

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

I, as Wesley did, believe that each person must have a personal experience with the risen Christ. I believe we must live out our lives guided by scripture, and using reason to hold our lives accountable according to that scripture. Traditions are those foundational practices that ground our faith, but keeping traditions for tradition sake can be counterproductive. When traditions cease to edify Christ and glorify God it may be time to change the tradition. When the “way” we do things is more important than the “why” it becomes problematic to our purpose of worshiping God and living out a life of discipleship. I believe that we are to be nurtured in our faith within the church and always growing toward “perfection”, not because it is Methodist but it is scriptural. At the same time we are expected to witness of God’s grace in our lives in order to evangelize the lost in the world. I also believe that all people of all nations & all races are a part of the Parish and we, who call ourselves disciples, are to seek out the non-believer to share the Word of Christ in thought, word and deed. The scripture guides us and teaches that we love all people, seek out the lost, stand with the lonely, provide for those in need and live the way Jesus would and did here on earth.

Describe your record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church.

As I reflect on my years as a pastor, there have been many professions of faith, growth in attendance and participation, increased involvement in being disciples and spiritual growth within the congregations. It was a blessing to reach some of the lost and help many find a way to live their lives being a disciple. Churches became more mission minded through teaching what Methodists do as a connected church and getting people involved in local mission efforts in each community where I served. Congregations who had historically been hands off with mission work began to change as I lead them to serve in various mission opportunities and some continue that service even now, years after I left. The weekend after Katrina, 60 members of our congregation gave up their Labor Day morning to collect and load a truck of supplies to go to Sager Brown.

In one pastorate we led an evangelistic effort for five nights with the “Power Team” and saw 220 decisions for Christ. Nearly every year saw an increase in the average attendance at worship and most every year produced many Professions of Faith. In one place the attendance and membership grew 25% in three years as all of our churches have seen small to significant growth. In another appointment, we arrived five years following the completion of a new family life center with a 20-year loan and through the congregational growth in many areas, the church paid off the loan eight years early. I have served as the lone staff person to a multi-church charge to being the lead pastor with 15 staff members plus 35 pre-school and daycare staff.

I have lead Bible studies, not only for my congregation, but daytime studies where people in the community, some from other churches, would come to grow in their Christian walk. I have had many parishioners over the years express how their spiritual life had grown during the time I was their pastor.

As a Superintendent I have worked hard to create an environment where pastors and lay persons would feel supported and encouraged to try new ways of reaching lost persons in their communities. I learned quickly in this role that pastors felt if they tried new things and failed they would pay for it in their next appointment. We tried to change that attitude and helped congregations begin to envision what could be done to grow the Kingdom. I believe local churches are the foundation for Kingdom building and the greatest tool we have to reach the lost and the least. In the South East District of the Kentucky Conference there were six new services started within 18 months in local churches. Two of those would become the lead component in helping those two churches grow, one from an average attendance in worship of 150 to now over 280, the other from an average of 60 to over 300 over the last 2 ½ years. Sadly, two of those six new services didn’t make it, but the other two are trying to hold on as they are slowly reaching new persons. I attribute this to a change of environment where pastors and congregations are set free to catch a new vision and try new things, know that they are supported by the church even if they do not achieve the expected outcome.

The challenge of the Red Bird Missionary Conference was multi-faceted. When I arrived the conference was working on a deficit budget of \$350,000 annually, using reserve funds to cover expenses. The reserve funds were declining rapidly and no one knew it but office staff. We began a process to change that direction by cutting expenses, staff, apportioned the churches a bigger portion of the Conference budget and 2016 will be the third consecutive year with a balanced budget. We have also increased our fund raising efforts and developed direct partnerships with two other annual conferences. We have had to close a couple of unhealthy churches and let go a couple of churches that did not want to be United Methodist through their unwillingness to be held accountable or contribute and one congregation

did not like the United Methodist stance on women in ministry and would only receive a “perfect” pastor, one with no sin and no weaknesses. (I was out of my supply of those)

The other challenge there has been one of culture. The Appalachian area has long been one of depressed economics, and though that continues to be the case, it has been my privilege to lead the Red Bird Conference in trying to change the culture in the churches from simply being receivers but being givers and disciples. In 2016 we will send a VIM team to another state for the fourth year in a row. The Conference invested in the mission work of our partner conferences. Today, the Red Bird Conference continues to strive toward the goal of changing a culture of just receiving to one of being a part of a connectional church in its ministry and mission all over the world. These efforts manifest themselves through financial support, physical labor and sometimes it is being connected through praying for others in their time of need. Regrettably, there is little one can do about the economics of some areas of our country but we can have a more Christian outlook through giving and receiving together, we work for the good of all persons in the world.

