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Cover photo

Read about the Great Plains Conference’s camps — Camp Chippewa, Camp Comeca, Camp Fontanelle, Camp Horizon and Camp Norwesca — on pages 8-10.

What is a Vital Congregation?



Bishop Scott J. Jones

View the bishop’s blog at greatplainsumc.org/bishopsblog

All of us want our congregation to be vital, healthy and alive. We talk a lot about vital congregations. But American culture is changing and being the church is not as easy as it once was. In such an environment we have to be much more intentional about vitality and our purpose as the church.

Let’s go back to the basics. Article V of our UMC Confession of Faith (found in the Book of Discipline or online at www.umc.org/what-we-believe/confession-of-faith#Church) says this: “We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ’s own appointment. Under the

discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.”

When it talks about the Word of God, John Wesley’s sermons (another doctrinal standard) teaches us that the general tenor of Scripture is about the way of salvation — God’s grace helping persons move from sin through repentance and justification to sanctification.

Thus, a vital congregation is one where people are regularly experiencing God’s grace on that journey of salvation. Every healthy church has a discipleship system that moves people from wherever they are toward the goal that God has in mind for each human being. That goal is to be sanctified — so filled with the love of God and love of neighbor that everything they do is done for the Lord.

Paragraph 122 outlines the process: We make disciples as we:

- Proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather persons into the body of Christ;
- Lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;
- Nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines and other means of grace, such as Wesley’s Christian conferencing;
- Send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and
- Continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.

How is your congregation doing on each of these steps?

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Scott J. Jones".



Bishop Scott J. Jones,
Resident Bishop
Great Plains United Methodist Conference
@Extreme_Center

From your lay leader

Prayer warriors

The beginning of a new year is a hopeful time — a welcome sentiment in a world in need of hope. This past October, I was fortunate to attend the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) Gala to benefit the pastoral endowment, raising money to support the salaries of clergy in the OIMC, who are among the lowest paid in our connection. The OIMC is one of the Great Plains’ mission relationship fundraising initiatives. I know personally from seeing first-hand the wonderful ministry and family relationships built and sustained in the OIMC. They do so much — with so little — and are part of the amazing work that God is blessing. Their work fills me with great hope for our church.



Courtney Fowler

A highlight of the evening was the live auction where I was the successful bidder of an original oil painting by native artist Brent Greenwood. The picture is called “Prayer Warriors.” And even the name is meaningful to me — because of the implied mission to which we have been called. Prayer. Active, living and unceasing. Now and in the coming months, all of our prayers will be needed in this manner.

As I prepare to lead the Great Plains delegation to General Conference next May, I invite you to join me on this journey of prayer, praying and placing our trust in God and God’s vision for building a sustaining faith community, not only in Kansas and Nebraska, but all over God’s great earth.

Imagine if we all engaged in prayer in this manner. What would that mean for our own faith journey, our lives and our churches? My prayer is that we will focus on the hope Jesus brings, filling us all with forgiveness and love. I’ll say this — it remains an ongoing process. And that process is prayer. What will you leave behind you in yesterday? And what will you carry with you tomorrow? Prayer. Let us all become prayer warriors.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY COURTNEY FOWLER

A photograph of “Prayer Warriors,” an oil painting by native artist, Brent Greenwood.

Like the laity’s Facebook page at facebook.com/greatplainslaity and follow Courtney on Twitter at twitter.com/c24fowler

