



Young musicians of El Sistema, an after-school program of OKC-St. Luke's, play their violins.

Sounds of hope

After-school music program reaching 200 children

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

A music program at OKC-St. Luke's for disadvantaged children fulfills a dream for its benefactors, Phil Busey Sr. and his wife, Cathy.

The Buseys, who own Delaware Resource Group, a

defense contractor, decided several years ago that they wanted to fund an after-school program to benefit children in the inner city. They met with Bob Long, senior pastor of St. Luke's, about their idea.

"We wanted to make sure we're in a church that could

support us," Cathy said.

Mark Parker, dean of the Bass School of Music at Oklahoma City University, shared with them some music CDs from El Sistema (The System), a youth orchestra program in Venezuela. The Buseys were intrigued

SEE SOUNDS OF HOPE, PAGE 4

Project tackles racial divisions

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

Riding bicycles with my dad on country roads is among my favorite memories. For Carlos Ramirez, however, apprehension forced his pedals faster when he cycled between the rural churches he once served in eastern Oklahoma.

Drivers on four wheels often dogged his bike, cursing and taunting the young man.

His story riles me. The ordained United Methodist elder simply was pursuing healthy exercise, but racist whites were pursuing him.

Rev. Ramirez is a native of Mexico. Did they know he was a pastor? Would that matter to them?

These were 21st-century confrontations.

The continuing struggle against racism in the United States topped denomination news in 2015, according to the United Methodist News Service. Ramirez's personal story confirms that justice work and peace building by United

'Let's Do Something About It'

Seminar exploring cultural issues

9 a.m.-2 p.m. Feb. 27
OCU School of Business

- Jabar Shumate, OU community diversity leader
- Elaine Robinson, dean of Saint Paul seminary
- Carlos Ramirez, Hispanic Ministry coordinator



Register by Feb. 20

Shumate

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

Tulsa native Jabar Shumate, shown, was student body president at the University of Oklahoma. He served in both the state House and Senate. After a racist video of OU students was circulated last year, Shumate was named as OU's first vice-president for University Community, overseeing diversity programs and initiatives.

Methodists are necessary not only in places such as Charleston, S.C., and Ferguson, Mo., but also in Oklahoma.

A current Conference

SEE PROJECT, PAGE 7



PHOTO BY DAVID HOLBROOK

Benton Rudd props up baby Luke Brooks for a special photo session at Lost Creek UMC on Dec. 4.

Holiday blessings multiply for rural church

BY HOLLY MCCRAY

On the first day of Christmas, the good Lord gave Lost Creek baby Luke Brooks.

On the second day of Christmas, the good Lord gave Lost Creek baby Harper Hayes. God didn't stop at two.

Twelve babies were born into the Lost Creek Church family between Christmases 2014 and 2015.

So the rural United Methodist church south of Stillwater made merry in multiples for Jesus' birthday in December.

The choir sang "The 12 Babies of Christmas" (customizing the carol) as slides showed the babies posed in red stockings for Sweets & Treats,

the church's Christmas variety program.

The moms and babies took turns as Mary and Jesus in the children's Christmas program on Dec. 20.

An heirloom ornament for each child was added to the sanctuary Christmas tree.

A lively holiday photo session with all the infants yielded a memorable group picture.

The impact of "a bumper crop" of babies "has changed our ministry," said Local Pastor Max Rudd recently. It goes well beyond adding rocking chairs in the sanctuary.

Lost Creek UMC is almost 108 years old, but most of its people have attended only 10 to

15 years, Rev. Rudd said.

They are from many faith streams, including Moravian, as well as no faith history. Lost Creek is the first United Methodist experience for "the vast majority" of newer members, the pastor said.

Yet people tell Rudd it's "like coming home" to become part of this church family, he said.

"There's this dynamic of a new church held within this church with a rich history. We have the best of both worlds," Rudd said.

"We do things because they have meaning and purpose here with the group of people we have here. It's not the same for each church."

SEE BABY BOOM, PAGE 6



PHOTO BY DAVID HOLBROOK

Becky Reedy and Camden take their turn as Mary and Jesus in the Lost Creek children's Christmas pageant on Dec. 20.



PRAYING FOR GENERAL CONFERENCE — Oklahoma's clergy had the opportunity to craft special strands of beads at the Orders Meeting on Jan. 19. They are part of the prayer ministry for the 2016 General Conference, set for May in Portland, Ore. "I'm personally convinced that the one thing every United Methodist can do to influence the outcome of General Conference is to pray," presenter Tom Albin, who co-chairs the GC Prayer Team, told the clergy. He is dean of The Upper Room Chapel and an Oklahoma clergy member. www.umc.org/gc2016

Annual Conference advance information:

• **PREACHING** — Bishop Hayes will be the preacher for all worship services of the 2016 Oklahoma Annual Conference, May 30-June 2, in Oklahoma City.

