delegates, has life-and-death consequences," Benz said. She is a delegate from New York and founding member of Methodists in New Directions, an unofficial advocacy group. She is also gay.

Stanislas Kassongo, a delegate from the Democratic Republic of Congo and a professor of medical ethics, offered a different take.

"In my tradition, the subject of sexuality is taboo," he said through an interpreter. "That means this subject is only discussed in a family, but really in the midst of the couple." He said that he did not discuss sex with his five children, four of whom are now married.

What the church teaches about sexuality he sees as God-ordained and in no need of further discussion.

Arnold, a delegate from Kentucky and a professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, noted that United Methodists are united in deploring violence and sharing doctrine. But he'd like to see a stronger form of church unity.

He is a backer of the Covenantal Unity Plan, which includes proposals to strengthen penalties for those convicted of chargeable offenses, as well as making it easier for clergy and congregations that disagree with church teachings to leave the denomination.

General Conference prayer vigil: March 2 liturgy for Oklahoma

The denomination's Council of Bishops has invited each annual conference to hold a 24-hour prayer vigil prior to the 2016 General Conference, to create a groundswell of prayer in the days leading up to the mid-May meeting in Portland, Ore.

March 2 is the designated date for Oklahoma Conference United Methodists to pray. The following day, March 3, is assigned to the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference.

At the request of Bishop Robert E. Hayes Jr., retired Oklahoma deacon Ginger Howl has created this liturgy for use by individuals, families, and churches.

Download this liturgy at: www.okumc.org/GCPrayerLiturgy.

The Upper Room also created resources: <http://60daysofprayer.org/>

GATHERING - Psalm 95:1-7

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
**Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise with songs of praise!**
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great ruler above all gods;
**In whose hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains also.**
The sea is God's, who made it,
and the dry land, which God's hands have formed.
**O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!**
For the Lord is our God,
**and we are the people of God's pasture,
and the sheep of God's hand.**

HYMN

Christ, from Whom All Blessings Flow No. 550, United Methodist Hymnal (Charles Wesley, text)
(Hymns may be omitted if hymnals are not available.)

PRAYER

Let us pray:

**O God of all times and places, we pray for your Church,
and for the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, soon to convene.
Your Church is set today amid the perplexities of a changing order,
and face to face with new tasks.
Baptize her afresh in the life-giving spirit of Jesus.
Bestow upon her a great responsiveness to duty,
a swifter compassion with suffering,
and an utter loyalty to your will.
Help her to proclaim boldly the coming of your kingdom.
Put upon her lips the ancient gospel of her Lord.**

**Fill her with the prophets' scorn of tyranny,
and with a Christlike tenderness for the heavy-laden and
downtrodden.
Bid her cease from seeking her own life, lest she lose it.**



**Make her valiant to give up her life to humanity,
that, like her crucified Lord, she may mount by the path of the cross to a higher glory;
through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

No. 505, UM Book of Worship (Walter Rauschenbusch)

Paul wrote to the church at Philippi from his prison cell, giving them advice and quoting one of the earliest Christian hymns, written just 10 or 15 years after the resurrection. His words and that ancient hymn are just as relevant for our church today:

SCRIPTURE READING - Philippians 2:1-11

One Voice: If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

All: Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form, he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

SILENCE FOR PRAYER AND MEDITATION RESPONSE

As we are gathered to pray for the General Conference of our church we are reminded of these words from the Wesley Covenant Service:

**Christ has many services to be done: some are easy, others are difficult;
some bring honor, others bring reproach;
some are suitable to our natural inclinations and material interests,
others are contrary to both;
in some we may please Christ and please ourselves,
in others we cannot please Christ except by denying ourselves.
Yet the power to do all these things is given to us in Christ, who strengthens us.**

And also, we remember the vow we each made at our baptism:

**As members of The United Methodist Church, we will faithfully participate in the
ministries of the church by our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our
witness, that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.**

PRAYER

Let us pray:

**O gracious God, we pray for your holy Church universal,
and especially today we pray for The United Methodist Church of which we are a part,
that you would be pleased to fill it with all truth, in all peace.
Where it is corrupt, purify it;
where it is in error, direct it;
where in any thing it is amiss, reform it;
where it is right, establish it;
where it is in want, provide for it;
where it is divided, reunite it;
for the sake of the one who died and rose again,
and ever lives to make intercession for us all,
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.**

No. 501, UM Book of Worship (Book of Common Prayer)

HYMN

Blest Be the Tie that Binds No. 557, United Methodist Hymnal

CLOSING - Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, beloved, whatever is true,
whatever is honorable,
whatever is just,
whatever is pure,
whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me,
and the God of peace will be with you. Amen.

From left are Oklahoma's elected General Conference lay delegates: Don Kim, Cara Nicklas, Chuck Stewart, Janey Wilson, Aly Shahan, Herschel Beard, and Bill Junk. An equal number of clergy also will vote.



Legacy Planning Using Life Insurance

"IF ONLY I KNEW, I WOULD HAVE DONE THIS SOONER."

It's a statement we often hear. Everyone knows you can name a spouse or child as a beneficiary of a life insurance policy. You may not know that you can also name a charitable organization such as your church or other United Methodist institution or agency beneficiary and help further its ministry.

A gift of life insurance is a wonderful way to support Methodist causes at a significant level, but at a fraction of the cost of other gifts. The following are the options for gifts of life insur-

ance and the specific tax benefits:

A GIFT OF YOUR POLICY

If you own a life insurance policy that is no longer needed for its intended purpose, a gift of life insurance can provide immediate benefits for you. If you decide to make a gift of your policy today, you will receive an income tax deduction.

