

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

I was very blessed in seminary to have been formed by students and faculty who were bent towards the sacramental life and daily prayer in a Wesleyan ethos, and it has shaped my life and ministry. I believe it reflects in how I have led churches and the district I serve: more regular practice and teaching about the sacraments, distinct teaching and celebration of liturgical seasons, increased awareness of Wesleyan means of grace, acts of piety, etc., and the need for our life of Christ to be included in all aspects of our lives, not just on Sunday mornings. Most of my ministry has been served in a predominantly Calvinistic culture, and I think those who have witnessed my ministry can attest that I have given a Wesleyan witness where such is a minority view.

I have also willingly placed myself in accountability groups in my ministry, ranging from covenant discipleship groups to Emmaus reunion groups to SLI incubator projects and covenants. Small covenant communities hold us in love and grace, and hold us to Christian disciplines, which are certainly a Wesleyan practice.

**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.)**

I believe that the churches I have served began to practice intentional discipleship practices and community missional involvement under my leadership. Two of the churches that I served previous to being a superintendent underwent changes in both physical plant and discipleship practices that are now bearing fruit. I believe some of this is because of demonstrated ability and comfort to minister to the “dones” and “nones.”.

Our growing edge as United Methodists will be how we engage in both traditional and non-traditional forms of worship and community life, such as Fresh Expressions and small communities/house churches that live under a common rule.

**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)**

The most recent demonstration of this would be in the formulation and implementation of the Generative Leadership Academy (GLA), a leadership development program that I co-developed with other leadership in the district I presently serve, in tandem with GBOD and the (formerly) neighboring Paris District. GLA is a year-long event that helps develop leaders who partner with their pastor to make deep changes, including: (1) help local churches develop an outward missional focus, (2) teach fundamental elements of discipleship, (3) help implement ministry ideas, and (4) foster connections in small groups

and across the district to strengthen relationships and pool resources. The quarterly gatherings consist of a 24-hour retreat, and each weekend centers on these respective themes: Weekend One: Meeting God/Foundation for Discipleship, Weekend Two: Piety/Practice Being with God, Weekend Three: Spiritual Gifts/Living into God's Call, and Weekend Four: Mercy/God's Love in Action.

GLA has born fruit, and it shows in (a) leaders who have gone back to their churches to help interpret present realities and ways to be effective, (b) individuals who are furthering their exploration of call (lay or clergy) given their identified and realized spiritual gifts, and (c) individuals who are pursuing a vocation in the church.

**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)?**

As a superintendent, the yearly consultations that I hold with clergy are face-to-face opportunities to talk about faithfulness in ministry, vocational "fit," and a discussion about fruitfulness (which I tend to use "gross" rather than "net" metrics as a measurement) is part of the consultation. I have similar conversations with churches at charge conferences: (1) where are you bearing fruit as a congregation, and (2) where do you need help? I believe I am able to do so with both a passion for excellence as well as grace in our manner of upholding each other.

As a pastor, I challenge both church committees and staff similarly: How are we bearing fruit? Where are we having success and growth? What needs to be shored up? Where can we grow? Where have we failed? It is always a priority for me to ask the staff-parish committee to be equally frank with me in my work as their pastor and challenge and assess me in these areas.

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

In April of 2000, Robert Glen Coe was executed by the state of Tennessee, the first person to be executed in Tennessee since 1960. In the months before and after the execution, I served as a pastor to the Coe family. While I had some support of family and church members, I faced a lot of public scrutiny and disapproval. There is no doubt in my mind that I did the faithful thing, but there were days and moments where it would have been easier to back away. It was an experience that taught me a lot about embracing grace amidst adversity, and facing conflict rather than avoiding it.

As a cabinet member (March 2011-present) I have embraced strategy and discipleship over "being liked", regarding the embrace of payment of apportionments and addressing issues such as declining worship attendance and right-sizing staff. While difficult and going

against the culture of “church nice,” I find that the conversations lead to clarity of call and purpose, in some cases yield fruit, and in all cases lead to faithfulness.

**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 served on several conference committees, most notably as chair of the Commission on Equitable Compensation, member of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and as an assistant conference secretary. I have also served on the General Board of Discipleship as the Order of Saint Luke representative, and was an *ex officio* member of the Holy Communion Study (2000-2004, also by virtue of being in the Order of St. Luke), speaking on the floor of General Conference 2004 in favor of its adoption. I was also selected from our conference in fall of 2001 to be a baptismal interpreter regarding the proposed constitutional amendments regarding baptism and church membership.

I was elected a GC Alternate and Jurisdictional Delegate in 2004, a GC First Alternate and Jurisdictional Delegate in 2012, and the lead clergy GC delegate in 2016. I have been a member of the Memphis Conference Cabinet since March 2011, and currently serve as cabinet dean. I currently serve on the SEJ Committee on Investigation.

**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.)**

My experience with the global church has been limited to my own writing (of which a few articles have been published globally), serving on GBOD as the representative of an affiliate agency, and working with UMCOR in two conference disasters. Our conference, along with the Tennessee conference, is in a PACTO with the Eastern Mexico Conference, and our cabinets met jointly in Mexico in 2013.

As I mentioned earlier, the district that I presently serve collaborated with the GBOD on developing the Generative Leadership Academy, which will soon be available for use for the whole denomination.