This includes the early-morning Communion homilies on Wednesday and Thursday at OCU's Smith Chapel.

The bishop is retiring this year.

• **REPORTS DUE NOW** — The deadline is Feb. 15 for all Conference committees and agencies to submit their reports for the Pre-Conference Workbook. Email your group's report to agalyon@okumc.org, and send a copy to cstinson@okumc.org.

• **THEME** for the gathering will be "Enriched by Our Diversity, United in Our Love." It relates to this Bible verse: "Under God's control, all the parts of the body fit together ... So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love." (Ephesians 4:16)

• **OFFERING** — In honor of Bishop Hayes, the Annual Conference Offering is designated for two scholarship funds at Africa University and Saint Paul School of Theology.

• **KNOW MORE** — Online link to all meeting information: www.okumc.org/annual_conference. Information will be added as available.

Renowned scholar from NYC will present Neustadt Lectures

Oklahoma City University is pleased to welcome Wendy Zierler to present the Neustadt Lectures on March 3.

Dr. Zierler joined the faculty of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City in 2001, where she currently serves as the Sigmund Falk Professor of Modern Jewish Literature and Feminist Studies.

A former research fellow in the English Department of Hong Kong University and a Fulbright Fellow at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, she received her Ph.D. and her M.A. from Princeton University and her B.A. from Yeshiva University, Stern College.

Zierler will receive her M.F.A. in fiction writing from Sarah Lawrence College in 2016.

At HUC-JIR, she serves as Head of the Hebrew Department and teaches courses on Modern Hebrew and American Jewish literatures, Holocaust literature, literature of the holidays, Reel theology, and courses dealing with gender and Judaism.

Rabbi Shirley Idelson, dean of HUC-JIR, praises Zierler as "an extraordinary teacher and scholar, whose multifaceted work reflects a rich variety of passions and interests. She brings together rigorous scholarship with the writing of poetry and fiction, and as a postmodern feminist



Zierler

Jewish scholar and writer, she integrates critical analysis with the personal convictions of an artist and a deeply religious human being. We are most fortunate to have her on the New York faculty."

Zierler's book "And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Hebrew Women's Writing," published in 2004, references the story in Genesis of Jacob's wife as an illustration of women appropriating the patriarchal legacy as their own.



Mark your calendar:

Neustadt Lectures

"Moses and Miriam in Film and in Life"

Thursday, March 3

- **Moses in the Movies: Modern Midrash**
1 p.m., University Center Great Hall, OCU campus
- **The King's Speech: Moses Speaking on Behalf of God**
2:30 p.m., University Center Great Hall, OCU campus
- **What about Miriam? A Conversation on Miriam's Story for Today**
7 p.m., Emanuel Synagogue, 900 NW 47th St., Oklahoma City

All events are free and open to the public.

For more information call 405-208-5284

Her forthcoming book, "Reel Theology: Popular Film and Jewish Religious Conversation," brings a Jewish perspective to what has been primarily a Christian endeavor of exploring religious themes in movies.

In her first two lectures, to be held in the Great Hall of the Student Center on the OCU campus, Zierler will focus on the story of Moses that has been presented or referenced in movies. In the evening, the attention turns to the sister of Moses,

where Zierler will engage her story in a conversation with Dr. Lisa Wolfe. This will be held at Emanuel Synagogue at 7 p.m. The public is invited.

Walter and Dolores Neustadt of Ardmore established this lecture series in 1983 for the purpose of strengthening understanding of the great contributions of the Judaic religious tradition to Western civilization and thought.





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

Spiritual inventory

"If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you. I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in His word I put my hope." (Psalm 130:3-5, NIV)

BY BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

Among typical life activities that I dread most, you'll find going to a department store at the very top of my list.

Without a doubt, it's an agonizing experience for me.

A trip to the dentist or the doctor? No problem! What about cutting the yard, washing the car, even painting the house? No problem!

But going shopping? Stepping inside a mall? Major problem!

So you know how I felt when I had to return a Macy's gift that was not the correct size. My wife was out of town, and the deadline for exchanging the gift meant I had to go that day.

The moment I walked in to the place, I felt my knees wobble, but I persevered and pushed on to the men's department. I stood helplessly, waiting for someone to assist me.