ANNUAL GIFTS TO PAY PREMIUMS

A further option is to make annual gifts that can be used to pay the premiums on a life insurance policy. You will receive an income tax deduction for each year you make a gift.

NAMING A METHODIST CAUSE AS A BENEFICIARY

If you are like many people, you may not yet know if your life insurance policy will be needed and you would like to preserve your options. Another idea to consider is maintaining your existing life insurance policy during your lifetime and naming a Methodist cause as a beneficiary. Your insurance company can provide you with a change of beneficiary form that

will permit you to name a Methodist cause as the sole beneficiary or as the beneficiary of a percentage of the policy proceeds.

CREATING A NEW POLICY

If you don't currently own a life insurance policy and wish to help further the church's ministry, you can create a new policy, name the ministry as sole beneficiary and give ownership of the policy to it. You will receive an income tax deduction for your gift. Term life insurance premiums can be surprisingly low, especially if it is a two-life policy. If the policy is not paid up, you can send a donation for the amount of the premium each year and receive an annual income tax deduction for each of your gifts, as well.

If you would like to learn more about how you can create a legacy using life insurance, please contact David Battles at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org.

THE OKLAHOMA UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATION
4201 N CLASSEN BOULEVARD, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73118-2400
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Mark your Spring calendar

■ Retreat for clergywomen

Clergywomen are invited to a spring retreat titled "Reaching Across the Divide" from 6:30 p.m. April 10 to noon April 12 at Canyon Camp.

Carol Cook Moore, pastor of Alva-First UMC, will lead the retreat.

Topics will include differences in backgrounds, theologies, understandings of faith, and reading and interpreting Scripture.

Registration is online at www.okumc.org/

■ 3 districts announce leader training

For three districts, joint training dates and locations are set for Lay Servants and for local-church officers in three roles: Lay Leader, Administrative Council chairperson, and lay member to Annual Conference.

- Lake Country — March 4-5 at McAlester-First UMC
 - Crossroads and Heartland — April 1-2 at McFarlin UMC, Norman
- The church officer classes will be on Saturdays only. The Board of Laity and district offices partnered for this plan.

■ Update: Annual Conference

Online registration is set to open March 14 for people attending the 2016 Annual Conference in Oklahoma City.

More info: www.okumc.org/annual_conference

Passages

RADCLIFF — Evelyn Radcliff, 88, of Enid died Jan 31, 2016. She was the widow of Rev. Ralph Radcliff, who had been pastor at Inola and Okmulgee-Butler in the 1980s.

Survivors include sons Kenneth and Ralph and daughter Nancy Major. Service was Feb. 6 at Memorial Park Cemetery Chapel in Tulsa.

• Becky Brown of Madill died Jan. 25. She was the mother of Rev. Katie Hill, pastor at Bristow.

Appointment

Jeni Markham Clewell, from Norman-St. Stephen's UMC associate pastor to OKC-Mosaic associate, effective Feb. 1.

Donald Whitman, from Vici/Lenora to medical leave, effective Feb. 1.

Apportionments:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

churches that paid 100 percent in 2015. Thank you also to those churches that tried their best to reach that goal."

Oklahoma ranks near the top in Apportionment support among the annual conferences of the South Central Jurisdiction, he said. "Several conferences in our jurisdiction are barely making 80 percent."

In 2015, Apportionment giving by Green Country District's churches averaged 97.16 percent, highest among all eight districts.

A church is assigned a portion of the costs for each shared ministry, or line item in the Apportionment budget, according to the Conference's decimal plan, calculated on that church's expenditures.

Apportionment support for Project Transformation topped 130 percent last year, Bakeman reported. Cookson Hills Center and Skyline Urban Ministry received 99 percent; Circle of Care, 96 percent.

UMWomen:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

president, and Sue Burgess of Lawton.

President Hull is in her 45th year as a UMW member; she recalled accepting the role of spiritual growth chairperson for her local church's unit when she was just 18.

She expects women from even far-flung states to make the journey to Oklahoma City. UMW members "travel anywhere they need to go," she said.

UMW is "a very well-rounded organization" that ministers to women, children, and youth at home and around the world. Its Mission U program

Oklahoma churches gave to the denomination's six apportioned funds at percentages between the high 80s and low 90s.

Bakeman saw a "significant" drop in contributions from the 30 churches assigned the greatest amounts in 2015. Their support fills about half of all the budgeted connectional ministry needs.

However, "the other 400-plus churches did better last year than in 2014," Bakeman said. They "stepped up. I celebrate that the medium and smaller churches did well."

The 2016 Apportionment budget is even lower, \$14,882,701, as the Conference shifts more of the active-clergy health care costs out of that budget and over to direct-billing of churches with full-time active clergy. This move, prompted by the federal Affordable Care Act, is being implemented over four years. — *Holly McCray*

represents "the best mission education arm of the whole church," she said.

Each person at the meeting can attend two workshops. Among the topics: Empowering Oneself, Deaconess and Home Missioners, Bullying/Cyberbullying, Charter for Racial Justice, Go Green, and Native American Arts (basket weaving).

Keynote speakers will be national President Yvette Richards and Harriett Olson, UMW chief executive officer. Tours of United Methodist-related Neighborhood Services Organization will be offered. To register: www.umwmwsej.org