

The 2016 SEJ Questions for an Episcopal Nominee

Dr. Tim McClendon – South Carolina

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

We are the only denomination whose name comes from the way that we corporately *live* our beliefs. We are “United Methodists” because our theology is characterized by determined methodical action with both an inner and outer focus. Wesleyan process theology, with an emphasis on vital personal and social spirituality, is a denominational identity that is rooted in *praxis* as much as theory. A life rooted in the Wesleyan way, as I believe my life to be, is one in which our real-world actions are synonymous with the sincere belief that Jesus is Lord.

By this measure, I try to live my ministry with a “both-and” quality that I trace back to my early life. From my father, who left school before finishing the 8th grade to go to work during the Great Depression, I adopted the personal goal of putting my best effort forward all day, every day, in every way possible. He taught me how priceless hard work and integrity are, not to mention the value in humor and relatability to win people’s hearts. At the same time, my mother was one of the most compassionate women in the county, and she was universally known for it, not because she cared for any fanfare but because there were dozens of individuals, of every class and race and background, that she ministered to in our community. She, above all, personified grace, along with creativity and beauty, which manifest themselves in my understanding of God and the application of my faith.

They were both good Methodists in different ways, and their lesson that lives in me is that, taken together, a Wesleyan life and ministry must be comprehensive, and it must feature complementary ideals. Indeed, John Wesley pioneered this “both-and” framework of ministry. He injected into our Methodist movement both the great moral expectations of Scriptural holiness, and an utter reliance on God’s grace. He both exemplified an intense effort in spiritual discipline, and also paired it with vibrant and creative expressions of faith. He urged both the articulation of sound doctrine as well as the incredible priority of human connection.

My aim is that my life and ministry reflect these realities. I *work hard* in every single avenue of service to which I am appointed. I put a premium on moral integrity and transparency. And I hope also to never take myself too seriously; I know that my best communication tends to be through the power of story and humor. I try to live Wesley’s General Rules by doing no harm, doing good, and staying in love with God through the spiritual disciplines, and I try to be as *creative* about it as possible.

I have experienced the depth of God’s love for me before ever fully grasping it, know no other redeemer than Jesus Christ, and expect for God to continue to transform me for the transformation of the world. And this is the kind of three-fold Wesleyan grace that I intend to share with all others.

So, as you continue to read through the answers that follow, I pray that indeed a life and ministry rooted in the Wesleyan way is evident.

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.)?

Cindy and I have served in a variety of settings, from a three-point charge to a county seat church; a struggling city-church turn-around to an eight year term as superintendent to the largest district in South Carolina; and now as pastor of a thriving regional church in Aiken, SC, just outside of Augusta, GA. In every place, I believe the ministry has grown in spiritual health as well as quantifiable metrics. Professions of Faith, Average Worship Attendance, and Numbers of Small Groups have increased dramatically in each setting.

I am known as an engaging and inspiring communicator, and I think I am a catalyst for leadership. My experience in the District, on the Cabinet, and supervising large-church staffs, leads me to prize a team approach where my attention to detail, creative planning, and supervisory skills can be effective while also enabling others to thrive independently in their own roles. For instance, even though the pastor is chair of Nominations in the local church, my practice is to let committees and teams self-select their own successors, giving rise to superb partnerships between laity and clergy and the unleashing of heretofore unknown spiritual gifts. This generates a continuing pool of excited and equipped servants in every facet of the church's life.

The results were evident in my time as Senior Pastor at St. John's UMC in Rock Hill. This downtown church was in a slow, downward spiral when I was appointed. Over our nine years there, the congregation added more than 1200 new members, *over half* by profession of faith, resulting in my reception of the Denman Evangelism Award. During that time we started new initiatives in contemporary worship and discipleship, began a pre-school and after-school ministry, started college-aged ministry with Winthrop University and its Wesley Foundation, and began making annual mission trips to Nicaragua. Even more, we revived a culture of hospitality that culminated in our receiving the "Welcoming Congregation" designation from UMCOM for four consecutive years (one of *only eight* churches in the entire UMC to do so).

The same fruitfulness is present now at St. John's in Aiken. It is known as the strongest church in its community and since my appointment has seen a 30% growth in attendance. In a small town context -- albeit one with a strong economic and scientific engine through the U.S. government's Savannah River Nuclear Site, a large number of retirees, and historic equine-related businesses -- St. John's UMC has an average attendance of nearly 900. This is amazing in small town South Carolina; it is the fourth highest attendance in all of SC United Methodism and we're still growing! We are excelling at St. John's in ministry to all people, with our annual Mission Impact Celebration funding missions now at \$200,000 per year above apportionments, with strong local partnerships, and with growing missional relationships in Kenya and Honduras. In February

2016 we are launching a new venture for our annual conference in Hispanic/Latino ministry, and we hope to lead the way in this vital witness to welcome all people.