Standing there, I realized that high-pitched beeping sounds were occurring all around me, and every salesperson within 20 yards seemed preoccupied in an unusual activity.

Each was equipped with a bizarre gadget, like something straight out of "Star Wars." Some were on their knees, and shadows moved between the displays.

After waiting almost 10 minutes, I had enough. I approached the nearest clerk and asked, "Sir, can you help me?"

He looked up from his kneeling position and said, "Sir, you'll have to go to the cash register down the hallway. Everyone in this area is taking inventory." "Inventory?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "We're all seasonal employees that have been brought in to account for every item in the store. There is only one register open, and you'll have to go there to get waited on."

As I said previously: I hate going to department stores!

I survived but, when I got back to my car, I thought about that experience. I am perplexed that right after the rush of serving the Christmas holiday crowds most stores seem required to quickly take stock of their merchandise.

As I drove home, I thought about Christianity's designated time for taking

inventory. What does the upcoming season of Lent, which begins Feb. 10, mean for us? The 40 days of this holy season call each of us to spend time taking a spiritual inventory of our souls.

Lent is a time to personally account for your waywardness and to identify all those things that have separated you from God despite your best intentions. Lent offers us a great opportunity to reflect, seek forgiveness, and draw closer to God.

The Psalmist knew God does not count our offenses, because no one would be acquitted if God did. *"If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can serve you."*

The Psalmist declared that no one has sinned beyond forgiveness. That's the beauty of God's grace.

Someone made this statement: "God is not interested in an even score; He is interested in a holy life." God's ultimate desire is that we live in relationship with Him. God hates our sin, not because He is against us, but because He is for us! God judges our sin, not because He wants to get even, but because He wants to correct us.

God created us for fellowship with Him. Sin keeps us from experiencing that fellowship. Therefore God judges our sin in His holiness, and when we confess God forgives our sin by His grace so we can come back into a right relationship with Him.

God was willing to go as far as He could to cover our sins. He did so with the sacrifice of His only son.

Protestant reformer Martin Luther once dreamed that the Day of Judgment had come and he was standing before God.

In the dream, Satan was there, too, accusing Luther of all kinds of sins. When the Book of Life was opened, Satan pointed to transgression after transgression. Luther's heart sank.

Then Luther remembered the cross of Christ.

Turning to Satan, Luther said, "There is one entry which you have not made."

"And what is that?" Satan asked.

Triumphantly, Luther declared, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son purifies us from all sin." (1 John 1:7)

Alexander McClaren, a great preacher of the 1800s, expressed well the scope of God's forgiveness. Focusing on the exchange between Jesus and the two thieves crucified with him, Dr. McClaren said, "One thief was forgiven and saved upon the cross, that none might despair; and only one that none might presume."

Don't presume you don't need a spiritual inventory during Lent. Go to God now and ask Him to help you change your life. Don't put it off any longer. God is waiting for you to come home and, when you do, He will have mercy and abundant grace.



Bishop Hayes



Confirmation retreats

February 19-20

For grades 6-8

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Topics include: church history, understanding worship and the sacraments, doctrine and polity, and United Methodist beliefs.

Canyon Camp

Deans: Mary Richardson, 405-584-2183, richards_mary@att.net and Guy Langston, 918-232-5332, revguyo@cox.net

Egan Camp

Dean: Allen Carson, 405-258-1440, acarson@soonernet.com

www.okcamps.org (see Specialty Camps)
Sponsored by the Conference's camping ministry

Bishop's preaching schedule

FEBRUARY:

- 7: Hydro UMC
- 14: Elk City UMC
- 21: Tulsa-Centenary UMC
Crossroads/Heartland
Districts Gathering, at OKC-Wesley UMC
- 28: Cheyenne Valley UMC
Waynoka UMC
Cimarron District Gathering,
at Woodward-First UMC

MARCH:



- 6: Little Washita UMC
and Cache Creek UMC
(OIMC churches)
- 20: Norman-McFarlin UMC
- 27: Stillwater-First UMC


The bishop sometimes preaches at several locations on the same Sunday. For details, contact the host church or district office.

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Tulsa kids tune in to life lessons

BY CHRIS SCHUTZ

A child's first experience practicing a trumpet or a clarinet at home might not be exactly heavenly.

"I call it a joyful noise," said Jose Luis Hernandez, director of Sistema Tulsa, a music program at Tulsa-Boston Avenue UMC for disadvantaged children.

The after-school program is an offshoot of El Sistema, which started with 11 students in Venezuela in 1975 and has since spread around the world.