Courtney

Courtney Fowler
Conference Lay Leader

Conference events

Conference events are posted at greatplainsumc.org/events

Jan. 8-9

Candidacy Summit, Salina, Kansas

Jan.12

Boundary 201 training, Salina, Kansas

Jan.13

Boundary 201 training,
Great Bend, Kansas

Jan. 16

ERT training, Salina, Kansas

Jan. 25-29

Licensing School, Concordia, Kansas

Jan. 30-31

The OneEvent, Grand Island, Nebraska

Feb. 13

Bishop’s Confirmation Rally,
Hays, Kansas

Feb. 13

Nebraska Ecumenical Legislative
Briefing Day, Lincoln, Nebraska

Feb. 17

Orders and Fellowship,
Lincoln, Nebraska

Feb. 20

Bishop’s Confirmation Rally,
Emporia, Kansas

Feb. 21-22

Kansas Legislative Event for Advocacy
in Faith (LEAF), Topeka, Kansas

March 5

Bishop’s Confirmation Rally,
Lincoln, Nebraska

March 5

ERT training, Reading, Kansas

May 10-20

2016 General Conference,
Portland, Oregon

June 1-4

Great Plains Annual Conference Session,
Topeka, Kansas

June 6-10

Licensing School, Aurora, Nebraska

June 18

Bishop’s Bicycle Challenge,
Wichita, Kansas

July 13-16

South Central Jurisdictional Conference,
Wichita, Kansas

July 28-29

Licensing School, Great Bend, Kansas

Great Plains partners with Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference

By **TODD SEIFERT**,
communications director

The “Trail of Tears” – the forced relocation of Native Americans from the eastern United States to what is now Oklahoma – will forever be a stain on our nation’s history. But one positive impact came from the Indian Removal Act of 1830: When natives of the North American continent moved westward, they brought with them Christian beliefs.

In fact, they brought with them Wesleyan theology in what was at the time the fast-growing Methodist tradition. Not too many years later – 1844, to be exact – the General Conference of the then-Methodist Episcopal Church created the Indian Mission to serve native people who had been transplanted in the central part of the United States.

Today, that tradition of blending the rich Native American culture with Wesleyan theology continues with

the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC). The vast majority of congregations are located in Oklahoma, but worshippers also gather throughout Kansas and parts of Texas and Missouri.

“Most people don’t realize that the church we serve, the denomination we hold dear, United Methodism, had its roots (in the Midwest) from Native Americans who came along the Trail of Tears,” said Bishop Robert Hayes of the Oklahoma Conference. “The seed of Methodism was planted in the east before the Trail of Tears and brought to eastern Oklahoma.”

Those seeds have blossomed in many ways, with the OIMC now

serving as home to more than 6,000 members in 84 churches.

The Rev. Patrick Freeman served in the OIMC as well as churches in

This is the first in a three-part series on cross-cultural mission partnerships being supported by the Great Plains Conference in the South Central Jurisdiction and around the world. Be sure to watch future issues of “GPconnect” to hear about the Zimbabwe East Conference and the Lydia Patterson Institute.

Kansas prior to retiring as a United Methodist pastor. He credits the ministry and service he both witnessed and took part in as key parts of his own foundation as a pastor. He said it’s important for people to understand the history of the OIMC and its reach to native people in Oklahoma and beyond.

“It goes way back to North Carolina and Tennessee,” Freeman said. “Over the years, as they brought the church, it was a Methodist-connected church, but not as organized as it is today.”

The connection through the United Methodist Church provides support to the OIMC, with some of those resources coming from the Great Plains Conference. The Great Plains, in its 2015 annual conference session in June, voted to raise \$100,000 each for three cross-cultural mission partnerships – the OIMC, the Lydia Patterson Institute and the Zimbabwe East Conference. The money for the OIMC is designated to assist with an endowment to bolster salaries for pastors serving within that conference.

The Rev. David Wilson,



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Choptaw dancers provided a cultural exhibition during the OIMC gala in October, 2015, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

superintendent of the OIMC, said the assistance from the Great Plains is appreciated because of the need to raise salaries in his conference. The OIMC provides a base salary that is dependent on a pastor's education.

"For instance, a pastor with a master's of divinity degree will start out making "\$27,800," Wilson said. "That's the base salary. It doesn't mean you have the opportunity to go to a larger church that pays a larger salary because it doesn't exist. If you think about that salary, it puts many of our pastors right at the poverty level.

"So it really is about a person's commitment – commitment to Christ and commitment to wanting to serve a Native American congregation."

One way the OIMC tried this year to maintain and actually bolster salaries was to conduct a gala in October in Oklahoma City. The event featured a silent auction and dinner, the expense of which was donated by the Chickasaw Nation, with all of the proceeds going to the OIMC salary endowment.

With some money still coming in, Wilson reported in mid-November that the gala raised about \$85,000 for the endowment, a \$14,000 improvement over the previous gala.



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

A hymn sung by the Muscogee Creek tribe was among the songs sung at the OIMC gala.

"We were very pleased with the amount of people that attended the gala," Wilson said. "We had close to 300 persons present from Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas. The presence of so many showed us their concern for the future of OIMC and it also showed that they believe in who we are and what we are doing."

