

SEJ Committee on Episcopacy
Questions for Episcopal Nominee-2016
Leonard Fairley-North Carolina

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

The genius of Wesleyan Theology for me in my journey of faith has always been its' incarnational nature, starting with God's redeeming grace rooted in the divine love of Jesus Christ, and nurtured by the Holy Spirit at work in my life. It is the grace which is at the heart of my calling into ministry. It is grace that is active, continuous, and transformative because it is initiated by God's calling for my simple response of "yes," to a love that shapes all that I do. Wherever I've served, and with whatever level of effectiveness I owe all to the grace of God. I have been "water-washed, spirit born," and nurtured at the table of Lord, and through these free unmerited gifts my life has been transformed. I totally depend upon the means of grace to empower, equip, and guide me into a life of faithful servanthood leadership. I find deep strength and encouragement in the practical nature of Wesleyan theology as I daily seek to live a life which is rooted in Scripture, informed by tradition, kept vital by reason, and attested to by experience. In Wesleyan theology I've discovered ways beyond my imagination to be a conducive channel through which the love and call of Jesus Christ flows from head, to heart, to life. The beauty of Wesleyan theology is that it is living and organic, opening up new and creative ways of being the people of God while still being deeply rooted in the unchanging Lordship and love of Jesus Christ.

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.)?

My record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church begins from a heart that desires to share the good news of the gospel with all of God's people, seeing in each person a beloved daughter or son of the living God made new by the grace of Jesus Christ. I have entered each of my pastoral appointments with the understanding that the best years were not behind it, but in front of it. I believed growth both spiritually and numerically were always possible, and expected not only by the denomination, but out of the sheer nature of God's calling and redemptive work in Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit I've been blessed to see growth in worship attendance, and

professions of faith in each of my appointments having over 300 professions of faith. In my first cross-racial appointment the average worship attendance increased by 30%. I have been blessed to lead others into accepting and answering their call to pastoral ministry. One of the joys of my life in ministry has been to discover, develop, and participate in small group disciple making pathways including but not limited to Disciple Bible Studies, Sunday school groups, relational groups, intercessory prayer groups, spiritual formation groups, and prison ministry groups. I have carried this over into my role as a district superintendent through sub-district gatherings where we gather as clergy to share in Holy Communion, and often sharing in the service of baptismal renewal. We also share table talk around scripture and a video clip with spiritual significance. It is from a place of Christ-filled spiritual formation and development that I have encouraged each community of faith to participate in long term and short-term mission opportunities. During my first tenure as a district superintendent I led a district team of lay people and clergy on a mission trip to Mississippi. It was out of this journey that we began to look for ways to serve in our own backyard, thus “Partners in Ministry” was born. This was and continues to be a missional emphasis focused on repairing substandard housing, developing youth leadership, and offering resource referral. I will describe this more fully in the next question.

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).

I have served as a trained coach through Passion in Partnership using the Appreciative Inquiry Method of discovery, destiny, dream, and design. Through my work with conference and district boards of ordained ministry and as a district superintendent I have been blessed to develop and mentor leaders. However, I feel that the most exciting and life-giving example has to be the development of leadership in the “District Partners in Ministry” which is outlined below:

Discovery-I moved into the neighborhood with the question: What God sized dream is waiting to become a reality in this setting? I intentionally sorted out the wisdom of every available social, religious, and governmental entity in the community inviting them to become partners in God’s kingdom work. In short I spent time prayerfully learning my context, which was a rural economically challenged district. There were no large United Methodist churches; in fact we did not have any congregations that had at least a thousand members.

Developed-A team of district clergy, laity, and youth leaders to form a co-operative group that began asking local churches questions such as what ministries and missions would they be active in if they had the resources, and what needs were critical for strengthening them and their communities? This team was intentionally multicultural including persons from every geographic area of the district. We physically went into each area asking a broad section of the community how the church could serve. We deliberately started with the idea of being in ministry with and not for the community. The results were simply amazing. I think the community saw this as not just another program, but an opportunity to develop a ministry that was truly incarnational. The three identified areas were: substandard housing, resource referral and youth development. Our response to one of the most essential needs was to develop, equip, and nurture ninth grade high school leadership through graduation.