Boston Avenue's program, which is less than a year old, got a startup grant from the Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation. Senior Pastor David Wiggs said OKC-St. Luke's also helped get the program going in Tulsa.

There are 40 students so far and eight instructors from Tulsa Public Schools.

Rev. Wiggs said the program "builds a bridge so we can develop a relationship with these children and their families."

The program shows the children that "God is already at work in their lives for good," he said. The most obvious sign is "the parents of students telling us how much of a blessing it's been ... to be part of such a loving and positive environment."

When the program started, each



student got to examine the musical instruments and pick three that interested them. The Sistema Tulsa staff then selected one of those to assign to the student. The instruments belong to Boston Avenue Church, and the students are permitted to take them home for practice.

"They have to earn the right (through positive behavior) to borrow the instrument," Hernandez said.

Students from the fourth and fifth grades of three Tulsa schools (Burroughs, Chouteau, and Lee) are eligible to participate.

They arrive by bus five days a week, for a snack, homework time, and music lessons.

The students gave their first concert before Christmas. Another is planned for May 13 at Boston Avenue.



Above: Eric Noble instructs two girls on how to properly place their fingers to play a trumpet during a Sistema Tulsa music class at Boston Avenue UMC. Left: An elementary-age girl who is enrolled in Sistema Tulsa gives great effort when performing with her trumpet.

Hernandez said he sees Sistema Tulsa as a way of creating "social change through music." He holds music degrees from Texas Christian University and the University of Texas and has experience as a conductor.

The students seem to enjoy being regarded as musicians, Hernandez said. They are developing "the feeling of being someone."

Sounds of hope:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

enough that a visit to an El Sistema program in Los Angeles followed.

The Los Angeles trip was an eye-opener, Cathy said. The program was located in an area recognized as gang territory.

Despite the neighborhood, the children were engaged and excited to be there, she said. "It was more than a music program."

Cathy, who studied music at OCU, was impressed to see the children's level of musicality. The instruments they had been given to play were their most prized possessions, she said.

More than that, the Buseys saw, the program gave children hope.

Their efforts brought El Sistema to Oklahoma City in 2013. Now, "we're seeing some of the same things here in Oklahoma City," Cathy said.

So far, 220 children are enrolled, and there is a waiting list. The program draws from elementary schools within a few miles of St. Luke's.

Students are taught by a combination of college professors and private music teachers.

Music students from OCU, who are required to do volunteer service, also help. The idea of volunteer work that can make a difference appeals to them, Cathy said.

She believes the people who have



One girl's smile says it all as members of El Sistema, an after-school music program founded by OKC-St. Luke's, get ready to play.

joined El Sistema have answered God's call. She likes to say that when someone sees an opportunity and takes it, "that can't be odd. That has to be God."

The volunteers and staff "have not been picked by me or anyone else. By God," she said.

Director is Robyn Hilger, an OCU graduate and nationally certified music teacher, and a St. Luke's member.

"We're very blessed to see God at work

in our mission," she said.

Robyn sees what she calls "miracles of the moment" within El Sistema. Some of the students are struggling in school, and some of their families don't have enough food. "They will call us and ask for help. That represents a big change in our community."

Robyn sees it as "God at work providing a place where people feel safe and secure."

During a session, students also work on their homework, with tutors to help them.

The Buseys have invested \$1.5 million in the program over the last four years. "It's our responsibility to give back," Cathy said. After giving the program its start, they have sought grants and foundations' support to help it grow.

El Sistema students learn how to take care of their instruments and can take them home for practice. Some of the instruments cost \$3,000 to \$5,000, but not one has been lost, pawned or damaged, Cathy said.

When families move away, the children are allowed to take instruments with them if they think they will find ways to continue to play.

Students as young as third-graders can enroll in the program. They can continue through high school. The staff also will try to find ways to help them go on to college.

El Sistema at St. Luke's now has three full orchestras. To perform together, they travel to Rose State College, which has a venue to accommodate all of them.

Some of the children have advanced enough to even compose music for the orchestra. El Sistema offers performances by smaller ensembles at special events, such as the OKC Jazz Festival, music teacher conventions, and luncheons.

Building debt settled early

A full year ahead of schedule, Bethel United Methodist Church near Shawnee paid off the debt on its 10,500-square-foot Christian Life Center.

The mortgage-burning ceremony marking that moment was Nov. 22, with several pastors, the district superintendent, and the bishop in attendance.

Among those present were Leslie Long-Wheeler and Chris Talley, former pastors, and Dan Fletcher, who is both the current and a former pastor.

