



Photo by Dewayne Simpson

A NEWS HIGHLIGHT — Cutting the ribbon to open the delightful children's building at Edmond's New Covenant UMC was among grand United Methodist moments in 2014. Revisit the year in summary stories that begin on page 4. At the New Covenant event Oct. 26 are, from left: George Winters; Richard Whetsell, the church's construction project manager; Bishop Robert Hayes; OKC-North District Superintendent Rockford Johnson; youngsters Aubrey and Anna Junk; Bruce Barta; Joe Broome, building committee chairman; and Senior Pastor Adrian Cole.

Hodson builds Community in Lawton

By **HOLLY McCRAY**

During his 20s, Phil Hodson launched five businesses. That gained him great experience for his newest venture.

He's planting a church in Lawton.

This entrepreneur didn't plan to redirect his skills into career ministry. At age 28, he sold his fifth company and looked forward to golfing for pleasure.

Then "I woke up one day with nothing to do, and there was God, waiting," he said recently.

Newlyweds Phil and Joelle Hodson moved from Indiana to Dallas. In Fall 2010, he began study at Perkins seminary, Southern Methodist University. A fashion designer, she was able to transfer within her company.

Joelle and Phil Hodson play with sons Xander and Xane.

Fast-forward to Annual Conference last May, when Lawton District Superintendent Chris Tiger introduced Rev. Hodson as Oklahoma's newest church planter.

On Dec. 5 in Lawton, some 70 people attended a candlelight service, a preview worship event for Community United Methodist Church. A second service is set for Jan. 24.

As he nurtures this new community, Hodson holds dear his family's long-time faith. He is a fifth-generation United Methodist. He was baptized and grew up in the Indiana church where his parents were married and his paternal grandfather was pastor.

He first felt God calling him at about age 16, Hodson admitted. As he prayed in his home church, "It was that voice. It was surreal, that feeling. I just knew."

Hodson sought advice, but even his grandpa told the teen to study "accounting or business, something practical," he recalled. "I took them at their word."

They said, "If God wants you, God will find you."

So he majored in selling and sales management. The sense of God's call "just slipped away" — until that morning in his late 20s.

"It was like that feeling in the sanctuary," Hodson remembered

Continued on page 8

One district test-drives realignment

By **HOLLY McCRAY**

Within the Lawton District, Chris Tiger jump-started six Missional Areas soon after the 2014 Annual Conference.

The superintendent wanted to test that concept before June 1, 2015, when an eight-district system for Oklahoma becomes official. Each district will have Missional Areas, with churches grouped by affinity, geography, or other basis.

"I've noticed many of our churches feel isolated," Rev. Tiger said. "They feel they don't have enough — people, money, whatever it takes — to do something. I want connection. Churches working together may accomplish something (greater), or a church may be encouraged by the other churches. It's important that we focus on mission."



Tiger temporarily grouped the 42 churches in his district by geography. Each Missional Area has five to nine churches.

He named a Missional Elder for each group. "I just asked them to facilitate. The intent is not another level of supervision," Tiger clarified. "There's no mini-DS."

He wants clergy in each Area to meet bimonthly and laity to meet at least once a year.

Both attended the first Area meetings, evening events with a meal and worship. Participants agreed to pray for one another.

The superintendent offered "A Father-in-Law's Advice" (Exodus 18). Jethro urged Moses, his son-in-law, to delegate some of his many duties to trustworthy people, to share together in the work.

At the meeting, churches in one Area agreed to coordinate Vacation Bible School schedules so materials and props can be shared.

"I thought it was important to gain experience in this. I prayed about it, pondered it," Tiger said. "What I'm learning, through the Lawton District, I hope will be helpful to the other parts of the state."

The realignment is progressing. Names are confirmed for most, but not all, of the eight new districts. *Heartland* and *Crossroads* replaced the first-draft names of Central Area South and Central Area North, respectively. The state's southeast will be *Lake Country*.

The assets of all existing districts have been tallied and submitted, and the 12 Transitional Teams are handing off their work to Teams serving the new districts.



OCU contributes to United Methodist missions

The closing weeks of any academic semester can be hectic. On the Oklahoma City University campus, they also were a time for giving during the recent school term. Several United Methodist agencies benefited by the gifts from the university community.

The Athletic Department held its fifth annual canned-food collection for Skyline Urban Ministry. The drive swelled to a record 11,976 items, pushing the five-year total to 44,800 items — more than 32,000 pounds of food.

Every athletic team participated in the drive. Top teams were: Softball (2,368 items), Women's Wrestling (1,376), Men's Wrestling (1,241), and Rowing (1,045).

Food gifts were collected at OCU home athletic events and through various campus departments. Several teams came up with creative ways to collect items,

including trick-or-treating for canned goods.

Athletics Director Jim Abbott applauded Skyline's ministry. "They are positively impacting the lives of those in need on a daily basis, and we are proud to partner with them. Each year I challenge our coaches and student-athletes to make their best efforts to contribute to this endeavor and to contemplate the fact that, for most of us, wondering if we are going to eat today is not a concern."