Deployed-We ran this ministry out of the district office for a year before the Holy Spirit guided us to work with a local church that was closing. Spending the necessary time and energy with the leadership of this congregation was extremely challenging. However, out of this necessary work the Holy Spirit moved the leadership of this congregation to offer the use of their facility for Partners in Ministry. We led the lay leadership of this church to be in ministry with the people being served by Partners in Ministry, and as a result we were able to reopen the church. The ministry eventually outgrew the space, and actually purchased a former alternative school building. The church continues to be in ministry having learned and developed new spiritual gifts, new spiritual leadership, and a deeper understanding of what it means to be in ministry with the least and the lost. We were also able to develop strong youth leadership in the community and the church. Without paying attention to context and the available resources (both human, and church), this ministry would not have been possible.

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)?

The key element that has helped me toward a healthy, effective, and gracious form of (mutual) accountability has been the development of “Core Values” in each of my ministry settings, especially where non-appointed staff was concerned. The mutual setting of “Core Values” with clearly stated consequences has saved me a lot of heartbreak and despair when I’ve had to either discipline or dismiss a staff person. I’ve been able to share from a place of integrity and honesty with anyone who has, for whatever reason, made choices that were outside of the team’s set of values. Whenever I’ve had to hold

someone accountable I've always used this tool along with a 360-degree evaluation method. I've never released or held anybody accountable without a clear, loving, and gracious reminder of their promised covenant relationship as part of the team. I have always given people, where possible, an opportunity to do the work of reconciliation and restoration to the covenant team. However, I don't like to see things just sit and fester; it doesn't help the person or the team. I hold myself accountable to the covenant relationship of the Order of Elders, and also to Core Values of my local church setting. I've been a part of accountability groups throughout my ministry. I have always sought out a group of trusted and well respected colleagues who will hold me accountable without fear of offering anything that calls me toward greater depths of effectiveness. Whenever I've broken covenant, I have always made it a point to seek out the brothers or sisters necessary to restore covenant. I believe that there must be accountability in every area of the church if we are to effectively live into our vision and mission.

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

There were several situations during my first tenure on the cabinet including exiting a popular local pastor who was influencing a congregation negatively. The church turned around under new leadership, but before new leadership was brought in I allowed the congregation to share their hurt and anger without my responding back until they were finished. I just took their anger, and did the right thing. In another situation the right thing to do was to close the church. It was difficult, but it opened our eyes to a new discovery for ministry in the community. If I had not done the right thing, this new ministry would have never been born. Another example of doing the right thing was to remove the church treasurer who would not follow proper procedures. Once the treasurer was removed they began the process of suing me, but once again through prayer and spiritual discernment, removing them proved the right thing to do.

I have had the wonderful privilege of serving two cross-racial appointments where doing the “right thing” under difficult situations was a daily thing. I always felt the pressure of being the first African American Senior pastor in both of these settings. It was always amazing to watch how doing the “right thing” when I knew my character or ability was being questioned caused many wonderful transformations in me, and the congregations. I have always considered myself to be a non-anxious leader, and this I believe has served me well when it comes time to do the right thing.

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.)

Annual Conference: Board of Church and Society, Congregational & New Church Development, Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, Conference Episcopacy Committee, Conference Finance & Administration, Church Vitalization Consultant, Conference Transition Team (moving from 12 to 8 districts), Leadership Academy
Rockingham District Superintendent 2005-2012
Capital District Superintendent 2015-Present

Jurisdiction: Committee on Arrangement

General: Delegate to General Conference- 2008, 2012, & 2016

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.).

I have always been proud to call myself United Methodist and one the chief reasons is that through the “connection” we demonstrate over and over again, throughout the world, “the power of we.” I have witnessed that power through UMIIV, and UMCOR by serving on the following mission work teams: Costa Rica, Jamaica, Montserrat, Zimbabwe, and Haiti. I have also served on the Appalachian Service Project, Habitat homes, and Co-founder of Partners in Ministry (district mission). Disaster Recovery work in North Carolina, Mississippi, and South Carolina have also been some my most blessed moments in life. Publications: Contributing writer for *The Day the Earth Moved Haiti: From Havoc to Healing*.