The Great Plains Conference, which sent a contingent of approximately 10 people to the event to show support,

received recognition during the gala. In particular, a gift was presented to Copeland United Methodist Church from the Dodge City District. This church, with attendance of approximately 24 per week, made a donation of \$10,000 to the Great Plains Conference's fund-raising drive to help the pastors' salary endowment. Penney Schwab, a member of the church, said a special gift to the church helped make the size of the donation possible. Because some of the church's members are Chickasaw and because Copeland United Methodist Church's members understand the difficulties that small churches often face, the church's Missions Committee voted to make what is meant to be a "kick-off" gift for the fund-raising campaign.

"It was wonderful to be part of such a culturally rich event to raise money for pastors who are doing the work that God is blessing," said Courtney Fowler, Great Plains Conference lay leader and a member of the delegation that attended the gala. "I'm so proud of the Mission Committee at Copeland United Methodist Church. They are truly an example that size is not a barrier to mission, and they gave generously for a cause they believed in."

Bishop Hayes spoke to attendees at the gala and expressed his optimism for the future of the OIMC.

"This is not about us trying to be separate or distinct. It's about us being in union together with one another, trying to accomplish the goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ," he said.

He continued to express his hope that the OIMC would remain a leader in the effort to spread the gospel of Christ to Native Americans while preserving their culture.



PHOTO BY TODD SEIFERT

Bishop Robert Hayes takes part in a dance during the OIMC gala in October, 2015, in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

"I believe that OIMC will raise up a new nation of gifted, qualified leaders that will change the course of how ministry is done among native people," Bishop Hayes said. "I believe that OIMC will be a leader in re-establishing native languages among its people and tribes. I believe that in our lifetime, the support of our pastors will be competitive and fundamentally sound so that we can attract younger and gifted pastors."



NUMB announces 2016 route

The route for the Nebraska United Methodist Bike Ride for Hunger (NUMB) 2016 will start and end at Milford UMC. The anticipated 150 riders will journey to Wymore UMC on the first day of the ride. From Wymore they will head west and spend the night at Hebron UMC. The final night on the road will be hosted by Sutton UMC. NUMB 2016 will be the 21st year for this ride that raises awareness and funds to address the cause of hunger around the world. Since the first ride in 1996 more than \$793,000 has been donated to various hunger causes around the world.

Registration for NUMB 2016 will open Jan. 17, 2016. Riders may register at www.numbride.org.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY NUMB'S FACEBOOK



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PHOTOS BY CINDY KELLY

Start thinking now about summer church camps

By DAVID BURKE,
communications coordinator

Thoughts of swimming pools, horseback riding and summertime camp fires may seem worlds away from a January in the Great Plains, but now is the perfect time to start thinking of summer church camps.

“The school year is always so busy, and camp sometimes ends up playing second fiddle,” said Trent Meyer, director of Camp Fontanelle, near Fontanelle, Neb. “Camp is such a life-altering experience for so many kids, and the spiritual well-being of kids should be the first priority.”

The Great Plains Conference offers five camps in the two-state region, and one camp associated with the conference.

Each offers not only outdoor fun and activities, but a spiritual growth that keeps the campers coming back year after year.



Past and present campers were asked (on Facebook and through the electronic “GPconnect”) to describe their thoughts, feelings and experiences of United Methodist camps in one word. Those word now make up the flame on the previous page.

“Kids are busy, really busy nowadays,” said Sara Shaw, coordinator of camping ministries for the Great Plains Conference. “Kids are busy and really guarded with their time.”

Shaw said camps are a great way for young people to unplug from the world around them.

“Kids and youth get their first glimpse of life in a nonjudgmental world,” Shaw said. “It’s something different for them. If you fail, OK, then you try again.”

Church camp, Shaw said, sometimes carries the stigma of being nothing but worship and Bible study. But there are activities that include swimming, horseback riding, archery and many other opportunities.

“Just about everything we do in camp is tied back to a lesson in the Bible,” she added.

While youth and their families

should discuss church camp in January, so should their churches, said Joel Wilke, director of Camp Horizon, near Arkansas City, Kan.

“They need to have a few things planned out ahead of time,” Wilke said, including how many scholarships to camp each church will offer.

