

1. How do you reflect a life and ministry rooted in Wesleyan theology, spirituality and practice?

In 1982, during a revival at Asbury UMC, the second church on the Baldwin FUMC/Asbury charge, in rural Prentiss County, Mississippi, I gave my heart to the Lord publicly. I was 11 and was singing with the big kids in the youth choir. The preacher was preaching on the rich man and Lazarus and when he gave the invitation I came down to the altar to pray. Later that evening my pastor, W. T. Dexter, led me into a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior. This was not the first step in my personal *via salutis* nor was it to be my last, but it did mark my own personal conversion point, my own Aldersgate moment. I often have said that while I became a Christian that night, I truly learned what it meant to live that out in the Wesley Foundation Campus Ministry at Ole Miss. It was there I made Jesus both Savior and Lord. It was there that I became a member of a discipling small group for the first time. It was there I became a part of a leadership team with built in accountability by senior leadership. It was there I became a part of a community of believers that did life together. I became a participant in one of the earliest Disciple Bible Study groups. It was also there that I caught a passionate urgency for evangelism. When I moved into our ministry house on campus, an unoccupied Fraternity House, Wade, the Wesley Director, would come by and leave a list of names on my door for me to call and invite to worship that week or some event we were planning. Because of the Ole Miss Wesley foundation, small groups for accountability, bible study and spiritual formation have been hard wired into my spiritual DNA. It is these practices that have sustained me and pushed me to grow over the years. It was in teaching incoming freshmen Disciple Bible Studies and in teaching Youth Disciple when I worked as a youth director that all of those lessons became ingrained, because in teaching I was also learning. As I became a passionate student of the history of the Methodist movement and the life of both Charles and John Wesley and the First and Second Great Awakenings, I became increasingly convinced that our spirituality is one of holding truths in tension such as the tension of the private work of personal individual holiness and the social holiness that requires us to be “going on to perfection” while living in a community of believers that are often at different places in their own personal journey of faith.

At points along my journey I have relied more heavily on the spiritual means of grace and spiritual disciplines to continue on this Wesleyan way and have had moments where it seemed the intensity of God’s redemptive work was greater. My time at Asbury Theological Seminary and Richmond FUMC, Richmond, KY was one of those periods. I was challenged intellectually and was being formed spiritually in a culture that was overtly, unashamedly and completely Wesleyan. Coming from the deep south where Southern Baptist Influence was ubiquitous, this was completely new to me. Richmond FUMC was also provided me a unique opportunity to apply everything I was learning. I developed practices there that would carry throughout

the rest of my life; scripture readings and devotions that had nothing to do with sermon preparation, formation groups where I was a peer in formation, Christian monasticism and retreat as learned at the Garden of Gethsemane. One of the unique distinctive of our shared Wesleyan heritage is that our theology is a practical theology, our holiness is a practical holiness. Our theology is one that is at its best when it is lived out. Wesleyanism reflects on and informs every aspect of our lives, both private and public. For me this Wesleyan/Arminian theology has become one of the chief definition of my own personhood.

2. Describe your record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church. (For example, increase in worship attendance, professions of faith, small groups, missional engagement, social justice, etc.)

At every ministry level I have worked I have seen and experienced fruitfulness, both spiritual and numerical growth. However, I never did it alone. It was always a team effort from the those persons I was able to put together around myself and the overwhelming work of God's Holy Spirit. At the Wesley Foundation at Ole Miss we moved into a vacated fraternity house and grew our ministry from 30 to over 120. We also saw great fruit in spiritual growth and the number of persons serving as youth pastors and answering a call into ordained ministry. While working as a youth director and paying my way through law school we saw incredible growth in the youth group in Water Valley, Mississippi, in professions of faith, spiritual growth, mission and racial reconciliation. While serving as the volunteer youth director at my home church after graduating and beginning to practice in Tupelo, Mississippi we developed a sustainable model for ministry to youth, saw multiple professions of faith and spiritual growth. At St. Andrews UMC, Oxford, MS, where I volunteered while practicing with a firm in town, we made a profound impact in student lives and saw strong numerical growth. In 1999, I surrender to full time Christian Ministry and took a full time job as youth director at Getwell Road UMC in Southaven, Mississippi. In the 2.5 years I was there we saw a near 600% growth rate and grew a significant volunteer staff of local church members, former Camp Lake Stephens staff and college students. We saw professions of faith, the birth of small group ministry, a youth leadership team and the creation of a youth lead worship on Sunday nights. We became involved in missions with the homeless through a homelessness awareness project called Box-town and serving and preparing meals at the Union Mission in Memphis. In 2001 we raised nearly 9000 pounds of new and lightly used clothing for the homeless, half of an 18 wheeler full. We did all the pre thanksgiving food prep for the Mayor of Memphis' thanksgiving meal for the homeless the night before thanksgiving every year for three years. We started an ecumenical youth coed softball league and I became one of two go to youth pastoral counselors for crises at the two public schools. While serving part time at Richmond, KY, and attending seminary full time, we started an Alpha Course at both the church and the local Wesley Foundation that birthed several small groups, with several professions of faith or