How have you demonstrated the spiritual gift of leadership?

We have been very successful in using the Laity training program called LACE: Lay Academy for Christian Excellence. It provides 40 hours of training to study church history, polity and theology of the United Methodist Church along with training for teaching, preaching, leading worship, involvement in pastoral care, starting new study or growth groups and discernment for what God is calling people to do. I traditionally have taught the area of planning and leading worship with a portion of preparing a sermon. Over the past five years we have seen over 50 people in these classes and now at least six graduates of this program are now pastoring churches.

The Kentucky Conference has moved to a team approach in leadership and I lead an Operational Team, made up of leading pastors and lay people in my district, for spiritual growth and administrative leadership for the district. These leaders now are developing “Covenant Teams” of about ten pastors throughout the District, helping pastors grow, learn and lead in better ways in order to build the Kingdom. I do this in the Red Bird Conference in a different way as we have all of our pastors together about once a month for spiritual growth, learning, encouragement, organizing common work and introducing new opportunities for ministry.

One of my most fulfilling stories of developing leadership took a long time for fruition. At the age of 18 I was hired as a youth minister at a church in a neighboring county. We saw that group grow from about 6 to sometimes over 40 with events having 80-100 youth in attendance in the 2 ½ years I was there. Now, almost 40 years later, many of the leadership of that church were members of that youth group. Sometimes we plant the seeds and others harvest but God gets all the glory.

Throughout my life I have emerged in most of the groups in which I have served as the leader, from sports teams to the debate team in college. I have always been willing to make decisions, project a vision or direction, lead a meeting in a productive and efficient manner. I’m not afraid to try new things, new approaches and fresh concepts. I lead by voice, action and example. I have always been one who believed ministry was one of a servant but even the servant has to take initiative, sometimes point the direction and at times even correct what may not be right.

How have you demonstrated a willingness to be held accountable for results and an ability to hold others accountable, with grace, for their results?

One of the best things we have done on the Cabinet of the KY Conference is to divide our large team into Covenant/Accountability groups. These smaller groups are for keeping one another accountable just as the Classes did in Wesley times. They also serve as a support group for one another as our journeys in life are intertwined. This has been a big help to me as I am the only Superintendent in the Red Bird Conference it gives me a group to talk things out with and seek advice from. I have always had a good relationship with the Staff Parish Relations Committee as a pastor and my lead teams in the district and conference where I serve. This relationship has allowed us to deal with what is best for the kingdom’s work in a healthy way.

I know my personal style of leadership is not one of micro-managing. I have always expected those working with me as the leader to understand their role, job description and expectations and then go do their job without my having to look over their shoulder every minute. Teams such as a Conference Cabinet need to work together, plan together and support one another so that what is done is in the best interest of a conference. I have held staff accountable over the years when they did not do their job by having conversations about what was expected. But I have also been willing to make tough decisions when the conversations did not result in improved productivity. I also expect staff to be totally honest with me and I make it clear anything less than that will not be acceptable.

In many ways I have not treated volunteer staff any different than paid staff when it comes to accountability. If someone has agreed to do a job, lead an event, teach a class, chair a committee, or even just show up on time then I expect that to happen. Though it is never easy, sometimes changes and difficult decisions must be made. I grew up taught that you do what you say you will do and when it is needed. I expect no less from the people around me.

One of my former typists tried to get a parishioner who seemingly felt intimidated by me to understand I was more than willing to listen to their concerns about me or the church. I think one of the strengths of our church is people are accountable to others. Local church teams are accountable to each other and must work together. Pastors are accountable to a Superintendent, who is accountable to a Bishop and Cabinet. And yes the Bishop is/should be accountable to their colleagues and Episcopal committees. No one can always be right nor can they always see everything. Working together allows small adjustments in the journey along the way instead of letting things wander way off course. But the bottom line is that we as disciples and churches must stay on the path where Jesus leads.

Describe your track record of doing the “right thing” in difficult situations.

As a pastor I have let staff go due to many reasons: one because they didn't do their job; one for inappropriate behavior but I did not make that public information even though I took harsh criticism for that decision; and one for lying to me. As a Superintendent I have replaced pastors that did not want to be United Methodists and have even removed church treasurers for not complying with rules. I even removed an Administrative Board chairperson for refusing to carry out a decision made by the Charge Conference of their church.

Arriving as the Red Bird Superintendent I found a conference working on a deficit budget and spending reserve funds to make up the difference. I came to be their Superintendent partially out of financial difficulties anyway so changes would have to come in order to be better fiscally responsible. I am in my sixth year serving in two conferences and have not received a salary for serving in the Red Bird Conference for the whole time. We cut staff positions, closed one small church that wasn't healthy and let one church go where we were paying the pastors salary but the church in 30 years had never chartered, would not prepare charge conference or end of the year reports and did not want to be United Methodist to begin with. We cut some conference programming, put two churches onto a two-point charge and changed office procedures to be more efficient in our work.