In the late 1990s, Bethel took “a leap of faith” and made plans to expand, said member Ann Orsburn. Building chairperson was Jim Jenkins; project cost was \$180,000.

Today numerous activities at the center serve the wider community, affirming the vision of the church.

The Christmas Family Project, which began in the early 1980s, is one example. The Men’s Group of Bethel UMC steers this community, school, and church effort, and the church’s building is the distribution hub.

The Men’s Group has six members, ages 60-92, said Jenkins, a retired science teacher.

The project served a total of 72

children in 31 families in December, he reported.

The men purchased clothing gifts for all the children. Bethel Schools students raised \$1,000 to purchase toys. An anonymous \$2,000 donation added to the blessings.

Students at all grade levels donated food for the families. Members of the Future Farmers of America helped sort and load the food, with oversight by adult volunteers.

The Men’s Group also provides about 40 school children with food each weekend, Jenkins noted, through the Food in a Backpack program.

“We have had many events in the center,” Orsburn said. In 2013, the church became an approved Red Cross disaster shelter.

Today the center is the location for the yearly Community Craft Show and Fish Fry, Health Fair, Sweetheart Banquet, Grief Support Group meetings,



Carl Briggs sets fire to the mortgage for the Christian Life Center at Bethel UMC, during a recent note-burning ceremony.

weddings, and reunions, Orsburn listed, and the church sponsors Boy and Girl Scouting troops.

Newest episcopal area challenges ministers

KANANA, Democratic Republic of Congo — The United Methodist Church has thousands of disciples in its newest episcopal area, established in 2012.

Deep in the forests and savannas live impoverished tribes of pygmies. Bishop Gabriel Yemba Unda of the East Congo Area has a heavy heart for these people in the far-flung areas under his care.

“We cannot ask them to leave their homes; it is for us to go where they live,” he said. Churches, schools, and clinics will come after people know God’s love, he said.

No road signs point to the pygmy village of Kanana. It takes determination and a strong back to make a pastoral call.

There are no roads into the village. A narrow dirt trail cuts through the lush vegetation. Planes and cars will get you to Tunda, but it is about 62 miles to Kanana, where Kyungu Pene Ove is the chief.

Prospère Tunda, chief of Tunda, is a life-long United Methodist. He invited Ove to become a Christian and a United Methodist.

Ngoy Lunganga Amour, a village boy, travels several kilometers to attend school at Abanga. His teacher, Assani Tshomba Lebien, is United Methodist. The boy said he knows education is important and he hopes to become a lawyer one day. (United Methodist News Service, Jan. 19)

The global church

AGENCY MOVE — This fall, the General Board of Global Ministries, located in New York City for almost 200 years, will move to its new home in Atlanta, Ga. A ground-breaking ceremony was held Jan. 19.

The missions agency purchased property from Grace UMC in Atlanta.

General Secretary Thomas Kemper stated, “For Global Ministries, ground-breaking means breaking open new spaces for innovation and collaboration.” (United Methodist News Service, Jan. 19)

MALL ASSEMBLY — Saturday shoppers at a mall in Minnetonka, Minn., saw something unusual outside Macy’s: tables where people were assembling UMCOR health kits for refugees—and signs inviting them to join in the packing, which many did.

Messiah UMC organized the “packing party” in an effort to reach new people. Over three hours, 153 people packed 1,300 health kits. Members of a girls’ basketball team were among those who stopped to help. (UMNS, Jan. 19).

DISASTER RESPONSE — When tiny Sabine Pass UMC had its sanctuary and parsonage clobbered by Hurricanes Rita and Ike, no one sent more volunteers than the North Texas Conference. Now Sabine Pass Church — which averages 18 in worship — has quickly raised and delivered \$4,000 to the North Texas Conference’s fund for victims of a deadly tornado Dec. 26 that raked communities northeast of Dallas. (UMNS, Jan. 11)

MOBILE PANTRY — For students of Arkansas State University’s two-year campuses, the burden of feeding themselves and their families was lightened when the Bread of Life Mobile Food Pantry began providing them groceries, with a truck purchased and outfitted by a grant. Clark Atkins of Harrisburg-First UMC said that 483 students and their families, including 151 children, were assisted in Fall. (UMNS, Jan. 11)

ISRAELI BANKS — The General Board of Pension and Health Benefits recently declared five Israeli banks off limits for investment, following its plan to use a human rights guideline for investments, implemented in 2015.

“We have sold our holdings in Bank Leumi and Bank Hapoalim, which represented less than \$3 million. We remain invested in approximately 18 Israeli companies that meet our investment criteria,” according to a press statement.