recommitments and members of one small group that are still in leadership in the church now over ten years later that entered that church through our Alpha Course. While on the Mississippi gulf coast we were able to see growth at Gateway UMC all the while continuing to share space with disaster recovery and UMCOR. The most significant growth we saw was in our outreach ministry through the ML Tootle Mission. While there we doubled our floor space, entered into several new relationships with food resources, acquired a walk in freezer and increased the number of families we were able to help from 25 a month to over 400 and built an ecumenical component to the ministry with a local Baptist Church. We also transitioned from purchasing poinsettias for the sanctuary at Christmas to buying and packing Christmas dinner boxes that we provided along with a ham or turkey to needy families. For my last Christmas there we gave away 84 Christmas dinners with turkeys, all from a congregation that had less than 140 in AWA. While we saw professions of faith, baptisms in a horse trough, and the birth of a vibrant Friday night small group of young couples that met for nearly 3 years, at the end of my time there we were beginning to struggle with how to sustain that growth when it was built heavily on military families that are routinely transferred. At Indianola, a county seat First Church in the middle of the Mississippi Delta, we have decreased the average age of worship attenders nearly 20 years while increasing giving and involvement of new leaders. We have completed a \$700,00 building project and a \$150,00 sanctuary renovation with no debt. We have started a third service that is non traditional in its form. Two years ago we brought in a consulting group to conduct an in-depth assessment of our church including 5 prescriptions for growth. Since then we converted to a 9 person leadership team structure instead of an administrative board/ppr/trustees/finance structure, brought on a full time children's minister and full time worship team leader, started a day care center in a property we acquired through a single donation and are in the process of acquiring a significant piece of property for future expansion. One of the new members of our leadership team is an under 35 member of our praise team who came into our church through our contemporary service, the Vine. I have learned that fruitfulness can take different forms at different times in a church's life cycle. The chief question we must always ask ourselves is this "Are we going into all the world and making disciples of Jesus Christ, baptizing them in the name of Christ and teaching them all that Jesus taught us."

3. How have you demonstrated the spiritual gift of leadership? (For example, give examples of ministry context where spiritual leaders were discovered, developed, and deployed for a Kingdom task)

One of the areas I'm the most proud of is what we have done with our youth ministry at Indianola FUMC in the last two years. Because of the changing in our staffing structure changes, I began working with youth again 18 months ago. In that time we have had to focus on small group ministries. In so doing we have seen incredible growth from a dozen or so youth to ministering to over 100 students between 7th and

12th grades in our small groups in any given month. We have developed the leaders, most of which are under 40 and none whom have a child in the program. We have also converted to a new leadership structure of a nine person leadership team in the last 18 months at FUMC Indianola and we have just rotated out the first class of leaders. In the first 18 months of our new structure, our leadership team has been able to accomplish far more in a far shorter time and have emerged as strong and courageous leaders, leading an older established congregation through tough and real change, refocusing our mission on those outside our church that need to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout my ministry, I have always worked hard to raise up, empower, and release lay leaders to go forth and lead, whether they be 16 year old youth who worked as my administrative assistant to small group leaders that just needed someone to resource them and say, "Go!"

4. How have you demonstrated a willingness to be held accountable for results and an ability to hold others accountable, with grace, for their results (staff or volunteers)?

In our new leadership structure at FUMC Indianola we have implemented an Elijah Council, named for Elijah Allen Bailey, a retired pastor who served full time for nearly 30 years until his death just two years ago at 92. I meet with this group of 8 leaders every two weeks for accountability and encouragement. They are the ones that I place the care and accountability of my soul into. The first question asked of me each time is, "How is it with your soul?" They have the right to ask me any question and bring up any subject. While they have no actual authority except as operating as the keepers of the vision, the wise advisors and also the committee on lay leadership, they have enormous influence. Everyone talks to them and they listen. On anything of significance they are the first consulted and they can hold me accountable for anything at any time.

