

**The 2020 SEJ Questions for an Episcopal Nominee
Rev. Edith Gleaves—North Carolina Conference**

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

The Wesleyan way of being a disciple of Jesus Christ has been part of my faith DNA for at least four generations. God's prevenient, justifying and sanctifying grace have been active in the lives of my father's father, and my grandfather's father who were all Methodist pastors. These same wonderful graces were active in the lives of my parents, who both actively served in the local hometown Methodist Church in which I and my younger sister and brother were baptized as children.

Through the nurture and modeling of my parents and my church family I gave my life to Christ at eleven years old. However, for as long as I could remember, I understood that I was a child of God, loved and claimed by God, and a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. I was confirmed at twelve, becoming a member of my home church. Up until that time I had been part of the children's Sunday School and ministries. Over time I as a young person became the Sunday School secretary, taught children's Sunday School, sang in the children's then adult choir, and even played the piano as a youth for the church during a time when we were temporarily without one.

All of these rich experiences helped to form and shape me as a Christian rooted deeply in Wesleyan theology and practice in head, heart and life. It seemed to come as no surprise to my parents, my pastor, and those who knew me when I shared I had heard the call to into ministry at sixteen years old. I had been praying for the Lord to send workers into the fields which were ripe for harvest. Growing up in Robeson County, one of the poorest in the state, and one of the most distinctive, evenly divided between Black, White and Native American people, I saw there was much human need--physical and spiritual. I knew they needed a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, who loved them, and also cared about their physical, financial, emotional needs, and the need for justice.

God answered my prayers by setting my heart on fire and calling me into full time ordained ministry. God has been doing remarkable things with me, in me and through me ever since.

I was blessed to receive my Masters of Divinity at Duke Divinity School where I learned more deeply and broadly about the Wesleyan tradition, about the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, experience and reason, about how this tradition involves both personal and social holiness, and about the centrality of the Scriptures. In addition to the practice of daily disciplines of prayer, and weekly corporate worship, I learned of and began journaling and, fasting.

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.)

God has blessed me to be the first woman of color to be ordained in the history of the North Carolina Annual Conference. God has also blessed me abundantly in giving me experiences of serving the Church locally and globally in a variety of settings which include a small, black local church as pastor; an associate in a cross-racial appointment in a large suburban church; as Director of Multi-cultural Ministries, Spiritual Formation and Social Concerns for the N. C. Annual Conference; as lead pastor in another cross-racial appointment for a midsize suburban church; as Deputy General Secretary for Mission Personnel for the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM); as associate in a cross-racial appointment in a large suburban church and currently as a District Superintendent.

In each of the local church settings there were increases in professions of faith, in average worship attendance, in outreach efforts and small group formations.

During my tenure at Resurrection UMC as their first pastor who was female and first person of color, I received the District's evangelism award. We doubled membership there from two hundred to four hundred. My service at North Raleigh UMC was the first cross-racial appointment of an elder of color in the Annual Conference, and their first appointment of a woman. My primary focus was the Youth Ministry which grew steadily in my service there, again in partnership with laity leadership. My role also included preaching and small group formation. A Sunday School class I founded is still active some 30 years later.

The work of the General Board of Global Ministries connects us with the local church. During my service at GBGM, I led in oversight of the recruitment, training, deployment and support of some one thousand global and domestic missionaries, who came out of their local churches. I also worked across the USA and in over 40 countries to visit with missionaries, problem solve, consult with our mission partners and church leadership. My work included oversight of program staff and offices in New York and Atlanta, and a budget of over \$28,000,000. I was the first female elder of color to serve on the GBGM Cabinet. One of my most treasured accomplishments was the commissioning of some four hundred new missionaries across those years, and the development of two new categories of missionaries—the Home Missioners, the male version of the Deaconess, and Global Missionaries, focused on Global Health. I did so with the help of some forty dedicated and faithful staff in the New York and Atlanta offices, and with church partners in the U.S. and across the world.