I should note that my experience includes administrative and financial fruitfulness as well. In the local church I have personally shepherded churches through *eight* different multi-million dollar building programs, not counting the many more such projects under my care as a superintendent. I also seek to be an example for creative and effective church fundraising. Every church I serve pays 100% of Connectional Giving responsibilities and never fails to make budget. The Columbia District went from last to first in apportionment giving during my tenure and paid *over* 100% as a district my last two years. A part of this success was my consistent and personal emphasis on the absolutely vital ministry that cannot continue without combining our strength through connectional giving dollars. I highlighted my daughter's role as a Campus Minister shaping students who are the future of our church. I reinforced how our giving undergirds Africa University and other missional efforts that I have seen firsthand worldwide. I pointed to South Carolina's increasingly vibrant Camps & Retreats ministry which shaped my own children along with so many others. In other words, in the local church and in the district, I try to translate giving into human terms, with an eye on laboring for the Kingdom of God.

Overall, then, I believe any of my fruitfulness is, first, a testament to the working of God's Holy Spirit, even often in spite of me. And, second, I credit fruitfulness with the combined effort of teamwork, through partnerships and relationships with the laity and clergy. My motto for ministry within the UMC is, "Together We Can Do More!" and it has come true by the power of God.

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)

My previous answer started to address this question, but let me add that the area of leadership that might be nearest to my heart is in teaching and mentoring. In every context I make it a central priority to disciple congregations through sound doctrine, theology, and Biblical teaching. The result is that I have been blessed to personally mentor 16 persons from my pastorates into ministry as United Methodist clergypersons, not including the persons mentored through DCOMs, the BOM, and as a DS.

When I first started teaching Lay Servant courses, they went by another name and I was still a young preacher who had hair. I continue in it today and actually just got a phone call *yesterday* from one of my first students who needs a recommendation for seminary! At least three others I know of are already ministers and serving churches. Similarly, for twelve summers I taught "Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit" at Emory's Course of Study for Local Pastors.

For ten summers I taught "United Methodist Discipline and Polity" as Adjunct Faculty for Candler School of Theology, and "United Methodist History" at Lutheran Theological Southern

Seminary. I want to claim that my students would say that I made Methodist doctrine and polity engaging and entertaining and, above all, applicable. My intent was that they learn these lessons while also learning about real life in the local church so that, as good United Methodists, they could discover where theory and reality, belief and practice, meet.

In the local church I continue to teach church-wide Bible Studies that, most recently at St. John's, are attracting attendance in the hundreds. I have taught Disciple I at least 26 times, and Jesus & The Gospels, Christian Believer, and Disciples II-IV numerous times each. With an emphasis on discipling men, I am currently using the HBO mini-series "Band of Brothers" to lead participants to draw spiritual and ethical implications for today, and to grow as emerging male leaders.

Even my children, two of whom are now young clergy in the UMC, say that despite my imperfect example (especially compared to their mother), it was sound teaching in our home and in our churches as they grew up that most influenced their faith and sense of call. I am forever proud to be a part of that.

Overall, then, my ministry of building relationships with others, noticing their potential, helping to nudge them, walking beside them and watching them blossom, is where I feel most effective as a leader. By God's grace, this is the avenue where I most clearly see people being called forth, equipped, and deployed for the sake of the Kingdom. And, as it turns out, the relationships I build through ministry are the ones that most challenge me to continue to grow, to ask new questions, and to learn more deeply about my own call to serve the Kingdom.

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)?

I am more than willing to be held accountable for every aspect of the ministry that God has entrusted to me. As a clergyperson and formerly as a District Superintendent, I know the supreme value of supervision and effective responsiveness to concerns. I certainly believe in the structures we implement to provide accountability. At the same time, these tools must be combined with individual, personal accountability, so I have persons in my life who know my weaknesses, speak truth, and offer guidance. I try to do the same for others, always in love. One particular staff person who struggled with addiction once told me, "The way you handled my situation saved my life." I thank the Lord alone for that outcome, and for every occasion when conflict is navigated to the betterment of all. It teaches me that attentive, relational leadership provides the church with its best foot forward in these toughest of circumstances.