OCU Athletics also encouraged the 10 schools in the Sooner Athletic Conference to hold a similar drive for a worthy organization in each of their communities. This initiative, called "The SAC Gives Back," will result in more than 50,000 items being donated to serve the needy.

OCU University-Church Relations (UCR) coordinated the Christmas Grace endeavor again

this year. Individuals and university departments supplied gifts for 20 families, whose members varied in numbers and ages. Wish lists were available from each family.

Although purchasing all the listed items was not expected, it was evident that givers fulfilled every wish for most families. Their generosity provided microwave ovens, blenders, coffeemakers, coats, bedding, bicycles, MP3 players, movies, CDs, and toys.

Rita Himes, UCR administrative assistant and director of Christmas Grace, recalled a request for a music keyboard. The giver of that gift told Himes, "Wouldn't it be amazing if this student comes to OCU to study music some day!"

All the recipient families were adopted in two days, and all the gifts were delivered before the deadline.

The Wesley Center at OCU sponsored two programs. In con-



Jim Abbott, OCU director of Athletics, receives donations of canned food for Skyline Urban Ministries from Tory Doherty, administrative assistant in Human Relations.

sultation with Mike Slack, the Wesley students identified gifts requested by 10 foster children who are supported by the Circle of Care. The students set a goal of \$700 to purchase those gifts.

Through personal donations and a silent auction, the amount raised exceeded \$1,000. Each child received gifts valued at \$100.

One child asked for a dress like one worn by the character Elsa in the movie "Frozen." The volunteer shoppers located the last one available in local stores and, happily, it was that child's size.

The Wesley Center partnered with a new student group, R is for Thursday. This organization helps children in foster care to become self-sufficient.

The Center also sponsored the Alternative Gift Marketplace. Through money donations, shoppers "bought" missional gifts such as rainwater taps in Haiti, for \$2 each, and protective gear for disaster clean-up crews, for \$25. The Marketplace purchases benefited UMCOR (the United Methodist Committee on Relief) and Project Transformation in Oklahoma.

Mark your calendar:

■ Neustadt Lectures

"The Jewish Context of the New Testament"

Dr. Aaron Gale
Feb. 4-5

■ Martha Jean Lemon Special Lectures

"Dancing with THE WORD"

Marilyn Oden
March 5

Find out more at:
www.okcu.edu/religion/centers/continuing-education/

Wesley students market alternative gifts

By **SUSAN KIM**

This is a different kind of Christmas list:

- An emergency food pack in Liberia
- Preventive malaria treatments for five pregnant women
- Supplies for flood cleanup in Colorado and Indiana

At Oklahoma City University, students on their way into the cafeteria paused to read through this list at a table marked "Alternative Gift Marketplace." They were Christmas shopping — but the gifts were not the usual items one picks up at the mall.

- Cleaning supplies for community water distribution centers
- Supplies for water sustainability in Haiti
- Gardening tools to start a community garden

A shopper selected a specific cause from the list to sup-

port through a money donation, designated the gift funds in honor of friends or family, and made that donation at the Alternative Gift Marketplace. Then aid agencies including UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief), through project partnerships around the world, received those funds, purchased the chosen item, and put it to use to assist people in need.

The cost for the gift-giver? Anywhere from \$1 to \$25.

The person whom the gift honored received a card notifying them of the donation as well as providing information about the cause it supported.

Rodney Newman, director of religious life at OCU, said, "It's a way to spread the word about the kind of work The United Methodist Church does."

Prior to Christmas, the Al-

ternative Gift Marketplace was administered by the Wesley Center, the United Methodist ministry on the OCU campus. Students volunteered to supervise shifts, juggling the work with their class schedules.

The center also hosts a Monday evening worship service and a weekly free meal called "Wednesday at the Wesley." Students involved with the center also do periodic mission projects, said Rev. Newman.

Midway through its duration, the Marketplace had raised several hundred dollars for UMCOR. As Newman and the students tracked the project's popularity, they said they plan a similar effort next Christmas season.

They also offered tips for churches and agencies that want to set up their own Alternative Gift Marketplaces.

1. Offer a variety of price ranges. Newman worked with UMCOR to determine alternative gift items of varying amounts. "It enables people who don't have much to give," he noted.

2. Arrange to take credit cards and checks. "We get almost no cash," said Newman. He consulted with OCU's financial experts, who helped design a system in which shoppers could enter their own credit card information.

"It enables them to give in a secure way with a credit card. For the small service charge from the credit card company, we will make that up with designated funds we already have," explained Newman.

UMCOR's Gifts of Hope catalog is online.

(Susan Kim regularly writes for www.umcor.org.)

The Oklahoma United Methodist
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Oklahoma City, OK 73106

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

The centerpiece of time

God, it seems you've been our home forever; long before the mountains were born, long before you brought earth itself to birth, from "once upon a time" to "kingdom come" — you are God.