One of the greatest accomplishments in outreach and mission was at Wrightsville UMC in partnership with laity there in the establishment of the Mission of Hope: Rotifunk Hospital. We founded it with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. It embodies the priority of all United Methodist people to engage in ministry with the poor and in global health. This partnership has grown to be a Harbor District and Annual Conference Mission Initiative. The lives of mothers and babies are being saved in the name of Christ through this ministry outreach, and community based health care has been established.

District Superintendents are the primary mission strategist in the District. In partnership with laity and clergy leaders across the District we have twelve primary areas of focus. As the first District Superintendent of color for the District, and only the second female, I take particular sense of accomplishment in the growing partnership with our African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches in efforts towards fostering racial reconciliation and justice. In the midst of racial tensions which exist in our current society, one such gathering included Wilmington's mayor, and the Chiefs of the Law Enforcement Agencies as UMCs and AMEZs churches honored our local law enforcement officers with a joint worship service and dinner, in a local AMEZ church. Along with joint worship services and outreach mission projects I rejoice and the partnering of individual local UMC and AMEZ churches and are seeing fruitful church and personal relationships developing across racial lines which will promote healing, wholeness and justice. Another exciting result of this partnership is my leading in the development of a new faith community between our UMC and the AMEZ of the area.

I have also been blessed with many invitations to preach, speak, and lead workshops and plenary sessions within the District, the Annual Conference and globally. This includes preaching twice for the Sierra Leone Annual Conference, most recently in 2019. For most of the local churches I preach I am the first woman, and certainly the first clergywoman of color, to be afforded the opportunity. I have been profoundly blessed by the openness and warmth of the reception in most of these settings.

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.

Through my work with the Annual Conference and District Boards of Ordained Ministry, and currently as a District Superintendent where I oversee 86 charges of over 100 local churches and local pastors, I have been blessed to develop and mentor leaders.

An example of leadership is my commitment to an inclusive church through open itineracy. An accomplishment of which I am proud is the cross-racial appointments of this District's first Asian-American pastors to local churches. I have made three such appointments in the three

years of service here thus far. These appointments are seeing fruits of growth spiritually and numerically. Also, at least 20% of new appointments made each year in this District have been women clergy, many of whom will be the first woman pastor to be received by their churches.

I also bring to mind a layperson who subsequently became the leader of the Mission of Hope: Rotifunk Hospital. I had invited him along with three others to travel with me to Sierra Leone, West Africa. Those persons were profoundly impacted by that trip, and the subsequent work we did to develop that mission. Now, many lives are being transformed and saved through that ministry because of these spiritual leaders who were 'discovered, developed, and deployed' for a Kingdom task.

Perhaps some of the most exciting and life-giving encouragement of development of leadership are the three persons of color, two of whom are women, who have become UMC clergy, recognizing and/or accepting that calling while I was their local church pastor.

As mentioned earlier, one of my most treasured accomplishments was with GBGM, with the recruitment, training, commissioning and sending of some four hundred new missionaries across those years of service. The development of two new categories of missionaries—the Home Missioners, the male version of the Deaconess, and Global Missionaries, focused on Global Health, happened under my leadership and in partnership with the Deaconess Program, and the Global Health Offices.

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 clergyperson, Annual Conference and Global Agency staff leader, and now as a District Superintendent, I know the crucial importance of supervision and effective responsiveness to concerns. As Wesleyan Methodists we are blessed to have sound structures in place to assist us in providing accountability. Whenever I had staff in a local church or Conference or General Agency I held us accountable in regular meetings, usually weekly, where we reviewed, planned and shared. We also did annual evaluations and looked for ways to commend and improve performance. Training and continuing education opportunities were also provided as needed.

At the district level I have intentionally worked to have a visible presence within the district through regular clergy meetings, (both active and retired), charge conferences, preaching, visiting district churches to hear the pastors preach, UMW meeting presentations, and other special gatherings. At the Annual District fall 'Set Up' meetings I invite the Lay Leaders as well as the local pastor of our churches as a way to emphasize the importance of lay/clergy partnership in the local church. Together we have worship, fellowship, and a sharing of expectations, goals, and important information.