As a candidacy and RIM Group mentor, leader of a staff, and having twice been appointed to serve as Counsel for the Church, I am constantly having to, with grace and mercy, hold persons accountable for their actions and for their non-actions. I believe that ultimately we are all accountable to each other for our part in the advancement of the Kingdom of God and our faithfulness to Gospel of Jesus Christ.

5. Describe your track record of doing the "right thing" in difficult situations.

My father and mother taught me to always do the right thing no matter how much it cost you, in terms of friends, finances or "success" in the eyes of the world. My mother was the daughter of sharecroppers and my father the son of a teacher and administrator. They both had worked hard all their life and they instilled in their young son the idea that working hard and doing right was the only way to truly succeed. Throughout my life, I have always had the ability to make difficult decisions, and have often had to be the one to make the hard call. This was true in my private life and was reinforced in my practice as an attorney. I learned how to do this

by seeing it modeled for me by great leaders that I learned from over the years. As a high school student I often spoke out for the students in my role as Editor of the Student Newspaper and as an elected leader of student government. I kept publishing the paper for two years when our sponsor did not continue as a sponsor and when no new sponsor was found. At Ole Miss, I was part of the executive branch leadership team of student government that lead the way on racial reconciliation in often very difficult times following a United States Supreme Court decision that affected higher education in Mississippi. While on the leadership team at the Ole Miss Wesley Foundation I learned what it meant to hold friends and fellow leaders accountable for their action so that I might keep covenant with others. As a youth director I have often had to make very unpopular decisions of holding youth accountable (and having them call their parents to come get them from a retreat at 1:00 AM) or alternatively going the second mile with a youth who was routinely high on acid because he had no one to turn to at home. Unfortunately, it is not possible to discuss the most illustrative examples of doing the “right thing” because of the confidentiality required by the circumstances and the publicness of this type of forum. I believe the content of our character is revealed when you must stand for what is right and just and true regardless of who is standing with you.

6. What has been your exposure to the Annual, Jurisdictional and General Conference? (For example, cabinet experience, service on a committee, board or agency, etc)

I have always believed that it is our connection that is one of our greatest strengths. I have always been taught that we have a responsibility to give back since we have been given so much. Therefore, I have always tried to diligently offer my skills, gifts, graces and leadership to my local ministry, my conference and the general church. I have served in the following areas:

Delegate to General Conference 2016 from Mississippi;

District SLI Team;

Forming Faith Communities Committee, Mississippi Annual Conference;

Chair of District Property Committee;

Elected to Jurisdictional Delegation 2012;

Reserve Delegate to General Conference 2012;

Greenwood District Disaster Coordinator;

Mission and Outreach Coordinator Greenwood District;

Greenwood District Leadership Team;

Greenwood District Board of Ordained Ministry;

Mississippi Conference Missions Committee;

Mississippi Annual Conference Committee on Race and Religion;

RIM (Residency In Ministry) Group Mentor;

Candidacy Mentor;

Conference Parliamentarian/Disciplinarian;

Chair of Petitions and Resolutions Committee;

Member of Annual Conference Planning Team;

Member of Committee on the Journal, SEJUMC, 2012;

Reporter for the Mississippi Circuit Rider, Mississippi Annual Conference and special correspondent for GC2012 to the Circuit Rider;

Board of Directors, *The United Methodist Hour*, The Mississippi Annual Conference's Television ministry;

Mediator for the Church, pastors, and congregations to reach Just Resolution when a complaint may be filed;

Council for the Church, Appointed Twice;

Walk to Emmaus, Chrysalis and Crossroads, Cursillo and the Happening;

Board of Directors, Seashore Assembly, Master Plan Committee and Programming Committee;

Seashore District A2 and A29 Teams, Healthy Church Assessments;

Conference A2 and A29 Teams, Healthy Church Assessments;

Member of Task Force for Alternative Conflict Resolution within congregations in association with Just Peace;

Member, L3 Incubator within Seashore District;

Elected to RIM (Residency In Ministry) Council as a Probationer, serving 2 years and in charge of speaker and worship at RIM retreat 2006;

Second class of Mississippi's School of Congregational Development/Pastor's Leadership School;

New Church Development Committee Since 2006 until replaced by Forming Faith Communities Committee, Mississippi Annual Conference. Vice-Chair, New Church Development Committee, oversight of assessment process for new church planters, developed process from discernment to planting for Mississippi Conference adopted annual conference 2008, trained new church planting assessor, New Church Development by Jim Griffith, trained coach for New Church Development and Coaching for Success, Ministry Coaching; assessed as a New Church Planter;

Mississippi Conference Youth Events, Dean of Senior High Spirit Life Retreat, Associate Dean Overflow Winter Retreat, Workshop Leader, Speaker, Conference Council on Youth Ministry, Youth Annual Conference-Steering Committee, Security, Transportation and Workshop Leader;

Camp Lake Stephens United Methodist Camp – Board of Directors, Attorney;

Ole Miss Wesley Foundation – Board of Directors, Director Search Committee 2000;

North Mississippi Russian Initiative-1999,2000,2001, Program Director, summer youth camp, Penza, Russia;

Teacher, Mission and Evangelism, Mississippi Licensing School.