You've got all the time in the world — whether a thousand years or a day, it's all the same to you. (Psalm 90:1-2,4; *The Message*)

By **BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.**

As you replace your 2014 calendars with new ones for 2015, let me pass on a few thoughts about a related subject, seldom discussed.

The days and months stretch before us — for many people, nothing more than empty calendar spaces to be filled in with tasks to do and upcoming events to remember.

Have you ever stopped to think that our Christian calendar is the one most commonly used throughout the world?

That calendar would not exist if there hadn't been a man named Jesus Christ. Jesus is the hinge of history and the centerpiece of time simply because the modern record of our human existence has been dated according to the time of Jesus' birth!

When I was in elementary school, it took me a bit longer than most to understand the concept of "B.C." and "A.D." But with the help of Mrs. Wells, my fourth-grade teacher, tugging my ear each time I got that wrong, I finally understood that what happened in all time before the earthly appearance of Jesus was designated B.C., *Before Christ*.

And although I've always wanted to believe that A.D. means "after his death," I came to understand that it means *Anno Domini*, a medieval Latin translation for "In the year of our Lord."

(Thank you very much, Mrs. Wells, for making my left ear a little longer than my right one!)

Now I know of other calendar systems, ancient and current, among them the contemporary initiative to use "B.C.E." and "C.E." Yet their use remains limited. The Associated Press Stylebook abides by A.D. and B.C.

With all that being said, do you realize the significance of such wide use of A.D. and B.C.?

Every person — whether Christian or atheist, agnostic, even a follower of another religion — unwittingly testifies that Jesus Christ is known to all in the person's simple act of making out a check, dating a letter, or updating a blog.

Every newspaper or magazine you pick

up announces in the cover date and on each page that we are "in the year of our Lord"!

No other person in all of history has carved his name so deeply into human existence as has this man Jesus. Your life is part of that witness because the date of your birth is a timely link to *his* birth.

The name of Jesus is written across time itself, and we are living in his time.

Yes, Jesus was a Jewish peasant born in some obscure province half a world away, in a far-off age. He never wrote a book nor made great discoveries; he invented no philosophy and built no grand structures. He died at age 33, and you and I would conclude that he hadn't reached the prime of his life. Even his closest friends deserted him when he was nailed to that Roman cross.

And yet, he is the pivot of history.

We are transitioning into a new year. Each one of us has a B.C. and an A.D. period in our lives. Can you remember a time in your life when you didn't know who Christ was or when you failed to acknowledge him as Lord of your life?

Well, that was your B.C. era!

Isaiah 9:2 speaks of those who "walked in darkness" in that ancient time. Unfortunately, there are people today walking in darkness, wandering without hope, lost in their days.

The B.C. people of this world will change the calendars on their walls and in their cellphones, but, for most of them, nothing else will change.

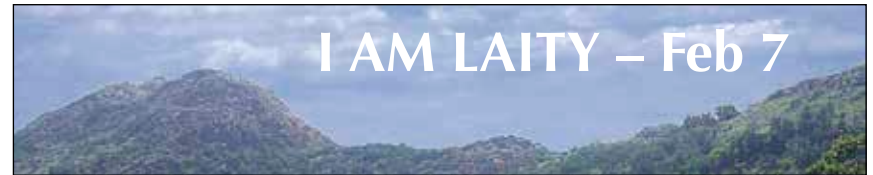
As you transition into this new year, change more than your calendar. Make your heart a humble manger where Christ enters anew, takes up residence, and begins his personal ministry within you. Welcome the A.D. period of your life; it has the potential to make all the difference to you and to those you encounter every calendar day.

Years ago I visited the fabulous Rockefeller Center in New York City. I will never forget the series of murals at its entrance; they depicted the march of civilization across time. The first fresco showed humans working by painfully using only their hands, living precariously but determined to survive. The second painting showed people as the makers of tools and other useful inventions. A third mural portrayed humans as masters of machines we have created that harness the forces of the material world.

The final mural, however, was not what I expected. It did not picture our leap into outer space or major advancements in technology.

Rather, the final mural showed Jesus Christ preaching the Sermon on the Mount. Underneath the scene were these words: "Man's ultimate destiny depends not on whether he can learn new lessons or make new discoveries and conquests, but on his acceptance of the lesson taught him close upon 2,000 years ago."

Welcome to A.D. 2015!



Classes offer leader training for laity

On Feb. 7, the Conference Board of Laity will sponsor a leadership training day for church members from across the state.

"I AM LAITY" Summit '15 starts at 9:30 a.m. that Saturday at OKC-St. Luke's Church. Advance registration is necessary. Sign up at:

<https://okumc-reg.brapp.com/IAMLAITYSUMMIT2015>

Each participant may choose two classes to attend, and Bishop Hayes will preach. Fee, \$15, includes lunch and class handouts. Child care is free.