“They need to start planning fundraisers now,” he added.

Sending youth to camp benefits the church and the community, said Wilke, entering his fifth year as director at Camp Horizon.

“They’re not only on fire for God, they become passionate about their faith community back home,” he said. “Camps can act as a kickstarter and a catalyst.”

While some youth go on mission trips during the summer with the goal

See CAMPS on page 10

CAMP continued from page 9

of helping others, camping provides direct dividends to a church, Wilke said.

“We’re transforming campers’ lives, and it’s strengthening their own congregations,” he said. “It’s so their own ministries can be stronger.”

For 2016, Wilke said, Camp Horizon is converting a former 70-year-old dining hall into a 50-bed dormitory called the Inspiration Lodge.

Camp Fontanelle is creating an open-air wooden fort for campfire and worship, using cedar trees from the camp area, Meyer said.

Meyer, in his 12th year at Fontanelle, said his own camping experience from ages 13-18 years led him to direct camps so others can have the same experience.

“It can be a nucleus or an incubator where the passion for their faith can sprout,” he said.

Near Ottawa, Kansas
www.campchippewa.org



Near Cozad, Nebraska
www.campcomeca.com



Near Nickerson, Nebraska
www.campfontanelle.com



Near Arkansas City, Kansas
www.horizoncenter.org



Near Chadron, Nebraska
www.norwesca.org



Near Scott City, Kansas
www.camlakeside.net



Disciples nurtured at Kansas United Methodist college

By **BRITT BRADLEY**, *Institute for Discipleship at Southwestern College*

Set high on a hill overlooking the Walnut River Valley in Winfield, Kansas, Southwestern College looks much like any other small college. But this United Methodist college — one of four affiliated schools in the Great Plains Conference — is doing more than just offering classes and awarding degrees, it's forming disciples.

Southwestern is home to two different programs which engage in spiritual formation and help students become dedicated disciples, committed Christians and future church leaders. Worship Outreach, started in 1993, teaches students how to lead music in worship and develop their gifts as musicians. And Discipleship has grown from a Disciple Bible study group in 1996 to a four-year program, with students moving through their college years together in covenant groups.

Discipleship Southwestern

"If you want to grow in your faith, this is a great place to be," says Discipleship director Molly Just, a provisional elder in the Great Plains Conference.

Just should know — she was a part of Discipleship during her years at Southwestern under then-director Ashlee Alley, who now acts as the Clergy Recruitment and Development coordinator for the Great Plains.

Just frames the program's core values as faith formation, holistic education, community, meaningful service, leadership and fun. Commitment is another defining feature — students

apply to be a part of the program and commit to small groups, Bible study,



PHOTO BY BRITT BRADLEY

The Rev. Molly Just speaks to her Discipleship class on Feb. 11, 2015.

and mission work in community with one another. They don't need to come in as experts in the Bible and Christian community, though.

"Discipleship is an open community where you can come and learn and grow in your own faith, and you can be from any walk of life," says Tana Tyler, a junior in the program from Salina, Kansas. "Whether you're wanting to become a pastor or you've only read one book of the Bible — you can still learn a lot and develop your faith."

Worship Outreach

Most people know that music can be a powerful way of connecting with God, but music requires musicians, and even good musicians require training to lead worship well. That's where Worship Outreach seeks to step in and fill a gap.

As with Discipleship, students apply to be a part of Worship Outreach. Director Martin Rude looks for students who have been involved with music or praise bands in the past, who have musical, tech or video skills, and who are interested in learning.

Once a part of the class, students in Worship Outreach focus on three questions each year: Who is Jesus Christ, what did he come to do and what difference does that make to me?

"There's really a fourth question that comes out of that, too, which is what do you want to do to express and share that difference you feel?" adds Rude. "What is God doing in your life, and what is God calling you to step forward in the near future, in three years, and beyond?"

To help guide that discernment process, Rude sits down with each student every semester to help them outline a personal plan for their growth as musicians and disciples.



PHOTO BY BRITT BRADLEY

Martin Rude speaks at the premier of the Worship Outreach music videos in November 2015.

"They can decide that that means improving in one instrument, learning another instrument, learning how to produce, shoot video or run the sound board," says Rude.