The board’s Human Rights Investment Policy Guideline applies to 14 regions around the world. (UMNS, Jan. 14)

PASTOR CONVICTED — A church court in Florida removed a pastor’s credentials Jan. 12 after he was found guilty of heterosexual misconduct. A laywoman brought the complaint against Errol Leslie, pastor of two Connecticut churches, who had served in the Florida Conference. He was found guilty of immorality, sexual misconduct, and disobedience to the order and discipline of the Church. (UMNS, Jan. 14)

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DETAILS

OKC: Quail Creek Country Club TULSA: Mayo Hotel



How many babies can you see? Moms and volunteers scramble to stage a photo at the church on Dec. 6 featuring the 12 children born during the year to Lost Creek's families. One child is hidden by the busy woman at left.

PHOTO BY DAVID HOLBROOK

Baby boom:

'There's this dynamic of a new church held within this church with a rich history' – Max Rudd

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

This church offers Holy Communion every week. Sunday School is the preferred small-group format, and both Sunday morning worship services are traditional.

Statistics show between 17 and 20 percent of Sunday worshippers are third-graders or younger. Lost Creek welcomed four more members on Jan. 10, and already two babies are expected in 2016.

All Lost Creek's people participate in church life "in some meaningful, concrete way. It's just expected here," said the pastor. A 6-year-old's mission idea illustrates his point.

After taking part in Lost Creek's annual Volunteers In Mission (VIM) trip to Belize, Alexandra Petermann wanted to make Christmas merrier for a village's children. Church VIM teams have served in Belize for 16 years, Rudd said.

For a \$3 donation, the girl colored an angel picture; all the money and pictures were sent for a children's party in the village.

More than \$900 was collected! Rudd said half the amount provided a grand outdoor Christmas party for 100-plus children as well as boxes of food for 40 families. The other half will fund an Easter party for them.



PHOTO BY DAVID HOLBROOK

"That's what we talk about when we talk about the culture of this church: a 6-year-old can vision this and bring it to fruit," Rudd said. "That plays out in multiple roles all the time" at Lost Creek.

Such vibrant lay ministry grows both informally and through training opportunities. Officers serve in three-year cycles.

Every other year, Rudd teaches a leadership class. "We develop a common vocabulary," he said. Topics include:

- how a committee functions;
- appropriate conversation and behavior for a committee meeting; and



Left: Pastor Max Rudd prepares to hang an ornament in honor of his new grandson, Harrison, on Lost Creek's sanctuary Christmas tree. Above: The country church south of Stillwater is more than a century old. The church has been enlarged three times. The original building sits in right foreground.

• identifying and appreciating different leadership styles.

The book "Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations," by Bishop Robert Schnase, "resonated" with the people when the congregation studied it, the pastor noted.

Rudd has pastored at Lost Creek for 40 years, but his was a bivocational ministry until 2011. (He also was a school psychologist for 35 years.) Lost Creek needed all its people to share in the work because of Rudd's dual duties in that era — and they continue in that commitment.

"You don't just go somewhere and stay 40 years; I see four or five distinct congregations that I've pastored in that time," Rudd said. "I see how I've had to change. And veteran leaders are always looking for their replacements."

"Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-

making occurs," states the United Methodist *Book of Discipline*.

Lost Creek counted 10 members when Rudd became pastor in 1976. Membership reported in 2015 was 412 people, with 199 attending worship weekly.

MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) programming kicked off in September — more proof of the impact by the diapered dozen on this church's ministry. Lost Creek's United Methodist Women give enthusiastic support, including funding, and Rudd prepares supper for the moms "because I want to."

About 60 percent of the women who attend are from the community beyond the church, the pastor said. "I've been floored by what an outreach it is. The friendships that are forged there! Any church might consider it," he suggested.



CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE Bob Zellner, center, was named a living legend by TIME Magazine in 2014. He spoke Jan. 18 in Lawton at Cameron University's 32nd Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Celebration banquet. Some 60 years ago, Zellner worked with Dr. King, Rosa Parks, and others battling racism. His activism continues; in 2013 he was arrested for civil disobedience in North Carolina. Sponsors of the MLK Day events in Lawton include the Wesley Foundation at CU, directed by Brandon Dollarhite. College and high school students volunteer in the city that day. With Zellner are Bishop Robert Hayes Jr., left, and Rev. Dollarhite.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH HARRIS

Project:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

intercultural awareness project led by Ramirez is one such effort.

With grant money from the General Commission on Religion & Race (GCORR), he began offering diversity training to various leadership groups last year. He has presented to the Board of Laity, Cabinet, Annual Conference Council (ACC), Department of Communications, and others.