Conference Lay Leader Chuck Stewart said the Board plans this day of training in place of the Re-Ignite Workshops, not

scheduled this winter.

Class choices:

1. Lay Leader: Uncovering the leader in you;
2. Being a Lay Delegate to Annual Conference: How to navigate the system;
3. Church Council/Chairperson: ministry and administration;
4. Trustees: "It's not just mowing the lawn";
5. Finance;
6. Show Me the Money: Where to find grants and additional resources for your church;
7. Missional Area 1: How to relate in your district; and
8. An Exploration Into God's Calling.

Jan. 20 Orders Meeting: Putting our lives online

Bishop Hayes has invited attorney Joy Thornburg Melton to educate Oklahoma's clergy Jan. 20 using her book "Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World."

She will teach during the Orders Meeting at OKC-St. Luke's.

She is known as an expert in risk management and ministry protection. The book is the newest in a "Safe Sanctuaries" series by this North Georgia Conference clergywoman and Christian Educator.

Based in Atlanta, she has led seminars in more than 40 states.

Melton and co-author Michelle Foster want to help church leaders use multiple media responsibly.

All clergy under appointment are expected to attend the Orders Meeting that Tuesday, 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Lunch will be provided courtesy of the Board of Ordained Ministry.

Sunday School workshop at Shawnee open to all churches

In Shawnee, Wesley UMC will host a free morning workshop Jan. 10 on Sunday School development.

Leaders for "New Life" will be Tasha Casey-Loveless, Christian Educator and OCU graduate; Charles Neff, OCU dean

of the chapel; Greg Tener, OKC-South District superintendent; and Wesley's pastor Ben Williams.

Sign-in begins at 9 a.m. Please RSVP to WesleyChurchOffice@sbcglobal.net or 405-275-1556.

St. Luke's invites clergy to 2-day Faith Partners training

Faith Partners Addiction Ministry at OKC-St. Luke's will host a free, two-day training event open to all clergy on Jan. 15-16.

Trainers will be Drew Brooks of the nonprofit Faith Partners Inc., Austin,

Texas; Jeremy Sanders, St. Luke's pastor of discipleship; and Ann Andert of Faith Lutheran Church, Janesville, Wis.

Contact Rev. Sanders, 405-600-3411, jsanders@stlukesokc.org, for more information or to sign up.

Passages

Rev. Gale Norman Izard, 76, of Greenville, Texas, died Dec. 12, 2014.

His ministry, 1979-2003, included Tishomingo, OKC-St. Luke's, Wewoka-First, Tulsa-First, OKC-Asbury, and Blackwell.

Survivors include his wife, Holley Izard, and daughters Cyndi Bracy and Sara Martinez.

Service was Dec. 15 at First UMC, Tom Bean, Texas, with burial at Rosedale Cemetery, Ada. Memorial gifts to: First UMC, Tom Bean.

Employment

Youth Director: Mustang UMC. Full-time. Send resume to church, P.O. Box 180, Mustang, OK 73064; or to larry@mustangumc.org.

Nursery Attendant: Locust Grove-First. Matthew Franks, 918-479-6356, justfranks@gmail.com.

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

Contemporary Worship Leader: Tulsa-New Haven. Part-time. Cindy Havlik, 918-743-6491.

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

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

Pianist: Tulsa-Aldersgate. Part-time. Wayne Hayes, 918-627-4165, aumctu@sbcglobal.net.



Year in review

In 2014, God directed
Oklahomans in 'All Things New'

A two-story slide beckons inside the children's center, 24,000 square feet, completed in 2014 at Edmond-New Covenant. A roof transom infuses the play space with natural light. Top photo, a butterfly lingers with a guest at the building's grand opening.



Photos by Dewayne Simpson

WELCOMING THE CHILDREN —

Among churches that completed building projects in 2014 was New Covenant UMC. The Edmond church combined the grand opening of its NC Kids center on Oct. 26 with trunk-'n'-treat fun and a scavenger-hunt tour of the space. A butterfly release embodied the campus' transformation. Associate Pastor Jay Smith said later, "There was such a collection of unique people there to celebrate the fact that we are pursuing the heart of children for Christ." Children's Day Out continues, and a recent Advent crafts workshop spread throughout the second-floor space, which includes a stage. On Sunday mornings, worshippers are preferring the church's new north entry, drawn by a café where they can enjoy breakfast. Rev. Smith summarized Bishop Hayes' message at the grand opening: "We're planting trees that we will never sit under, for people we will never see ... but we know that God will work in it." Ten people were baptized Dec. 28, according to a Facebook post.

View the grand opening video posted Oct. 27 at www.facebook.com/NewCov.Edmond.

All things new. Three short words sum up much of Oklahoma United Methodist church life in 2014 — in addition to being the Annual Conference theme that year.

Make note of the new in this news digest, gleaned from the 17 issues of *Contact* in 2014. And consider what 2015 will reveal, because Revelation 21:5 tells us that God *is* making all things new. As we reflect, we also reaffirm our resolve to continue our mission to transform the world for Christ.