And while it seems as if musicianship would be the primary focus in a class like this, Rude says that Worship Outreach is roughly 80 percent philosophy and religion and only 20 percent performing arts students.

Connect online
www.greatplainsumc.org



Follow Worship Outreach at [facebook.com/worshipoutreach](https://www.facebook.com/worshipoutreach). You can also visit www.greatplainsumc.org/umuniversities to find a link to read the full story about Southwestern's programs.

Mayor remains church pastor, thanks to dad

By **SAM HODGES**, *United Methodist News Service*

The Rev. Mark Holland needed help when he was elected mayor of Kansas City, Kansas, and not just at city hall.

Holland knew that if he was going to be a full-time mayor and continue as senior pastor at Trinity Community Church, he would require pastoral reinforcement. So he recruited his dad, the Rev. Ron Holland, a retired United Methodist elder.

And for the past couple of years, the father has been his son's associate at Trinity, a United Methodist congregation. Mark, 46, preaches on Sunday and works as mayor through the week. Ron, 76, handles church administration and pastoral care.

Said son: "It's been a great opportunity to work with my dad at my side."

Said father: "I love the role reversal – to have the son be in charge, and I'm just working as an extension of his ministry. I'm having a ball."

A pastor-mayor's agenda

Mark Holland grew up wanting to be a United Methodist pastor. But, according to his father, Mark also showed an early interest in politics and public service while an undergraduate at Southern Methodist University. He earned a master's of divinity degree from Iliff School of Theology in Denver and a doctorate of ministry degree from St. Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, both United Methodist schools. He was ordained in 1994 and began his appointment at Trinity five years later.

As a pastor, Mark Holland served on community boards, and in 2007 was elected an at-large commissioner for the unified Wyandotte County/Kansas City government. Holland ran for mayor of that government in 2013, gaining endorsement from the Kansas City Star and from the outgoing mayor. Though a Democrat, he was elected on a non-partisan basis with 56 percent of the votes.

Kansas City, Kansas, presents challenges, with chronically high unemployment and other urban woes.

"It's improved my prayer life, that's for sure," Holland said of serving as mayor.

Holland has focused on economic development, a "healthy communities" initiative and innovation in providing government services. Mindful of racial turmoil in Ferguson, Missouri, he's worked to further integration

of the public safety force. And he's tried to make sure more of those jobs go to residents of Kansas City and Wyandotte County.

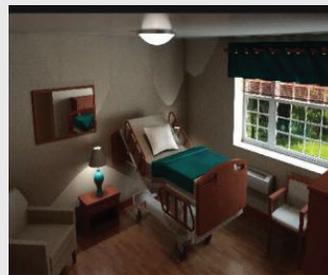
"I can't ask other big employers to hire local if we're not modeling that in government," he said.

Holland also has organized a mayor's clergy roundtable, which meets quarterly and recently decided to focus on homelessness. Of course, the mayor himself is a clergyman – and one who sees no contradiction in his dual roles.

"I think as a pastor we're appointed to a community, and not just to a church – appointed to a mission field, in terms of serving the community in any way we can," Holland said.

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'Different gifts'

Meanwhile, back at the church, Ron Holland tends to administrative details and handles (with the help of another pastor and a seminary intern) hospital visits, weddings, funerals and other pastoral work. He's paid a small stipend, without benefits, for 10 hours a week, though the work often goes beyond that. He'd been an interim pastor after his retirement, so filling in is nothing new.

"There are headaches," Ron Holland acknowledged. "I kind of call it the 'drama du jour.' I operate pretty much out of my cell phone."

When he can, Mark Holland chairs the weekly church staff meeting. When he can't, his father does. If Ron Holland feels Mark needs to make a certain hospital visit, he'll let him know. They're in touch regularly through the week.

"We have enough trust with each other that we can do stuff on the phone in about 30 seconds," Ron Holland said. "He knows that if I send him a text I need an answer."

Mark Holland notes that not everybody in the church has been happy about the arrangement, either because they don't think pastors should be in politics or just want him around more.

"I don't go on all the hospital visits, and I don't return all the phone calls," he

said. "There's been some grief around that both for me and the congregation."

But he believes things have smoothed out in the last year. Pat Gates, lay leader, sounds far more affirmative.

"It's wonderful to have both Ron Holland and Mark Holland serving the church," she said. "They have different gifts. They have pretty much the same heart for service to the community."