In multiple-staff churches and in the district, I have supervised, mentored, evaluated, promoted, and dismissed persons. I know what it is to deal with underperformance, misconduct, cases of severe criminal breach, and the complaint and trial process. I have advised Bishops and the Board of Ordained Ministry in a number of supervisory responses and, because of my experience teaching The Book of Discipline, I am occasionally consulted in church trial processes elsewhere

in the connection. These experiences inform my understanding of when and how to hold others accountable, with grace, to protect both local churches and the rights of clergypersons.

While a District Superintendent, I was involved in countless conflict situations and completed the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center's Conflict Mediation Training. As a Senior Pastor, where conflict can feel closer to home, I still find that a non-anxious presence defuses problems and opens up growth opportunities. Most recently, I encouraged a staff person who was continually caught in debilitating emotional triangles to read Edwin Friedman's Generation to Generation on church/synagogue family systems. Since then it has been marvelous to see his self-differentiation and the healing in the systems around him.

Given my time serving on the SEJ Committee on the Episcopacy, I believe healthy accountability is just as absolutely vital for our Episcopal leaders as it is for any and every member of Christ's church. The United Methodist emphasis on sanctification leads us to expect excellence and fruit-bearing from one another, whether clergy, laity, or Bishops. At the same time we must also uphold our common call to aid each other in the journey, with much mercy, as brothers and sisters in Christ.

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

In a matter of seconds as a parliamentarian I have to know the Standing Rules of the Annual Conference, the Rules of the Preceding General Conference, Robert's Rules of Order and pertinent Judicial Council Decisions, and then offer guidance to the presiding Bishop. But in whatever way I may be knowledgeable about our United Methodist processes, I know that doing the right thing is more important than doing things right. I have seen things "done right" that did more harm than good. I do, however, believe that the UMC has adequate mechanisms in place, if used properly, to lead to both doing the right thing *and* doing things right!

I have had to counsel church members in horrible family situations where a decision needed to be made between life and death. I had to report a clergyperson whose neglect had endangered his family, and, though we sought just resolution, it cost him his ministry. I have personally written clergy complaints for distraught lay persons, even though the respondent was a friend. I have had to remove persons from local church office because of their love for power, and Local Pastors or Retired Supply Elders because of ineffectiveness. I have listened to clergy spouses confide their spouse's unfathomable behaviors and offer solace and guidance to all parties, including the local church. Out of protection for all parties, serious correction and continued pastoral concern had to be extended to victims and the perpetrator.

Additionally, throughout my ministry my family and I have been supporters of racial justice in South Carolina, even when unpopular. For years I have engaged the “history versus heritage” and racial aspects of the Confederate flag flying atop our state house or on its grounds, and I took the lead in the writing and passage of a resolution for the flag's removal at the 2000 General Conference. Some of my proudest moments in recent months have been to see our state's collective response, and the remarkable witness of the church, in the wake of the shootings at

Emanuel AME in Charleston. For decades I have also been deeply active in SC and in the General Church concerning recognition and understanding of Native American issues. I was a keynote speaker at several Southeastern Jurisdictional Association of Native American Ministries (S.E.J.A.N.A.M) conferences, and I have led teachings in the local and general church on the special relationship between Wesleyan theology and Native American belief systems and practice.

Some of you will recall that I was almost elected at our last Jurisdictional Conference, and that nearing the end of those elections there was a call from the floor asking for sensitivity toward the election of a person of color. With a sense of peace, I stood to voice what many people do not know: I am not *white*. By all means, I have experienced a great deal of white privilege in my life, because, like many people of Native American descent in the southern United States, it is not obvious that I am in fact multiracial. But, following the forced relocation of Native Americans in the first third of the 1800s, my father's people settled in a neglected corner of South Carolina where multiracial and Native American families were prevalent, an area of abject poverty. My mother was white, but from an early age I can remember my father being described in hushed tones as "mixed blood," among other far more profane descriptors, and I was shaped by this perception.

Needless to say, I cannot pretend to share the discrimination that my father and others have experienced, but I do identify as Native American and multiracial and I continue to be as active an advocate as possible in ministries to, and on behalf of, Native Americans and other people groups. For these reasons, and keeping in mind that the UMC has never in its history elected a Native American person to the episcopacy, S.E.R.N.A.C. (South Eastern Regional Native American Caucus) joined the SC Conference in endorsing me for the episcopacy four years ago. Through my ministry wherever I am, I intend to continue trying to fulfill our C.O.N.A.M's (Committee on Native American Ministry) motto, "Making the Invisible Visible."