At the same time, I myself am subject to individual and personal accountability. I take the covenant relationship of the Order of Elders to heart and hold myself to it. When I serve in a local church setting, I hold myself accountable to the Core Values of that church. I have sought out and found trusted, respected persons in my life who are clergy and laity, family and friends, who know my strengths and my weaknesses, who will speak truth in love, offer guidance and pray with and for me.

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

I have the wonderful privilege of being the first Woman of Color (African American) to be ordained in the North Carolina Annual Conference. I was ordained by a bishop who told me “the only reason I am ordaining you is because the Discipline says I have to.” I was in this bishop’s last ‘class’ of ordinands. All along he had made no equivocation about his stance against ordaining women. All along he had made it clear he was no friend of the clergy of color.

So from day one, as it were, I have been challenged to do the ‘right thing’ in difficult situations. In my first appointment, as a young pastor right out of seminary, the chair of the Administrative Council told me face to face he did not believe in women pastors. However, I loved him, his family and those people in Christ anyway. By the time I left that appointment, the membership had grown in number and Spirit, the physical facilities had been significantly improved, the outreach and mission had increased, and he was sad to see me go!

My next appointment was as an associate at a White, suburban congregation of well over 1,000. It was the first cross-racial appointment of an ordained clergy person in the N. C. Annual Conference, and also this congregation’s first clergywoman. Overall the reception was good. However, an elderly gentleman refused to receive me for a visit when he was hospitalized. Later after he was discharged, this man knelt at the altar to receive Communion. I could have easily passed by him, refusing to offer him the Cup, the blood of Christ, shed for him. I could see him trembling, his head bowed. He would not raise his eyes to me. ‘The blood, of Christ, shed for you,’ I said. He raised his eyes and in them I saw tears. Doing the right thing in this difficult situation was a transforming ‘God’ moment of grace for us both.

The first day of my role of District Superintendent had me doing the right thing in a difficult situation. It was brought to my attention that one of the local licensed pastors serving a two point charge had to be removed. He was appointed the year before although he was not in good standing with his current, non-UMC denomination. My counterpart in the pastor’s denomination was the one who informed us of the suspension of this man’s credentials. He was insistent that this individual should not be serving a local church—anywhere. After I had consultation with the pastor, who confirmed this story, I met with the PPRC leadership of these two churches. So, their first meeting with their new DS was to tell them their pastor, who they

already had come to love, was being discharged immediately! I walked with this congregation through these hard times, and brought in a retired, former DS as an interim for the rest of that appointment year. The congregations both grew in numbers and Spirit. They now have their first clergywoman and there is a mutual love relationship between them. Both churches continue to grow in grace, joy and numbers.

Hurricane Matthew hit the fall of my first year. Hurricane Florence hit the fall of my third year. Many places had not yet recovered from the devastation of the first Storm. I have been walking alongside pastors and people in recovery and repair efforts, helping to direct Conference funding of over \$200,000 for assistance. Our district hosted Bishop Hope Ward and our entire Cabinet on a work team project at the home of a ninety-two year old man displaced by Florence. I have worked with our Conference to help establish four new Disaster Response Centers and four satellites in our District where there were none before. We were much better positioned for response when Hurricane Dorian hit the fall of my fourth year, and continue to improve in our ability to reach out in Christ's name in times of Disaster.

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.)

The areas of **Annual Conference Leadership** includes, District Superintendent, Harbor District, currently, General Conference/Jurisdictional Conference Delegate for 2020, Cabinet Representative SBC-21, Harbor District Committee of Ordained Ministry, N.C. Annual Conference Session Bible Study Leader, N. C. Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, N. C. Conference, Director of Multicultural Relations, Spiritual Formation and Social Concerns (1990-1995).

The areas of **Jurisdictional Leadership** includes service as Jurisdictional Delegate (1994) Jurisdictional Reserve Delegate (1990).

The Areas of **General Church Leadership** include, General Board of Global Ministries (2000-2010), Deputy General Secretary of Mission Personnel, General Board of Global Ministries, Deputy General Secretary, Special Projects, General Conference, GBGM Staff Representative.