Jan. 10, 2014

The new year brought a new name for an Oklahoma City church. The Christ Experience (formerly Christ UMC), 1006 N.E. 17th St., reported attendance growth at Sunday worship, tent revivals, and an after-school program.

Oklahoma-related missions and missionaries benefitted from the Church's first intentional promotion of *Giving Tuesday* (Dec. 3), an online charity drive. Among them were eight Oklahoma-Bolivia partnership projects, \$270,396; Manos Juntas Mexico, \$87,958; Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso, Texas, \$37,895; and Meri Whitaker, Cookson Hills Mission, \$13,606.

Jan. 31

Some Oklahoma clergy earned a healthy reward. Their medical insurance premiums were reduced by as much as \$60 per month throughout 2014. Clergy received discounts if they met health criteria on such things as blood pressure, cholesterol level, and body mass index.

The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation announced its

partnership with the Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team for "OKC Thunder Nothing But Nets Night." A portion of ticket sales for an April game was to be donated toward the purchase of mosquito nets to protect families in developing countries of Africa from contracting malaria.

Feb. 21

OKC-St. Luke's UMC announced it was opening a satellite campus in Edmond. The new worship community was to begin meeting in late March at Edmond's Sequoyah Middle School, with video preaching by Bob Long, St. Luke's senior pastor.

An official group from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) recommended that Saint Paul School of Theology at Oklahoma City University be authorized to offer all courses for each of its degree programs. A seminary student had been required to complete one-third of his or her courses on Saint Paul's campus in greater Kansas City, Mo. (The ATS Board of Commissioners approved the recommendation at a later meeting.)

March 14

New Covenant UMC in Edmond progressed with construction of its two-story "NC Kids" ministry center, featuring an indoor treehouse, two-story circular slide, and a stage. Also planned were an enlarged gym/fellowship hall with basketball courts and space to seat 500. Projected cost for the children's building was \$5.5 million.

Responding to the needs of allergy-sufferers in its congregation, Elk City UMC was offering rice-based wafers for Communion as an alternative to bread made using wheat. A community support group for parents of children with food allergies also was meeting at the church.

April 4

Delegates to the Annual Conference were studying a proposal to reduce the number of districts from 12 to eight, effective June 1, 2015. A draft document acknowledged, "Due to changes in demographics and membership losses, it seems time to make a change in our structure."

A life-size bronze representation of Jesus sitting on a park bench

created a special place to pray at Camp Egan. The statue was a gift from Tom and Barbara Naugle of Tulsa and artist Stephen LeBlanc. It was dedicated March 8 at the camp near Tahlequah.

April 25

One menu stood out at a springtime food-truck festival in Tulsa. While other vendors sold tacos, hot dogs, and meatball sandwiches, Pastor Nathan Mattox of University UMC served Holy Communion from the church's van to festival-goers. He was inspired by John Wesley's vow in 1739 to take the good news of salvation to the streets.

A proposal being considered by Annual Conference delegates would change the health insurance process for Oklahoma's retired clergy. Retiree coverage would move from the Conference-sponsored Medicare supplement plan to a plan chosen by the individual retiree according to what best suited his or her health needs. The proposal was expected to generate savings of more than \$1 million in Apportionment funding and to cut personal insurance costs for the majority of retirees.

May 16

The 2015 Conference budget proposal being considered by delegates included \$1 million in new funding to reach new people in new places, as well as an Apportionment reduction of nearly 8 percent. It was the result of collaborative work by several committees to realign Conference finances for the Church's mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

Shelli and John Pleasant were the first residents in Anchorhold, a micro-community planted by Tulsa-First UMC. The Pleasants represent a modern form of monastic community in a transitional neighborhood. Seeking to connect with their neighbors, they follow a rhythm of disciplined prayer, Bible study, shared meals, and volunteer service.

June 6

Annual Conference delegates and guests welcomed newly ordained and commissioned clergy: two deacons, 10 elders, and nine provisional elders.

Continued on page 6



Educating leaders to make disciples for Jesus Christ, renew the Church, and transform the world.

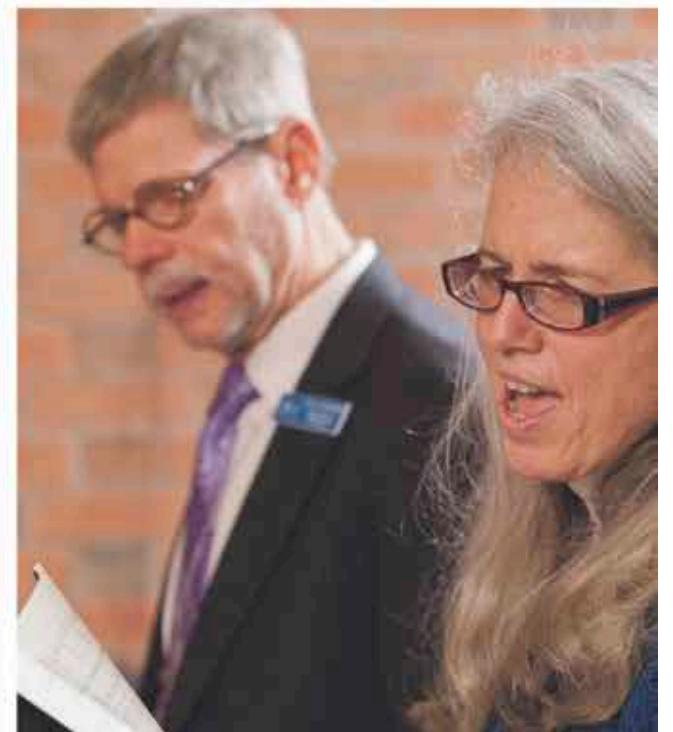
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Year in review:

from page 4

A year after devastating tornadoes in the center of the state, the Oklahoma Conference and Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) continued working together in recovery efforts. Their joint Disaster Response committee reported receiving more than \$1.2 million in direct donations since the deadly storms in late May 2013. Oklahoma United Methodists also are part of the Oklahoma Disaster Recovery Project, an unusual collaboration by five major nonprofits, which also includes the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities, the Salvation Army, and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul.

June 27

Phil Hodson had been introduced to Annual Conference delegates as the new Lawton District church planter.

One of the Conference's newest churches, Moore-CrossTimbers UMC at 3004 S. Sunnylane, received its charter June 1. Moore-First UMC served as its mother church, supporting the new congregation in many ways. Cross-Timbers held its first worship service in 2009, in a Moore elementary school. The church is now housed in rented retail space.

Delegates to the Annual Conference took home an incentive to design innovative ministries that will connect new people to Christ. The Conference is delegating \$700,000 to fund such ministries in 2015 through *New People*, *New Places* grant awards.

July 18

Four United Methodist churches in greater Oklahoma City had joined forces to help restore three homes for senior citizens. About 150 volunteers from Chapel Hill, St. Andrew's, Quayle, and Edmond-Summit combined their efforts during an annual day of service directed by Rebuilding Together OKC.

The deadline to apply for *New People*, *New Places* grants was set as Sept. 15. Any church and any Conference entity may apply for a grant to launch an innovative project to reach new people for Christ.

Aug. 8

The congregation of Edmond-Acts 2 Church cut a ribbon July 27 to celebrate the new sanctuary building that seats 500, more than double the size of the previous sanctuary. The \$3.2 million project also doubled the church's parking and educational space.

Weleetka UMC officially closed June 2, and the building and parsonage were transferred to the OIMC.

Aug. 29

Tulsa-Asbury UMC had invested more than \$1 million to install an innovative multimedia system called *Environmental Projection* (EP). The system visually transforms the surroundings and architecture of a space from a blank palette to a piece of digital artwork. The system also allows Asbury to live stream worship to an unlimited Internet audience.



PRAYER WORKSHOPS — Pauls Valley UMC hosts a crowd for a spiritual seminar, "Living the Lord's Prayer," by Trevor Hudson of South Africa. Each of the six regional workshops drew 45 to 75 people on October evenings, reported Diana Northcutt, Conference director of Discipleship for Small Membership Churches. "He just opened up the Lord's Prayer in ways that people never thought of," she said of Rev. Hudson's teaching.

INFORMATION HUB — Oklahoma welcomed superintendents and staff from other annual conferences to a Route 122 network event in early December.

A total of 113 participants, from as far as Oregon and Pennsylvania, gathered at OKC-St. Luke's. They shared their best practices to help revitalize existing churches, said Diana Northcutt

of Oklahoma, a Route 122 design team member. She listed eight keys to successful change for a church: a focus on the transforming grace of Jesus Christ, apostolic leadership by laity and clergy, Conference support to engage people in the mission field, continuous lay and clergy learning and collaboration, independent assessment of the congregation, ongoing coaching, and openness to the Holy Spirit's leading. Eleven of Oklahoma's 12 district superintendents attended, Rev. Northcutt said. Among other Oklahoma leaders were Charla Gwartney, Craig Stinson, and Rebekah Hasty (pictured).



New Deaconess Jerrie Lindsey of Holdenville said God led her, through two friends, to become a Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for children. She and other volunteer advocates are appointed by a judge to represent the best interest of children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. Their role is to advocate for the children as they move through legal and social service systems.

Sept. 19

Boundaries had been drawn out for the eight new districts of the Oklahoma Conference. Delegates to the 2014 Annual Conference had approved the realignment from 12 districts for missional reasons. The district names and locations of district offices, plus other decisions, were being processed.

H. Sharon Howell, the new president of Saint Paul School of Theology, awarded

master's degrees to eight students on Aug. 22 in OCU's Smith Chapel. The commencement ritual honored the fourth and largest group to graduate from the seminary's Oklahoma City program. In additional Saint Paul's news, Elaine Robinson had been named as the interim vice president of academic affairs and dean for both the Oklahoma City and Greater Kansas City campuses.