Demographic research that he uses underscores the urgency to connect the Church with more people of varied cultures.

In the U.S., 90 percent of United Methodists are white. But that's not true of the wider population. One Oklahoma example: In the Panhandle, the population of whites in Texas County is 42 percent.

"We have the greatest theology, the greatest story" of God's saving grace, Ramirez said about United Methodism. But statistics clearly show the Church's numbers and influence continue to dwindle, especially where populations are growing in diversity.

"We are an endangered species," Ramirez has told Oklahoma's leaders.

The GCORR-funded project develops intercultural relationships as a countermeasure.

This new "language of culture" takes work to learn. Church leaders complete Intercultural Development Inventories. Ramirez assesses and reports their skill measurements. Each leader can create a

personal plan for growth.

He challenges them: What makes you uncomfortable and why? "Be honest with yourself. How your answer is due to your culture."

The project does not seek to change a person's core values. The term *intercultural* does not mean *better than*, he explained to the officers.

"We have our differences; build skills that will allow you to gain what is needed. We are just trying to communicate. Stop seeing *us* and *them*. See the people in your neighborhood."

Challenge to leaders

He asks boards to rethink recruiting, budgeting, even church planting, with diversity clearly in mind.

He encourages intentional outreach in mixed-economic areas, not only places of white affluence. According to researchers, U.S. ethnic diversity will continue growing — "and fairly fast" — and the white population will cease to be a majority.

Ramirez, to describe a few cultural differences, told stories referencing his Hispanic heritage, but the project's goal to disciple all kinds of people remained paramount.

- "Despierta America" is the Spanish-language equivalent of daily TV's "Today Show." But the former spends 20 minutes on horoscopes instead of news.

- Hispanic guests arrive late to parties because they don't want to appear needy.

- A schoolteacher's authority is unquestioned by Hispanic parents

because, in their culture, power rests with the teacher. That also applies to pastors.

- 67 percent of Hispanics/Latinos in Oklahoma are native-born.

Intercultural awareness "is not a short task," Ramirez said. How to identify people willing to be bridges?

Board of Laity member Aly Shahan responded, "We are accountable to go out and share this information."

The board "has to get past putting people in boxes," said Lay Leader Chuck Stewart. "Don (Kim) isn't THE Asian representative; Aly's not THE young mom representative. It's all of us."

Other wisdom surfaced in a book review group led by Ramirez.

"When we do need and depend on one another, astounding things happen in our discipleship experience," said Roger Parker, who chairs the Hispanic Ministry Committee.

Relationships build hope

OKC-Quail Springs Pastor David Clewell added, "The hope amid forces that would destroy us is to find each other and connect and love one another."

"This conversation could help us as we go forward. It helps me," said Rockford Johnson, Crossroads District superintendent.

To contact Ramirez about this project, email Cramirez@okumc.org. He is a UM missionary, serving in the Oklahoma Conference Office of Mission as Hispanic/Latino Ministry director. His missionary support code is 3021528.

NEW MISSIONARY — Calley Piland, right, meets with Conference Office of Mission staff on Jan. 8 in Oklahoma City. In foreground is Hispanic Ministry Director Carlos Ramirez. From Austin, Texas, Piland was commissioned in October as a missionary with the General Board of Global Ministries. She is assigned to Guatemala, where she'll work with Volunteers In Mission. The Methodist Church in Guatemala has 12,000 members in 132 congregations. The GBGM Advance code for Piland is 3022138.

PHOTO BY HOLLY MCCRAY



The DVD Library

Two resources have been added to the DVD library at the Oklahoma Conference Ministry Center. They are:

- **"Invitation to the New Testament,"** by David A. deSilva, professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ashland, Ohio, and Emerson B. Powery, who chairs the Department of Theology and Christian Origins at Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn. The kit consists of eight segments on DVD and comes with guides for leaders and participants.

- **"A Thrill of Hope, the Christmas Story in Word and Art."** Includes discussion guide. The 50-minute DVD presents the familiar story of Christmas as told in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew. The production is from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University and Morehouse Education Resources.

To check out these or other materials call Chris Schutz at 405-530-2075 or email her at cschutz@okumc.org. Find all titles in the library's collection at www.okumc.org/resource/library

Appointments

Taud Boatman, from Owasso associate to El Reno-Wesley pastor, effective Feb. 1.

Allen Buck Jr., from Edmond-Summit church planter to OKC-Quail Springs associate, effective Jan. 1.