**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**

My thoughts regarding human sexuality were published last year in UMC.org’s “Sharing in Faith: Sexuality in the United Methodist Church” series. As I shared then: I am theologically orthodox and hold a traditional ethic regarding sexuality, and am convicted that United Methodism holds the best theological formulations and traditions to be a witness for Jesus

Christ in this world. Sexuality is complicated; it is emotional and can be an uncomfortable discussion at best.

To think that there are only two sides to this issue, and to sexuality in general, is to be less than self-aware. It is a multifaceted issue, and lack of true Christian conversation at a table has left us adrift to label, demonize and stigmatize those who see differently. Because of this, my own preference for embracing the *via media*, “the middle way,” has been strengthened even more. The *via media* is not to be confused with sitting on the fence; rather, it provides a stable ground for conversation, discernment and work of the Holy Spirit to abide. As I once wrote in a blog, I don't see how Christians can place themselves anywhere else other than the middle - the REAL middle - the place where Jesus was on Calvary. Crucified between a man who wanted Jesus to prove his power and fix things, and a man who knew that one day, he would get far better than he deserved. I think that's where God would have us: in the middle of life's messiness, placing myself in God's will rather than my own.

#### **b. Local church closures and establishing new faith communities**

I have been involved in a few church closures, necessitated in some cases by lack of participation, and in other cases lack of resources. Every year, local churches in the district are asked this question: “If this church closed tomorrow, who would notice?” One of the hopes of the Generative Leadership Academy is to help church lay leadership to act locally and Connectionally, and for the overriding question to be, “What is best for the Kingdom to make disciples of Jesus Christ?” That can mean anything from closing a church to merging congregations to utilizing the Connection in ways familiar and new, given resources and spiritual gifts.

Two attempts are in the making at present in making new faith communities in the district I presently serve: (1) a “pub theology” meeting at a brewery/pub, and (2) a similar meeting at a coffee shop in an arts district of a district city. A few churches in the district are also holding addiction recovery worship services that are, in essence, new faith communities located within an established one.

#### **c. Next generations leaders**

One of the things we must do as a denomination is instill a culture of call for laity and clergy. We are all “ordained” at our baptism, but how the Church encourages, develops, and validates that call is paramount. We must help people identify their spiritual gifts, increase their leadership capacity, and equip them not just to be disciples, but to be able to make disciples – who, in turn, can also make disciples.

Experience shows that short- and long-term mission work creates an environment where people encounter Jesus Christ and those in need of Him in experiential (i.e. non-theoretical)

ways that are formative and transformative. 57% of college students participating in Project Transformation go into a church vocation. Many of the laity participating in the Generative Leadership Academy have pursued additional venues to examine and enhance their call, in both laity and clerical roles. The Texas Conference does something similar in their “Laity Unleashed” experience. These, and other experiments, are things we must avail ourselves of in the years to come to prepare all of our leaders, today’s and tomorrow’s, for leadership in the United Methodist Church.

**d. Impending death tsunami (Dr. Lovett Weems)**

I understand the context from which Dr. Weems is speaking, but it is insular from an evangelistic point of view; there is no shortage of unchurched people in the United States, and the field is “ripe” for harvest. The death tsunami does require us to embrace the impending realities and needs, and to make choices now that are more organically driven and less about institutional survival.

**e. Guaranteed appointment for clergy**

The intent of the guaranteed appointment was a good one: allow pastors to be bold, creative, and prophetic in their work without fear of losing his/her job, and foster more support for appointments of women and people of color. The unintended consequence was the creation of pastoral complacency and ineffectiveness, exacerbated by the decline of membership and resources.

I am hopeful about the future of United Methodism, but there is certainly a difficult season in front of us that will force us to revisit guaranteed appointments and educational requirements, given the present unsustainability of General, Conference, and local church budgets. I support the ending of guaranteed appointments, but I am at a loss on how to accomplish such logistically, given the last attempt at General Conference that was ruled unconstitutional. Our current system has been firewalled so that change is very difficult, if not nearly impossible. I have been involved in the Disciplinary process to remove an ineffective pastor, and while not impossible, it is extremely time-consuming and a test of administrative and *Disciplinary* acumen.

**f. Term episcopacy**

We are very careful how much authority we give our bishops, and while the making and fixing of pastoral appointments is no small thing, bishops are limited in much; to quote Tom Frank and Russ Richey, “They (bishops) have few sanctions at their disposal, and certainly no right to fire the people they work with. [They have no] legislative or judicial authority.” (from *Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition* [2004], p. 96). In this age, leadership development and missional strategy seems to be the role we want bishops to have. These limitations are not insignificant and have to be considered in any conversation of term limits.

I would support (1) serving a term of 8 years, and then standing for re-election after such, or (2) being elected to an area for one twelve-year term. Our most successful churches have long pastorates, and it seems to me that conferences would be no exception.

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

Our *Book of Discipline*, ¶101, states, “We are a worldwide denomination united by doctrine, discipline, and mission through our connectional covenant. *The Book of Discipline* expresses that unity.” That, along with our denominational mission statement, makes us distinctive among most denominations in the United States. I would mourn a loss of that distinctiveness and unity in essentials.

As a United States, the UMC continues to be in decline, while other parts of the world are growing in membership. This is already causing a shift in demographics and influence. At the heart of this issue are matters of trust and power: do those of us who fund a large part of the UMC trust the larger Connection? As the global church gets larger, are we Americans comfortable having less influence in matters? At the same time, can we design our *Book of Discipline* to have flexibility to adapt to differing world contexts while embracing a global unity in essentials? I believe we can and should, if we believe John Wesley’s words, “The world is our parish.”