Though I would never claim to have always made the right decision I have always worked to do the right thing for the building of the Kingdom of God. I feel I have always been willing to lead, make tough decisions and carry out my responsibilities with the best interest of the church and the people in mind.

What has been your exposure to the Annual, Jurisdictional and General Conference?

I started early serving in my local church, district and Annual Conference as a teenager. I was president of the Annual Conference Youth Council my senior year of high school, along with the Conference Council on ministries and Board of Laity, a couple of Conference task committees for a newspaper and a consideration for merging two conferences and was elected a Jurisdictional Conference delegate at the age of 18. I have served on most every committee in the Kentucky Conference and as the superintendent for Red Bird, for the last six years, I serve on all Conference committees in addition to overseeing the everyday work of the Conference staff. In years past I have served as Secretary of the Annual conference CFA and now serve in the KY Conference as the Cabinet representative to Conference trustees and disaster relief.

I was President of the SEJ youth in Mission Conference (what now seems a hundred years ago) and now serve on the SEJ Episcopal Committee and have served on the Board of Hinton Rural Life Center.

I have served this quadrennium on the General Board of Global Ministries, the GBGM Finance Committee, the Budget Review Committee and the Emergency Fund committee. I serve on the UMCOR Board of Directors, the National Advisory Committee for Church and Community Workers and the Program Advisory Committee for UMW. I am also the Secretary of the Inter-jurisdictional Episcopal Committee.

I am in my eighth year as a Superintendent in the Kentucky Conference and my sixth year as the Conference Superintendent in Red Bird Conference. I served as dean of the cabinet in the Kentucky Conference.

Based upon your experience, how do you relate to the global United Methodist Church communion?

Obviously years of service on the Board of Directors of GBGM, UMCOR and committees of those boards has helped increase my knowledge of our General church and my direct involvement. I have always felt UMCOR was one of

the best organizations on the planet in dealing with disaster relief. Now I have learned how much more we do on a regular basis, with health initiatives, education, even small business loans to help people start businesses in third world countries. Our Church and Community Workers are missionaries serving in a variety of ways and places, meeting needs of people in all walks of life. But these are only one area of our Mission work in the UMC. We now have over 360 missionaries across the world, reaching people right where they live, helping with not only their daily needs but with developing better ways of life for all generations. From mosquito nets, to clean water, to housing and healthcare we strive to care for the least and the lost.

We have UMVIM teams come to the Red Bird Conference all the time through our missions and our churches. But we also send at least one VIM team out to other areas from the Red Bird Conference to help others. This past year it was helping rebuild from hurricane damage in West Florida.

I have helped lead IMPACT events which are partially funded and supported by UMCOM and worked with Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry with Boards of Ministry and Candidates for ministry. I also serve on the Board of Directors for one of the Course of Study schools in KY/TN, ALPS-THM.

I believe the UMC has the best network of resources and ministry in the world and we reach a great portion of the world in some way. We not only bring the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth, we bring the nets, the clean water tablets, the medical units, the education opportunities for children, college and seminaries. We United Methodist bring numbers who stand with the oppressed, speak out for victims and live in the poorest neighborhoods. Over the last six years I have traveled across a good portion of the US representing the Red Bird Conference, who along with the other Missionary Conferences, are themselves a part of the network of our church, reaching people where they are.

“Hot Topics in the United Methodist Church: Human Sexuality

“All people are of Sacred worth” is the quote that comes to my mind when I see the terms human sexuality. With that being said, I must say I stand with the present stance of the United Methodist Church as it is written in the 2012 Book of Discipline. The role of the Bishop is not to make the law of the church but it is the Bishop’s responsibility to be accountable for upholding the stance of Discipline.

Local Church Closures and establishing new faith communities:

It has always been a sad time at Annual Conference when we read the list of closing churches. Lives have been changed in each one, memories have been written and the faces of people from our formational years are seen in those pews. But the reality is five or six people are really a class not a church. But other situations can be even harder, for example, there are churches that have many people but don’t want to be the church by reaching other for Christ or helping others in their need. When I hear people talk more about the church building than the church ministries they are probably more interested in keeping the doors open from 10-12am on Sundays but not in doing ministry. This is not what the church was created for and closing them or letting them go may be the best solution. And some congregations don’t want to be United Methodist: they don’t believe in female pastors; some don’t want to do local mission work much less missions through the connectional system; and others don’t accept the church’s polity and procedures. Over the years, these kinds of situations have not been addressed and now Superintendents must spend a great deal of time with these kinds of problems.