Oct. 10

The international United Methodist Council of Bishops was preparing for its first meeting in Oklahoma since 1978. The session was to feature an Act of Repentance to continue the bishops' participation in healing the Church's relationship with Native Americans.

Helicopter rides were among the activities at an outdoor back-to-school event at OKC-Church of the Servant. More than 1,000 people came out for the celebration, which also featured food trucks, pony rides, a petting zoo, and inflatables. "Our church family understood the power of inviting people to experience our church in a new and family-friendly manner," coordinator Scott Bartlow said.

Oct. 31

Stillwater-First UMC had celebrated its official recognition as a United Methodist Historic Site. The church was established on Oct. 6, 1889. A plaque at the church, featuring a circuit-riding preacher, designates the church as Site No. 489.

Nov. 21

Native Americans called on the bishops of The United Methodist Church to act to heal injustices caused by the Church and develop genuine relationships with the First People. During the global Council of Bishops Meeting on Nov. 2-7 in the state capital, Native Americans described the harm they have suffered and continue to bear.

United Methodist missionary Helen Roberts-Evans met with Bishop Robert Hayes in Oklahoma City to update him on her work in the African country of Liberia. She advised the bishop that major cultural changes are needed in Liberia in order to stem the disease of Ebola.

Dec. 12

Skyline Urban Ministry celebrated the grand opening of its expanded food pantry at 500 S.E. 15. The \$933,633 project, a collaboration with Oklahoma City's Regional Food Bank, added 6,391 square feet to the Skyline facility, bringing it to a total of 10,959 square feet. Skyline offers multiple forms of aid to marginalized people.

A rapid response by supporters had doubled a \$69,000 challenge grant for the United Methodist Circle of Care to recruit and train foster parents in four more areas of Oklahoma. Recruiters had begun work in Shawnee and Stillwater, and plans were being finalized in Ardmore and Weatherford.

— Compiled by Chris Schutz



UM young adults in the Sierra Leone Annual Conference perform re-enactments to teach Ebola prevention and treatment in an area where people can't read or do not have access to radio.

Photo by Phileaus Jusu, UMNS

Disease, sexuality dominate 2014 denominational news

The worst Ebola outbreak in history — along with The United Methodist Church's mobilization to ease suffering and fight the spread of the deadly virus — was the biggest story of 2014, according to a United Methodist News Service poll.

Here are snapshots of denomination news that seized the poll's top five spots.

1. Ebola

The first case of Ebola was reported in May in Guinea and, by June, Sierra Leone had 24 cases.

By Dec. 11, the death toll in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone was more than 6,500.

Among those who died are some United Methodists, including health care workers. More than 18,000 people had been infected, according to the World Health Organization.

The Church mobilized quickly. United Methodists have used various forms of communication — text messages, radio broadcasts, drama, and song — to relay facts about Ebola. They have carried prevention information and supplies for sanitization to remote villages. They have left food and supplies at the homes of infected families.

The United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) had disbursed \$401,138 in grants by November. United Methodist Communications (UMCOM) helped produce an animated educational video in seven languages.

2. Frank Schaefer

The Church's Judicial Council in October allowed Frank Schaefer to remain a UM clergyman. That decision was the last in a series of rulings that began when a complaint was filed against the Pennsylvania pastor for performing a same-sex wedding for his son in 2007.

Schaefer was a guest speaker at an Oklahoma City program in late May.

Some people hailed the Judicial Council decision as a step toward full inclusion of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals within the denomination. Others said the ruling implied pastors could ignore church law as spelled out in *The Book of Discipline*. Everyone agreed on one thing: the debate isn't over.

3. Sexuality

The denomination's debate over human sexuality intensified as more U.S. states and more nations legalized same-sex civil marriage. Unlike the Rev. Schaefer case, some complaints were settled without Church trials.

A complaint filed against 36 UM pastors who officiated at the 2013 same-sex union of two men was resolved in October.

4. Imagine No Malaria

The Church is close to the goal of raising \$75 million by the end of 2015 for Imagine No Malaria. The global church has raised an estimated \$64.5 million in gifts and pledges for the campaign to eliminate death and suffering from malaria in Africa. Forty-two annual and central conferences have participated.

5. Church unity

A group of United Methodists who champion the Church's current stance on homosexuality issued a statement declaring that bishops must enforce and publicly support Church law restrictions against same-sex marriage if the denomination is to hold together. More than 8,400 United Methodists publicly had endorsed the statement as of Nov. 4.

Additionally, clergy and laity in the North Georgia Conference, with the largest membership of any U.S. conference, signed a covenant calling for unity. Similar statements were crafted in other conferences, including Holston, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Rio Grande.

Bishops at their November meeting in Oklahoma City issued a statement saying their "hearts break because of the divisions that exist within the Church." The Council of Bishops, whose members are not all in agreement about sexuality issues, committed to be "in ministry for and with all people."