7. Based upon your experience, how do you relate to the global United Methodist Church communion? (For example, boards and agencies, publishing, short-term mission teams, UMVIM, UMCOR, etc.)

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devastated the Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida Gulf Coasts. The response of the United Methodist Church through UMVIM, UMCOR and annual conferences from every corner of the UM Church was simply unbelievable. For four years, the church I served on the Mississippi Gulf Coast housed volunteers, sometimes as many as 200 a week, as well as case managers, long term volunteers, the Disaster Recovery Headquarters for Harrison and Stone Counties with Case Assessors and Project Managers, and hosted Cabinets from other annual conferences. I saw the UMC at its finest. I learned the difference we can make as the Church when we are United and align our resources behind a particular mission, when we see clearly the vision of a preferred future, and we implement smart and healthy strategies for accomplishing our goals. During the early days of our disaster response, my father related to me an experience that encapsulates what we as United Methodist represent to the world. While at a friend's automobile body repair shop, my father overheard his friend tell a customer that his local church, which was not a United Methodist Church, was giving all its financial support for Katrina Disaster

Relief through the Methodists because, “The Methodist make sure it gets spent right.” During my service as pastor on the Mississippi Gulf Coast following Katrina, I saw lives touched in countless ways, made lifelong friendships with United Methodist from around the globe, and saw how generous a people we can be. I have seen that repeatedly throughout the whole globe. Whenever disaster strikes, from a Tsunami in Indonesia to an Earthquake in Haiti, the United Methodist Church is there and is usually one of the last to leave.

I have also had the pleasure of teaching and leading mission efforts around the globe. I was involved while a lay youth director with the Mississippi Russian Initiative, traveling to Penza Russia several times to help facilitate a summer camp for Russian Youth led by approximately 40 high school seniors and college students from Mississippi. In 2006, I was privileged to teach at a pastor’s school in Accra, Ghana through the 4M Foundation. I will be traveling in 2016 to the Democratic Republic of the Congo for a prayer conference. I am convinced that, whatever culture I find myself in, that which binds the people called Methodists together is universal and strong.

8. What is your response to these “hot topics” in the United Methodist Church? Please limit your responses to two paragraphs for each topic.

a. Human sexuality

I support and would uphold our current disciplinary language. While this issue seems to be at the core of that which divides our church, I believe deeper issue underly it. Issues such as not only what authority scripture holds within our hermeneutical framework but how do we read scripture and even what scripture to read, what role does or should our sexuality play in defining our personhood and what other components are there to our personhood. I can’t help but wonder how much resources, financial, human and otherwise do we expend on this issue to the detriment of establishing new faith communities and revitalizing existing ones, to the detriment of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and caring for the widow, the orphan and the stranger in our land. I also hurt for those United Methodists that are same sex attracted; that are hurt, wounded, and broken in this struggle. All persons are of sacred worth. All of us stand in the need of a savior. We should always show the love of Christ in our every interaction.

b. Local church closures and establishing new faith communities

See d. One of the most effective ways of making new disciples for Jesus Christ is through establishing new faith communities. When Methodism in America was growing exponentially, from the late 18th to early 20th centuries, we were planting new churches, small groups, societies, and other para-church organizations. We were founding hospitals, colleges, schools and publishing

houses. If we are to be faithful to our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we must make church planting and new faith community formation a priority. We must be creative, inventive, adaptive and entrepreneurial. We must be willing to align our financial as well as our human resources around this focus.