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 been blessed to experience John Wesley's phrase, "the world is my parish" in a local and global way in our wonderfully global United Methodist Church. My first introduction to a

mission work team came as a youth. We simply cleaned up the grounds around an elderly women's mobile home. I will never forget the tears of joy that ran down her face and the hugs of thanks she gave to each of us. The love of Christ had touched her heart and ours through this simple outreach. A seed had been planted.

As a new, young pastor I participated in a Conference mission work team to Reynosa, Mexico where we assisted in building an addition to the parsonage for the pastor and family. I was so impacted by that experience I co-lead a work team the following year to the same place where we worked on the new sanctuary for this growing church.

All of this led to my position with the General Board of Global Ministries where I was Deputy General Secretary of Mission Personnel. There for nearly a decade I led the program area to recruit, train, deploy and support all categories of missionaries across the United States and the world. My work took me across the USA and in over forty countries to visit with missionaries, problem solve, consult with our mission partners and church leadership. My work with GBGM also put me in interaction and partnership for various reasons with our other denominational agency leadership, such as the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Discipleship, Communications, and Pensions.

Once back in my home Conference as one of the pastors at Wrightsville UMC, which was very active in local mission outreach, I partnered with the laity and led us in establishing a global mission outreach partnership. The Mission of Hope: Rotifunk Hospital is the now Conference and Harbor District level partnership with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. With the Methodist Church of Norway, we have rebuilt the hospital, brought in staff, and serve by saving the lives of mothers and babies in Christ's name.

Due to the impact of Hurricane Matthew and especially from Hurricane Florence the Harbor District has suffered extensive damage and devastation to local churches, parsonages and community homes and businesses. My intentional outreach of presence, assisting churches to connect with Conference, UMCOR and other financial resources and UMCs who wanted to partner in prayer and assistance, and providing a time of retreat for impacted pastors were important ways of connecting the United Methodist Church communion. New Disaster Recovery Centers and satellites have been established in the Harbor District as a way to be in mission to thousands. The needs will persist for years to come.

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 agree with the statement 2016 **Book of Discipline**... "We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift." and that

“All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence.” And that ...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. “ Par.161.G. I believe in the sanctity of marriage as a covenantal relationship between two adults, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The wind of the Holy Spirit blows to the ultimate oneness in Christ, regardless of race, age, class, marital status, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation. The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel to all. All means all. I believe God includes LGBTQ people in the ‘all’ to be fully loved and fully included as siblings in Christ, and that the gifts and calling of all includes LGBTQ persons for ordination.

Local church closures and establishing new faith communities:

Across the United States we are witnessing the decline of church membership, the aging of our congregations, and the increase of church closures. We know that it is crucial to engage in ministry in new ways, for new faces and new spaces of faith. The North Carolina Annual Conference leads the nation in establishing new faith communities. As a District Superintendent I have been working closely with our Conference Office of New Faith Communities and our Mission Strategy Committee to increase faith communities especially through satellite or mother-daughter type church relationships. We are working at something never done in our Annual Conference, and perhaps in the UMC, by partnering with our AMEZ counterparts in establishing a new faith community as a way to reach across dividing lines and witness to racial reconciliation in Christ.

We are also working with the recently established Conference Office of Church Transformation. We are making intentional effort in identifying and helping congregations discern the best path forward for health and strength in making disciples of Jesus Christ. This may involve revitalization, reconfiguration, or becoming a legacy church which closes with dignity while still being a blessing to others in some way.

b. Next generation of leaders:

One of the most refreshing moves of the Spirit I have seen of late is that so many of our Conference delegates elected to the General and Jurisdictional Conferences are under the age of 40, including the election of our youngest youth yet! Our denomination needs the leadership insight and fresh ideas from our bright and gifted youth and young adults. We are seeing in these delegations the fruit of the necessary intentional process of identifying potential young people, and equipping, empowering, training and placing them in leadership positions where they can serve effectively.