Two other subjects gained much attention from United Methodists in 2014:

- immigration; and
- the General Board of Global Ministries' planned move to Atlanta, Ga.

— Compiled by Vicki Brown, United Methodist News Service

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Remember your church

One of our most important acts of stewardship is the final distribution of our life's accumulation. How we distribute our estate speaks volumes about our values and our concerns for our loved ones.

First, we need to have a written estate plan, either a will or a revocable living trust. It has been estimated that over 50% of Americans die without a plan. What does this mean? Without an estate plan, we have no control of how our estate will be distributed. Also, not having an estate plan may cost our estate between 15-40% of its value.

What does having an estate plan reveal about us? First, it says that we care about our loved ones. Second, it means that we have sought to conserve our estate. Third, it provides insight into what is really important in our lives.

Bequests to family members tell of our love and concern for their welfare. Bequest to our church affirms our belief in the mission and ministry of our church.

As Christians we need to be good stewards of that which God has provided to us, and this means having a written estate plan.

A bequest to our church accomplishes several things. It expresses confidence in the future of our church. It creates a lasting legacy. It encourages present and future leadership. And, most importantly, it makes a difference!

A bequest to your church can be made through your will or trust. This is the simplest method. It can be a certain dollar amount, property, or a percentage of your estate. Many tithe their estate.

There are other options available that provide a current income tax deduction, fixed or variable annuity

for life, with the remainder going to your church.

If you would like information on making a bequest to your church and the various options, *please contact David Battles, CPA, at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org.*



Lawton church:

from page 1

thinking, "God has been really good to me. I've learned how to build a business, to manage people, to manage money."

He saw the dwindling membership in his home church as a microcosm of the denomination's status. Perhaps his skills could be used to change that.

"And there was God."

After only six weeks of study at Perkins, Hodson wanted to work concurrently in the mission field. He saw a church job posting and met Guy Ames III, who was then Ardmore District superintendent. A week later, he received an appointment to Calera UMC.

The Hodsons had never crossed the Red River into Oklahoma.

"One month later, we were in a pulpit," he said. He's also pastored the Hugo churches.

In Lawton, Hodson represents all UM churches as he knocks on doors and posts Facebook videos.

"Absolutely," said the church planter. "All churches benefit when a new church comes into a community and succeeds. We don't start churches for existing (churchgoers). That's sort of like shuffling chairs. That doesn't accomplish anything.

"Kingdom work should be a win-win."

Rev. Tiger has been active in the Conference's Department of Congregational Development for about 10 years. His commitment to that work is strong, he's familiar with the



After Phil Hodson's son attended a seminar with him, this photo meme was posted on Facebook.

Church's research.

"One of the things we need to do as a denomination: We need to start new churches; they reach new people," the superintendent said.

A church plant is a key component of the District's Strategic Plan.

Lawton seems underserved by The UMC, Tiger said. Statistics show 700-800

people attend UM churches there on Sundays, "but that's less than 1 percent in a population of 100,000-plus," he said.

Churches in the district are helping establish the new congregation through intentional prayer, volunteer support, providing supplies, and special offerings. Lawton's Centenary UMC volunteered office space even before Hodson was appointed.

Tiger encouraged the district's church planter to connect with anyone who has started a church, to learn from them. Hodson had made 11 such visits when he talked with *Contact*.

He attended church-planting "boot camp" by consultant Jim Griffith, in Dallas, and a leadership institute at Church of the Resurrection, Greater Kansas City, Mo. He's pored over demographics.

He pursues a media-heavy strategy, especially using Facebook. He has directed crowd-funding and church-naming social media campaigns.

And Hodson prays aloud as he drives around Lawton.

"You will not make a disciple in the office, ever. Jesus didn't sit in the synagogue all day; he was out walking the streets," Hodson said.

The Hodson children help dad hand out Community UMC postcards.

Mom hosts a weekly gathering of 12-20 young mothers, with their children, at the

parsonage.

That event gave Rev. Hodson affirmation of God's presence in the Lawton ministry.

Working from home, he heard snippets of their talk about God "week after week." When one mother spoke of having her baby baptized, much conversation was sparked.

Hodson couldn't resist. The pastor got a fresh cup of coffee and asked to join the group, "to offer a Methodist perspective."

"It was amazing to get to be a part of that group of people, so excited," he said. "Baptism is important to the women, and they wanted their babies baptized.

"People want to deal with the hard questions. They want someone who will take the time; they want a safe place to do that.

"God was in that moment."

He concluded, "If we want to share the good news today, we've got to speak it in a way that they'll hear. What if we can create a space where people can wrestle with hard questions, with God? There's a need."

Hodson is asking Oklahoma United Methodists to take a specific action to support the church plant. "Like" and "share" the Facebook page *Community United Methodist Church*.

"You never know who you might know who knows someone in Lawton. This is Kingdom work. Let's go viral!"

(Website: www.LawtonChurch.com)