Ultimately, when I conceded during the last Jurisdictional Conference elections, I attempted to model my heritage and spirituality by urging the delegates to support another person of color, and I then sat down with an even greater sense of peace. I believe that in this, and in the far more challenging tests of my life and ministry, tough circumstances afford us all an opportunity to draw closer to the faith we profess. Indeed, facing moments that call for doing the right thing in difficult situations is part and parcel of being a people who strive to do no harm, to do good, and to stay in love with God.

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)

My experience throughout the church is extensive. I have been elected as the annual conference Parliamentarian for over 20 years, a role which affords the chance to witness first-hand the effective presidential duties of bishops. I chaired the Conference Restructure Committee and

served two different District Committees on Ordained Ministry, as well as 10 years on the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. I was Secretary to the Conference Board of Pensions, and District Missions Secretary to develop Mission Saturation Events with GBGM. I am a member of the SC Conference Connectional Ministries, Committee on Native American Ministries, Committee on the Episcopacy, and was Chair of Standing Rules, among my other responsibilities including eight years as Secretary of the Cabinet while a District Superintendent.

In the SEJ, I have served several quadrennia as chair of the Committee on Rules & Organization and on the Committee on Episcopacy. I have been a speaker for the SEJ Student Forum; S.E.J.A.N.A.M. Minister's Conference, and the Jurisdictional Lay Speaker's Association. I was keynote speaker this past summer for the week-long SEJ "Music and Arts Week."

In the General Church, being known for my expertise with the Book of Discipline and our polity is a high compliment. I have served on the General Council on Ministries, two quadrennia on the UMC Connectional Table, The Worldwide UMC Study Committee, and I am currently a member of the General Commission on Religion and Race including its Executive and Governance Committees.

In addition, I have served on the Native American Forum, GBHEM's Native American Scholarship Committee, and was on the GCOM/Connectional Table Transition Team. I have been principal writer for GCOM, GCORR, and CT Legislation Committees. I have been elected as a delegate to *six* General Conferences. For service to the denomination, I am very grateful to have received the Candler School of Theology Distinguished Alumni Award, and the James Award from the SEJ United Methodist Men.

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.)

Serving on the Worldwide UMC Study Committee that was created at the 2008 General Conference was great exposure to both the diversity and unity found in the UMC. I seek to promote our connectional polity and avoid any diocesan fracturing of our denomination. I have sought to clarify what is adaptable and what is not across the whole United Methodist Church. I have been published on this subject in United Methodist publications like "The Quarterly Review" and "The Circuit Rider" numerous times. I also represented the issues of the 2008 Regional Conference Constitutional Amendments and asked for a Judicial Council Declaratory Decision on the Floor of GC 2008 (JD 1100). I have a history of being able to work with persons from around the world on worldwide UMC issues bridging theological and cultural divisions. We are a worldwide church and must work together for equity and understanding in order to promote the unifying work of Jesus Christ through the development of intercultural competency and fruitfulness. There is so much that we can learn from each other across our great connection.

I have also been on-site in missions with people across the world. I have been a part of mission teams and groups that have been in Bulgaria, the Philippines, Mozambique, the Bahamas, and Nicaragua. I and churches that I have served have been in mission in Stralzda and Varna, Bulgaria; Ciudad Sandino, El Porvernir, Managua, and Nuevo Vida, Nicaragua; Maputo, Mozambique; West End, Grand Bahama, Bahamas; and Quezon City and in the Payatas Trash Dump, Philippines. As a DS I led the Columbia District in missions giving for projects in Bulgaria and Malawi. I seek to be very cognizant of the missional needs of the poor and, once again, I absolutely believe that “Together We Can Do More!” as a missional church.

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 was on the eight person subcommittee at the 1996 General Conference that defined a “Self-avowed practicing homosexual” in BOD Paragraph 304.3. It was not an easy subject then, or now. I have close friends and have served many congregants who are LGBTQ persons. My eldest brother, who lived many years both in a heterosexual marriage and also later as an openly gay man, struggled all his life with sexual identity. So, the church’s stance is incredibly personal to me. With grace, love, and ministry toward all, I do also believe that there are actions that are contrary to God’s perfect plan for humankind, so I support our position on the matter. My theological and personal experience leads me to support the “incompatibility” language on human sexuality in the BOD.

