

Biographical Sketch for Sharon G. Austin Florida Conference 2020 Episcopal Nominee

The Reverend Sharon G. Austin is the Florida Annual Conference nominee for the 2020 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Her pronouns are she/her/hers. She has been a clergywoman for 40 years and served the last twenty-three years in The United Methodist Church. When she decided to transfer to The United Methodist Church, she described the transfer of orders, as a leading of the 'Holy Spirit.'

She serves as the Conference Director of Connectional and Justice since 2013. She has served five Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Appointments: including appointment to three local churches and then as a District Superintendent (of the former South Central District). She had oversight for a sophisticated district comprised of ninety churches and missions located in rural, suburban, and urban communities. She has served on a host of District and Conference leadership teams and, as Director of Connectional and Justice Ministries, serves as an officer of Florida Annual Conference. She also serves and has served on numerous as Southeastern Jurisdictional and General Church boards and Committees (refer to Question #6 for a complete list). She currently serves as Secretary of the General Board of Church and Society and Chairperson of the SEJ Directors of Connectional Ministries. She will represent the Florida Annual Conference at the upcoming General and Southeastern Jurisdictional Conferences and has represented the Florida Annual Conference at General and Southeastern Jurisdictional Conferences in 2012, 2016, and General Conference 2019. She was host District Superintendent for General Conference 2012 in Tampa, FL. Her leadership marks are her willingness to make difficult missional decisions and to speak the truth in love and to power.

She is a native of Jamaica, New York, who was baptized in the Congregational Church raised in Lutheran Churches in New York. Her parents, native Floridians, were part of the Great Migration of blacks who moved to the north, seeking more significant opportunities than were available for blacks in the south in the 1950s. Austin was actively involved in her neighborhoods, churches, schools, girl scout troops, and dance classes. These were culturally diverse organizations that significantly informed her passion and expectation for inclusion. The family later moved to Florida and joined the Baptist church of her grandparents.

Austin experienced her call to ministry while a student at Berry College in Mt. Berry, GA, where the ministry of a young, United Methodist campus chaplain influenced the course of her future vocation. Austin earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology with a double minor in Religion and Philosophy. She later attended Candler School of Theology, Atlanta, GA (and as a National Baptist) on the recommendation of her chaplain and Religion and Philosophy Department faculty. When Austin graduated from Candler with a Master of Divinity degree, only one previous graduating class included an African-American woman. She joined Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church (which was dually-aligned in the Progressive National and American Baptist Conventions). She was later licensed and ordained by that congregation, becoming the first woman to be ordained in the congregation's 95-year history. The late Martin Luther King, Sr. served on her ordination council. She was later 'called' to serve as the first clergywoman to join the pastoral staff.

Austin has served as a clinical chaplain in a prison for women, a hospice chaplain, completed 8.5 units of Clinical Pastoral Education in several hospitals and served as adjunct faculty at the Interdenominational Theological Center (The I.T.C.) and Candler School of Theology. Following her move to FL, she attended and graduated from the Barry University Doctor of Ministry program in Miami, FL.

She is married to Michael Holliday (retired), and they are the proud parents of three daughters, Erin, Genise and Desiree, and one son, Nicholas. Nicholas and his wife Nerli have one son, Collin, who is a joy!

She enjoys traveling and eating local foods, cooking favorite foods for family gatherings, reading, gardening, and dancing.

People in Austin's personal life and professional associations have spoken into her life and ministry over the years. The Spirit's nudging has prompted her toward listening and now responding to the call to offer herself as an Episcopal leader of The United Methodist Church.