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

a. Human sexuality

I will continue to allow the Holy Spirit to work in me by prayerfully maintaining a sense of what God (through scripture and the church) has called me to do. I took the vows to abide by and uphold *The Book of Discipline* and that is what I intend to do. We cannot allow this issue to paralyze the church and its’ mission in the world.

b. Local church closures, and establishing new faith communities.

I celebrate the amazing and extraordinary kingdom work done by every local church. I grieve the loss of any church. However, facing that reality has life within it, because I believe God causes something new to emerge. We are an Easter people of resurrection, life not death. We get a glimpse of the vitality of new faith communities from the Apostle Paul's ministry. He started new communities for new people. It has been my experience that new faith communities are vital to making disciples. We must also prayerfully be intentional about starting more multicultural new faith communities. We cannot expect new emerging leadership to be appointed into congregations that are on hospice and really need a chaplain. I don't mean this in a negative way. Oftentimes churches in this category need gracious leadership that can lead them through a good death.

c. Next generation leaders

I believe that next generation leaders are "now" leaders, and we must begin to allow them to lead. Every local church, annual conference, cabinet, and Board of Ordained ministry must make it a priority to put in place tools to identify, nurture, develop, and deploy young next generation leaders. However, we must also acknowledge that next generation spirit-led, and Christ-centered, leadership comes in all ages, genders, and races. Prayerful work must be done about how we appoint these leaders. We need to appoint them where their spiritual creativity and imagination are not stifled.

d. Impending Death Tsunami (Dr. Lovett Weems)

God has always done God's best redemptive work in the face of impending death. While we acknowledge and deal truthfully with the facts that Lovett Weems so prophetically makes clear, we must also hold to the fact that there is life for us after, and even in the midst of death. I believe our job is to faithfully begin to look for and work towards the new life that is breaking out all around us. I do not think the United Methodist Church is doomed. However, it would be to our own peril to turn a deaf ear to Lovett Weems' prophetic voice on this matter. It will take prayer, imagination, belief, and action on the part of the whole church to birth new life. Responses to a Tsunami or any storm require thoughtful and planned recovery efforts. I believe we should already have a plan in place centered in the Christ who stands in the midst of storms and speaks words of peace, renewal, and hope.

e. **Guaranteed Appointment for Clergy**

“Every effective elder in full connection **who is in good standing** shall be continued under appointment by the bishop.” Paragraph 334.1 *The Book of Discipline* (page 258). What this says to me is that there is no such thing as a guaranteed appointment. When the issue is faithful and fruitful effectiveness we must prayerfully seek the courage to gracefully follow the process outlined in *The Book of Discipline* with a deep willingness to speak the truth in love. I believe every local church deserves effective and excellent pastoral leadership. My heart breaks at appointment time when we spend so much of our time dealing with ineffective leadership. We must do the hard work upfront so that every pastor who is in good standing, and doing faithful, effective, and fruitful work receives an appointment regardless of race, gender, or prophetic voice.

f. **Term Episcopacy**

I do think the time for term limits has come. The dynamics of working with such an expansive group must be difficult when it comes to accountability. However, I am hopeful that we can find ways to continue to use the spiritual wisdom of all Bishops.

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

While I believe that the church is made global by our belief in Jesus Christ, and we are made richer by this truth the question for me has always been one of context. What are those particular things that bind us together? What can be adapted outside the United States? Which portions of *The Book of Discipline* are non-negotiable in the Global Book of Discipline? For example: Part 1-(Constitution), Part 3-(Doctrinal Standards), Part 4- (The Ministry of all Christians), and Part 5-(The Social Principles). This is a journey worth taking; however, we must be careful that while we develop structure for our worldwide nature, we do not form divisions. I look forward to being able to answer this more clearly after hearing the report at 2016 General Conference.