Lisa Crone, from transitional leave to Bereavement Coordinator for Amedisys Hospice, Morgantown, W.Va., effective Dec. 28, 2015.

Passages

BYRD — Joyce Byrd, 73, of Oklahoma City died Jan. 20, 2016. She was the wife of Rev. Steve Byrd, a retired director of Criminal Justice and Mercy Ministries.

She also is survived by two daughters, Stephany Volkl and Lori Lopez, and a son, Aaron Byrd.

Service was Jan. 30 at OKC-Penn Avenue Redemption UMC, where she was a member.

Memorial gifts to: OKC-Penn Avenue Church.

Correction

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

Employment

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

Two openings: Tulsa-Faith UMC. Both part-time. Children's Ministry Associate: email resume to Laura at laldridge@faithtulsa.org. Contemporary Music Assistant Leader: email resume to James at jlambert@faithtulsa.org.

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

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

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



BETTER STORIES



Better Stories — Jackie

Unable to afford standard dental treatment, Jackie was embarrassed by her own smile. Fortunately, Neighborhood Services Organization's (NSO) Dental Clinic offers low-cost, high-quality dental services to residents in Oklahoma. There are no income or insurance requirements to be a patient.

The Dental Clinic at NSO provided the services to give Jackie a new, bright smile, and she is no longer ashamed of her teeth.

NSO is supported by funds from an endowment set up and managed by the

Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation.

LEGACY PLANNING THROUGH ENDOWMENTS

An endowment fund is a very tangible way to create a family legacy. Endowment funds are easy to establish. They can be established now with current gifts of cash, securities or real estate, or they can be created later through a gift from your will or trust.

An endowment fund preserves the principal and provides annual payments

forever. It serves as a witness to your foresight and commitment to ministry. It is a way to make a significant difference tomorrow by doing something today.

TO HEAR THE WHOLE STORY...

Read about Jackie on our website, www.okumf.org/betterstories

DO YOU WANT TO TELL A BETTER STORY?

Contact David Battles at 800-259-6863 or dbattles@okumf.org for information on how you can tell a Better Story through a legacy gift.

THE OKLAHOMA UNITED METHODIST FOUNDATION
4201 N CLASSEN BOULEVARD, OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73118-2400
WWW.OKUMF.ORG • 800-259-6863



MILESTONE DATE

— Konawa's oldest and youngest members pose with the bishop and pastor as the church marks 111 years on Jan. 10. A new mission statement and logo also were unveiled that day. Seated is Milton Courtney, holding Bennett Preston and Corbin Joslin; standing are Bishop Robert Hayes Jr. and Steve Littrell, Konawa-First UMC pastor. Festivities included memories shared by former pastors, preaching by the bishop, special music, a slideshow, and lunch. Gifts were presented to the bishop and his wife, Dee.



Ada invites Lake Country District to retreat

Wendy Miller will lead a Lenten retreat on Feb. 13 at Ada's First United Methodist Church.

The morning retreat will begin with a complimentary brunch at 8:30 and will conclude at noon.

Pastors and lay people of the Lake Country District especially are invited and encouraged to attend.

Rev. Miller is an adjunct professor of Spiritual Formation at Perkins seminary, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. She is the author of several books on fasting, prayer, and meditation.

She has led spiritual retreats across the country and is recognized as an outstanding teacher, bringing renewal and revitalization to churches. She is a member of the Virginia Mennonite Conference.

David Daniel, lead pastor of Ada-First, highly recommends Miller. At Perkins, she currently is teaching "a course that I'm taking toward my doctoral degree."

There is no registration fee, but the church will appreciate knowing in advance your plans to attend. Call Carol at 580-332-1398 or e-mail carolhayden@cablone.net

Tulsa agency helps veterans find homes

A group working to combat homelessness among veterans in the Tulsa area has surpassed the goal it set for the end of 2015.

United Methodist-related Restore Hope Ministries is among the 23 partner agencies working together in the *Zero: 2016* effort.

The group, which is called "A Way Home for Tulsa," announced that it found housing for 298 veterans in 2015, surpassing its goal of 290. The group also housed 78 other people experiencing chronic homelessness.

"I have never seen this level of

strategy and collaboration among Tulsa-area nonprofits, and the number of individuals experiencing homelessness we were able to house is simply incredible," said Jeff Jaynes, executive director of Restore Hope and chairman of A Way Home for Tulsa.

"We have a moral obligation to make sure those who served our country do not find themselves without a home."

"I like to describe it as a boat with a hole in the bottom that is filling with water," Jaynes said. "Housing our homeless neighbors is like emptying water from the boat."