Mark Holland, Gates said, has cast a multicultural vision for the church, which averages about 140 in worship. Ron Holland shares that vision and excels at administration, she added.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY RON HOLLAND

The Rev. Mark Holland and the Rev. Ron Holland, seen here in 2007, are a son-father leadership team at Trinity Community Church, a United Methodist congregation. The arrangement has allowed Mark to work full time as mayor of Kansas City, Kansas.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY MARK HOLLAND

The Rev. Mark Holland joins a Meals on Wheels route in Kansas City, Kansas. He's pastor of Trinity Community Church, a United Methodist congregation, as well as mayor of Kansas City, Kansas.

For Mark Holland – who with his wife, Julie Solomon, has four children – absence from Trinity has made his heart fonder.

"It's easy when you're in the church day to day to get caught up in the mechanics," he said. "Sometimes Sunday feels like another work day. Now that I'm not in the church every day of the week, I really look forward to that worship moment."

The son-father pastor team could be in place at Trinity for quite a while. Mark Holland plans to run in 2017 for another four-year term.

"His social conscience is a deep part of his Christianity," his father said. "He believes deeply that the municipal-county government should be a part of caring for people."

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Death notices

The Rev. Carroll French, 82, a retired clergy member, died, Oct. 8, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife, Tove French. Survivors include children, Kirsten Wettlaufer, Niels French and Inge Sthreshley. Memorial contributions may be made to Page (Nebraska) UMC, Page Cemetery Association and Samuteb Hospital in Kapanga, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Doris, Garrison, 90, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Nov. 2, 2015. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Elton Garrison, and children, Sue Lynn, Dana, Renee and Andrew.

The Rev. Paul R. Hett, 96, a retired clergy member, died Sept. 10, 2015. He is preceded in death by his first wife, Catherine. Survivors include wife, Jane, children, Susan Moller, Nancy Rehmert, and step-children, Jeffrey Ellis and Jim Ellis. Memorial contributions may be made to Wesley UMC in Parsons, Kasnas.

The Rev. Conley Kent Hinrichs, 90, retired clergy member, died Oct. 24, 2015. Survivors include wife, Elsie, and children, Jim Hinrichs and Joel Hinrichs. Memorial contributions may be made to Lincoln (Nebraska) First UMC, Nebraska Wesleyan University, United Nations or to the family for future designation.

Shirley Holden Carpenter, 83, a retired associate clergy member, died Nov. 26, 2015. Survivors include children, Carl Carpenter, Scott Carpenter, Eric Carpenter, Michele Spaulding, Janice Carpenter Weidner and Christy Nickels. Memorial contributions may be sent to Saint Joseph's Indian School.

Connie Jo Jones, 77, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Oct. 13, 2015. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Doug Jones, and children, Stefanie Bleich and Ron Jones. Memorial contributions may be made to your local church.

Hilda Zoe "Zodie" Kaye, 95, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Oct. 8, 2015. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Philip Kaye, and children, Margie O'Meara and the Rev. Nancy Kaye-Skinner.

The Rev. Gerald Arthur Martin, 87, a retired clergy member, died Nov. 9, 2015. Survivors include his wife, Luella Martin, and children, Ken Martin, Fay Martin, Vonda McKenna, LaDona Martin-Frost and Shauna Martin. Memorial contributions may be made to Planting Hope International, c/o Neil, Schwensen and Rook Funeral Home at 918 7th St. in Clay Center, KS 67432.

Uriel Bernell McNeill Baldwin, 93, the surviving spouse of a clergy member, died Sept. 13, 2015. She was preceded in death by her husband, the Rev. Dr. William J. Baldwin. Survivors include children Janice Schaeffer, Judy Oilver, Joyce Denton and Phil Baldwin. Memorial contributions may be made to Wichita's First UMC TV Ministry, Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice or Youthville.

The Rev. Arnold Roland Jr., 80, a retired associate member, died Sept. 19, 2015. Survivors include his wife, Frankie Roland, and children, Dan Roland, Sean Roland, Ruth Roland and Melissa Hamilton. Memorial contributions may be made to Pikes Peak Hospice and Palliative Care, 2550 Tenderfoot Hill St., Colorado Springs, CO 80906.