As adamant as I am about dealing with troubled churches I firmly believe the church must be open to trying new ways of reaching people for Christ. They may never develop into a new “church” but a new service targeting an unreached part of the community, a new class for personal growth, or a new time for ministry opportunities for those who work around the clock are essential for the future of the church. In the early years of Methodism we were always starting new services, new opportunities, responding to what might work in each situation, such as Wesley preaching at 5:00am to the people going to work in the factories. Today’s church needs to return to our mission minded roots and get out in the world.

Next Generation Leaders:

Many are in the church today because of parents or grandparents who passed on the “faith.” The church needs to cultivate a generation of leaders, clergy and laity. In some churches the youth and young adults have not been given

opportunities for ministry and mission; however, in other churches, they have been thrust into situations for which they are not prepared. There is importance in “serving your time” but the church must also utilize talent, gifts and abilities when they are apparent. There are some things that only experience will teach, but years of service must also produce fruit. I know several Bishops who are now meeting regularly with young, promising clergy to help mentor and lead them for the years to come. I believe this is a positive formula for future success in the church. Through the appointive process, we need to be putting clergy in places where they can succeed.

Impending Death tsunami:

Dr. Lovett Weems has sounded the warning, hopefully ahead of the wave. As a denomination, I believe there is an urgency to be proactive before the tsunami hits. I don't believe the church has the luxury to ignore the warning. In my role as Superintendent, I oversee 92 churches. The majority of them are older congregations. The youngest of the baby boomer generation is reaching retirement. Most churches think to be successful; they must have a thriving youth group or children's program. Many communities are no longer in supportive situations for the young. I believe there are many churches that could combine their resources to transform the lives of those living in the community rather than maintain status quo by themselves.

As a nation, the United States is getting older. Many, if not most of those 50 years old and older are not Christian and never have been. The church has an obligation to reach out to them now. In a recent listening session at one of the congregations in my district that sits in the middle of a growing retirement area, told me they wanted to reach young people. When I asked if there were any in the area, one lady said, “I guess so the school is still open.” But not once did they mention reaching the aging population that was moving in around them. Regardless of age, it is God's desire to be in a relationship with all and the church stands as God's instruments to make that happen.

Guaranteed appointment for clergy

Having some security of a place to work is a stress relief for a pastor, which I think, is important. With that said, we need to work to some middle ground to better deal with that small percentage of clergy who are not productive or are consistently having problems serving churches. A pastor with a series of one or two year appointments may need to have intervention or a corrective action plan which may or may not lead to assistance transitioning to a new career. There is also the situation where a pastor refuses the appointment he or she is given. In this situation, some cabinets feel they do not have to offer another appointment. In some ways the term “guaranteed appointment” is a little misleading.

I believe that it should be the goal of every conference to insure that effective pastors are appointed to each congregation offering at least the possibility of having a successful pastorate. It is no secret that leadership has a record of being protective of clergy over the years and as a result, many churches have suffered. If the church were to change the present pattern of guaranteed appointment it would mean a dramatic paradigm shift and the entire church would need to be under that paradigm in order to be connectional.

Term Episcopacy:

This issue brings mixed feelings and thoughts for me. I know this is a reality in some other countries in the United Methodist Church. I see difficulty for an Episcopal leader to transition back to an Episcopal area where they are no longer the leader. I can envision a sitting Bishop feeling uneasy with a former Bishop chairing the Conference Finance Committee and/or pastoring a church. I could see an Episcopal leader transitioning to a teaching position or an administrative opportunity at an institution of high education for example. I understand the idea not to have leaders “build their kingdom” but the reality in transitioning persons may be more difficult than one might think.

The World-Wide Nature of the Church:

Among the many things I have learned over the last four years serving on GBGM, it is difficult to have the same rules across the world when the culture in many places is very different. The United Methodist church in the United States, for example, has an issue with the human sexuality topic and in other parts of the world the issue cannot even be discussed because it is so taboo. Educational opportunities are varied over the globe and the requirements for clergy

status are acceptable for some countries but not so in others. The church needs to work to find acceptable education without lowering the standards. Much of the Book of Discipline is written from a United States point of view. The United Methodist Church is truly a global community and the Book of Discipline should reflect that global diversity.

I think many areas of the church have already begun to be more Global in structure, participation and visibility. One important example is GBGM's decision to not only move its headquarters to Atlanta but to develop at least three other field offices across the world. The United Methodist Women have developed the Program and Advisory group with representatives from across the world. I know some of the General boards have met in other places besides the United States. We must continue to develop Global relationships embracing modern technology in order to share our church's values, our culture and our connected ministries.