I have experienced fruitful ministry with all persons, no matter their practice. Everyone needs the Gospel and loving accountable grace. In the vein of Richard Hays (The Moral Vision of the New Testament) and Bishop Tim Whitaker, I believe that our theological method cannot arrive at a different conclusion. Still, above all, I believe this issue should be reframed as missional engagement rather than judgment, as we try to work together for the redemption of all people with dignity and compassion.

b. Local church closures and establishing new faith communities

As a District Superintendent I was a missional strategist who sought ways to better facilitate community ministry. Sometimes that meant church realignments, but my strategy was less about closure than about new opportunities to share ministry. We created larger parishes, experimented with shared resources of clergy and buildings, and made room for connectionalism to work on the local level so that dire situations gave rise to resurrection and renewal.

We started new churches in every way imaginable, particularly through parachute drops, mother-daughter relationships (the most successful method), plus the

expansion of multi-site large churches. My attitude continues to suggest that we must do whatever it takes to create new spaces for new people that will effectively honor those who have gone before us.

c. **Next generation leaders**

In seminary and Course of Study teaching, and leading and teaching in Lay Servant Ministries, plus district wide “LeadershipNext” training and UMM ministry for years, I have sought to equip a new generation of leaders, both laity and clergy. I have been very involved in the teaching ministry of local churches and seminaries to train lay and clergy leaders.

It has been a joy to mentor many people into ministry and to have a leadership model that allows for people’s gifts to rise through the ranks of local churches without simply putting warm bodies into ill-defined situations. Through my time on the Cabinet, in contact with campus ministers, through my associate ministers, and also directly from my children (both ordained UMC clergy under age 35), I try to stay attuned to the particular challenges that face young and/or emerging church leaders as well as the exciting innovations that these folks are capable of producing that are unlike anything we have seen before.

d. **Impending Death Tsunami (Dr. Lovett Weems)**

There must be death for there to be resurrection. I commend the work of Dr. Lovett Weems, Dr. Don House, and others who project our ensuing potentialities in jarring ways. At the same time, we must dare to believe that we serve a God who can turn things around. I would rather reframe our circumstances as opportunities. This isn’t false hope that comes from desperation, but the fruitfulness that I have personally seen in my ministry and that of others. If you get the people called United Methodist together and put them to work on a mission from God, then there will be vitality. Church history tells us that seasons of revival and retreat come and go. I believe we are on the cusp of a new day of revival, and we should do everything imaginable to help make it happen!

e. **Guaranteed appointment for clergy**

The issue is really about ineffectiveness, and I believe that there are already methods such as administrative location (Par. 360), involuntary leaves of absence (Par. 355), and supervision (Par. 363.1(a) in the BOD to handle this. We need the right leadership who will use these procedures to deal with issues of ineffectiveness so that congregations and clergy can move toward healing and good health.

It is also important for bishops and cabinets to work together closely with Boards of Ordained Ministry to make sure that persons approved are effective and appointable. These two entities need to collaborate as much as possible in identifying, credentialing, and deploying effective clergy. I do not believe in perpetuating any institutional inequity that favors persons based on gender, race, or only one model of ministry. I support open itinerancy, and know how difficult that work is. I have done it! There is value in guarding our historic tenet of guaranteed appointment, but we must be vigilant in doing everything we can to promote clergy excellence at the local church and seminary level, promoting best practices through effective continuing and remedial education.

f. **Term episcopacy**

I support term episcopacy as a means to hold our episcopal leaders accountable. I must admit that I also value the wisdom of life tenure. If a bishop is effective then it would be poor stewardship to prematurely end their superintending oversight. Jurisdictional committees on episcopacy must have the wherewithal to deal with underperforming episcopal leaders and do all that can be done to address concerns. A related issue for me is that we need to have the same episcopal terms across the connection. At this point, only US bishops are guaranteed life tenure and that seems inequitable in a worldwide church.

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

As I just alluded, there are worldwide inequities in the nature of the episcopacy, apportionment expectations, plus huge areas of open itinerancy concerns. Some parts of the UMC are sorely lacking in supporting female clergy and women's rights. We are a global church that needs to avoid fracturing into separate parishes or affinity regions. I spent four years on the most recent Worldwide UMC Study Committee and support a Global Book of Discipline, but only with careful parameters about the use of local contextualization. Although Par. 543.7 allows Central Conferences to adapt the BOD, we must be careful about what can be adapted so that embracing our worldwide nature doesn't create separate entities or divide the church.

There is so much that we can learn from each other across the denomination, and we need each other so much. Partnerships must be fostered that promote unity and, at the same time, avoid US-centric paternalism. Once again, I support a motto of "Together We Can Do More!"