

Withdrawal of Nomination
Southeast Jurisdiction Conference
Rev. Tom Berlin
Virginia Annual Conference

After nearly a year of thought, prayer, conversation, reflection and discovery, I withdraw my nomination for the episcopacy. I have been able to reaffirm a clear call to pastoral ministry. At this time I do not sense a sufficient inward calling of God for the general superintendency to continue in the election process.

My reflection over the past year has enabled me to reaffirm my belief in the importance of the office of the episcopacy to the United Methodist Church. The oversight bishops provide, the faith they guard, the unity they seek, the discipline they administer and the work they support are all essential to our life together. Bishops work with cabinets who collectively administer appointments to hundreds of local churches in our conferences. The value of these positions and the good those who occupy them can do is apparent to us all.

At the same time, The United Methodist Church continues to affirm that *the local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs...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. (2012 Book of Discipline, P201)*

Those who serve as bishops give themselves predominately to the macro work of the denomination. Those appointed to the local congregation focus on the micro level of the church's mission in the community and world. Both arenas need committed and skilled leadership that is Christ-centered. Each is essential and both are important. During the 2016 General Conference I spent a great deal of time considering reports of the current and projected future state of the United Methodist Church provided by Don House, the economist who advises the General Commission for Finance and Administration. The projections are not encouraging for United Methodist churches in the United States. Changing these predicted outcomes will only happen if leaders at every level of our denomination find new and innovative ways to communicate the gospel to a society that is increasingly resistant and disinterested in its message, offer discipleship that moves from learning to transformation and engage the laity of our churches in challenges and ministry worthy of their time and resources.

At this time I experience the clear calling of God to give myself to these efforts in the context of leading in the local church. It is my hope that this leadership will prove beneficial not only to the congregation I serve but to other church leaders who seek resources, ideas and practices that might enable them to increase their fruitfulness. I am grateful for those who hear both the outer call of the church and a clear inner calling of God to offer themselves for election to the episcopal office. Being a nominee from the Virginia Annual Conference is one of the greatest honors of my vocational life. I appreciate deeply the encouragement of our delegation and I am indebted for this extended time to discern the will of the Holy Spirit. God has used this process in my life for many purposes, and I am grateful.