The Rev. John Melvin Snook, 81, a retired clergy member, died Sept. 21, 2015. Survivors include his wife Marian Snook, and children, Carmen Hall, Carleen Wade, Cherie Vanderploeg and John Snook II. Memorial contributions may be made to The Journey Home, 3406 S.E. Kentucky Ave. Bartlesville, OK. 74006, or the Comforting Hands Hospice 2450 S.E. Washington Blvd. Bartlesville, OK. 74006.

Donna Elaine (Stice) Stewart Stanton, 82, the spouse of a retired clergy member, died Sept. 13, 2015. She was preceded in death by her first husband, Alan Stewart. Survivors include her husband, the Rev. Delbert Stanton, and children, Douglas, Ryan and Kelly. Memorial contributions may be made to Stockton UMC or the Hays Community Assistance Center and may be sent in care of Plumer-Overlease Funeral Home, 723 N 1st Street, Stockton, KS 67669.

Richard H. Urbach, 92, a retired clergy member, died Nov. 28, 2015. He was preceded in death by his wife, Lois Urbach, and son, Raymond Urbach. Survivors include children, Roger Urbach, Ronald Urbach and LoAnn Horst. Memorial contributions may be made to the family with designation at a later date.

Thomas J. Wilborn, 60, an assigned pastor, died Oct. 25, 2015. Survivors include his children, Wayland, Brandon, Whitney, Taylor and Bronson. Memorial contributions may be sent c/o Blasé-Strauser Memorial Chapel, 620 Tenth St., Gothenburg, NE 69138, for the family to determine at a later date.





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PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE REV. KENT ROGERS

The Rev. Kent Rogers (left) and the Rev. Junius Dotson talk about the “Love. Period.” sermon series on a Wichita-area news TV talk show.

Focusing less on race, more on love

By **TODD SEIFERT**, *communications director*

People have many differences: backgrounds, gender, economic status, physical abilities, even race. It is that final difference that has sparked discussion and, in some cases, tension in communities across the country following the shooting death of an African-American teenager in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Missouri.

Religious leaders in the Wichita, Kansas, area have embarked on an effort to focus on a similarity that should weigh far more heavily than any other factor: our relationship as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Two of Wichita’s largest churches — First United Methodist Church, a predominantly white congregation, and Saint Mark United Methodist Church, a predominantly African-American congregation — traded pastors Oct. 25 and Nov. 15 during a six-week sermon series for both congregations titled “Love. Period.” The series comes from the book by the same name written by Rudy Rasmus.

The Rev. Kent Rogers, lead pastor at First UMC, said the universal church needs a revival of love for one another, regardless of our perceived differences. The harsh reality, he said, is “we live in a world where most often we love with conditions.”

“We have invited our two historic congregations to imagine what would happen if our racially diverse congregations started putting a period after our love and became ground zero for a ‘love revolution’ in Wichita, Kansas,” Rogers said.

One way to begin that revolution was to tear down barriers that society sometimes supports surrounding race. The congregations blended together their music departments and Bible studies since the start of the sermon series.

The Rev. Junius Dotson, lead pastor of Saint Mark UMC, said the swapping of pastors for two Sundays was about “breaking down barriers that prevent us from seeing each other as real, living human beings.”

“In light of all that continues to go on in our country around race, ethnicity and the intolerance of differences,

(the church) must push back and use our influence to remind and challenge all of us, especially people of faith, to ‘Love. Period.’” Dotson said.

While First UMC and Saint Mark UMC may be leaders in how they address such a sensitive topic, they are not the only churches trying to build relationships across racial lines. Faith leaders in and around Wichita are taking part in the “Moving Beyond Tolerance” community event, which culminated with a community meeting at 5 p.m. Nov. 21 at the Century II convention center in Wichita.

University United Methodist Church, led by the Rev. Jo Mead, sought out a partnership with Brotherhood Presbyterian Church, led by Pastor Eric Williams. After trading emails and sharing meals, the two pastors arranged for a pastor swap, with Williams preaching at University UMC on Nov. 15 and Mead scheduled to preach at Brotherhood Presbyterian on Jan. 24.



PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE REV. JO MEAD

Pastor Eric Williams and the Rev. Jo Mead have agreed to trade pulpits each for one Sunday as part of the Wichita area’s “Beyond Tolerance” community event.

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