However, as Don House makes the point in Heather Hahn's article referenced in d., "You can't new-church-start your way out of this existing crisis." Even if we double our current number of church plants per year we will still not offset our expected losses due to our demographics. We must find ways to revitalize exiting congregation and renew a passion within our entire denomination for the primary task of the church which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. However, we know there is a time and a season for all things under the sun, and even churches have seasons of ministry. The time may indeed come when we need to celebrate a congregations faithful ministry over many years and even generations but for whatever reason their ability to do effective ministry has come to an end. They may be located in an area where very few people live. They may no longer have the resources, the leaders, the willingness to change, the energy or strength to revitalize. Their property may no longer be in usable condition because of natural disaster or deferred maintenance. For whatever reason, we may need to celebrate their life in ministry while utilizing the resources they leave behind to continue the work of new places for new people. However much more desirable is for every one of our congregation to recover that outwardly focused passion for reaching those that do not have a relationship with Jesus Christ with the Good News. Every church was once a new church start. Every church was once a church growing spiritually as well as numerically. At FUMC Indianola we have adopted the word "**TRANSFORMATION**" as our theme for 2016. We must be transformed but not for our own sakes but for those that are not in a relationship with Jesus as both Lord and Savior. If we can be transformed individually, we will transform our churches, which will transform our annual conferences, which will transform our jurisdictions or central conferences, which will transform our denomination, which in turn will transform the world.

c. Next generations leaders

If we are to reach these new people in new places, if we are to reach new generations with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we must raise up new generations of leaders. It is from them that we will derive great creativity. They will bring new ways of communicating and new paradigms for organizing our collective lives and the life of the church. They will, in general, be the most effective in communicating the Gospel within their generation and their cultural context. If our desire is to reach the Millennial generation and the one after that then we must make a seat at the table for them and must hear from them. We must invest in

them, lead them, nurture them, mentor them, teach them, and ultimately pray for them and with them. If we are to raise up the leaders of the future we must cultivate them today. I have seen us at times do this very well in Mississippi.

d. Impending death tsunami (Dr. Lovett Weems)

In a May 20, 2015, article for UMNS, Heather Hahn writes, “‘By 2030, the denomination in the United States will either have found a way to turn around, meaning it is growing, or its turnaround in the United States is not possible,’ Donald R. House, Sr. told the May 19 combined meeting of the Connectional Table and the General Council on Finance and Administration board. ‘By 2050, the connection will have collapsed.’” Whatever else we do with the other hot topics, if we do not address this issue, we will continue to see realized decline within United Methodism. Since its creation in 1968, the American part of the UMC has seen its membership shrink in number and increase in average age. We have been able to maintain our global presence and our infrastructure because a shrinking and aging membership has continued to give more per capita to keep the structure afloat. With the predictions of Dr. Weems and Don House, it seems clear we are at or near a tipping point. The primary role of a leader is to clearly and starkly define the current reality. Then the next step is to ask the right questions. How long have we been in decline? When did we plateau? Where are we on the life cycle diagram of a church? How do we return to vitality and growth? What adjustments do we need to make in the interim? What permanent adjustments do we need to make to our structure to empower this growth, to adapt to the new status quo, and to take advantage of certain inherent strengths of a Wesleyan Theology that seem tailor made for this post modern culture? Our core values and doctrinal standards must be kept, despite the changes occurring around us?

Since 2012 we have collectively asked the question whether we are facing technical challenges, where we can identify the problem and know the solutions and merely need to implement them well, or whether we are facing adaptive challenges, where the solutions are not known and we must develop new systems and processes to arrive at a solution. I believe the solutions to this problem may actually be technical with adaptive components. Perhaps we need to do what we did then, with modern creativity and entrepreneurial spirit and be filled with the evangelical zeal that we once experienced.

e. Term episcopacy

There is currently no uniformity within the Global UM Church on whether Episcopal Leadership is elected for life or a set term. In 2012 the General Conference nearly adopted term limits for Bishops. There were and are many suggestions and proposals surrounding this issue and I think the details will be

important. I think perhaps as important as the discussion on what term episcopacy should look like in the United States, equally as important is the question, “Why is there a sudden push for limiting the tenure and the terms of our episcopal leadership?”

f. The World-Wide Nature of the Church: Global Book of Discipline/Global Structure

By 2020, it seems clear that if current trends do not change, the number of United Methodists outside the United States will be greater than the number within the United States. We, the United Methodist Church, are not just another US denomination but are very much a global church. Yet, often times, in our structures, and in nominations to our boards and agencies, our brothers and sisters over seas do not receive fair and equal representation. Clearly we have reached the point where all parts of the UMC must stand on equal footing with full proportional representation in the governance of the church. It is clear that the study committee will bring some preliminary proposals in 2016, although it is not clear precisely what they will be until delegates receive the Advance DCA. Some greater freedom for contextualization of parts of our order and discipline may be necessary. It should not occur, however, at the sacrifice of our unity of mission, vision, and doctrinal core values. The essentials of what makes a United Methodist a United Methodist should be preserved. Some change will and should occur but the details as well as the big picture are important.