Our District Mission Strategy Team has as one of our primary foci resourcing our local churches on how to identify, invite, nurture, and encourage Millennials within and beyond the walls of the church. We have developed a new resource which we will share with churches across the District, and I anticipate will become a Conference wide resource. We must empower and equip young people to lead at all levels of the Church. The UMC will not thrive, nor survive without them.

c. Impending death tsunami (Dr. Lovett Weems):

The word across the UMC has been for a long time is that in the USA we are declining and that unless we reach younger and more diverse people (including racial and ethnic diversity) our future as a denomination will cease to be. As our numbers-in the United States-continue to decrease, even the increase in giving which has been offsetting the decline in numbers will become an unsustainable practice.

Yet, we do dare to believe that in Jesus Christ all things are possible. When the people called United Methodists put our hearts and wills and minds and faith into it, we can turn things around from death to resurrection. Indeed, in the North Carolina Annual Conference our average worship attendance level increased in 2018 by 1250. The Harbor District which I serve made a significant contribution to that increase. When we faithfully discern and follow as the Holy Spirit calls and leads we have a future filled with hope and vitality.

d. Guaranteed appointment for clergy:

As a clergy woman of color who has experienced several open itineracy appointments, I have an appreciation for guaranteed appointment for clergy. It gives needed protection and justice to clergy from being denied appointment because of race or ethnicity, gender, prophetic ministry or theological affiliations. It is important we do the right thing in working to ensure ALL pastors in good standing doing fruitful work has equal access to appointments. I am in agreement with our Judicial Council who has overturned the attempt to discontinue the guaranteed appointment for clergy.

However, sitting with my Cabinet colleagues during appointment making sessions I realize more fully the impact of the guaranteed appointment as we agonize together over having to send regularly underperforming, even ineffective clergy, to yet another church. Frustration grows when gifted local pastors may not receive an appointment because the elder is owed one. I believe we have the answer—"All elders in full connection who are in good standing...shall be continued under appointment by the bishop *unless they ...have failed to meet the requirements for continued eligibility.*" (2016 Book of Discipline Par.337.1, 334.2,3) It takes the combined, willing and prayerful efforts of the S/PPRC, dCOM, BOM, Cabinet and Bishop to speak the truth in love, and gracefully follow the processes we already have to exit ineffective pastors. At the

same time it is important that clergy excellence be fostered and promoted at the most basic unit of the local church and every level of the Church.

e. Term episcopacy:

There are certain benefits and advantage for the UMC and our episcopal leaders for life long terms. As in guaranteed appointments the role of bishop as one which is prophetic and sometimes unpopular can be safeguarded. It assists to protect the open itineracy of the episcopal leadership who are female and/or of a different ethnicity or race from the majority of the people served. We want effective bishops. It takes time to live and grow into the role. With term episcopacy we may unintentionally be cutting short their service at perhaps the apex of their capacities.

There are also existing means of accountability in **The Book of Discipline** to address or remove ineffective or underperforming bishops. The Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy could also play a crucial role in addressing concerns of accountability. While there are term episcopacies in other parts of our global church, 'one size' does not fit all. When it comes to the global church local contextualization should be a key factor in determining limits.

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

Working with the General Board of Global Ministries, traveling around the world, meeting and talking with missionaries, episcopal, Conference, and local church leaders and partners and seeing the Church grow there gave me a deep appreciation of the UMC as a truly global church. The world is indeed the parish of the United Methodist Church as together we seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. While the global church is made the church by our common belief in Jesus Christ, 'one size does not fit all'. We need each other. Striking the right notes to be connectional while also being contextual is at the heart of understanding and fulfilling the nature of the world-wide Church.

We have much to learn from our family in those lands where Christianity is spreading like wildfire and the United Methodist Church is growing even faster than we in the United States are declining in numbers. We need now more than ever for the UMC to live into being a worldwide Church. I support a Global Book of Discipline, but only with careful parameters in the use of local contextualization. Paragraph 543.7 allows Central Conferences to adapt the BOD, yet we must take care for those parts that are non-negotiable including The Constitution, Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task, The Ministry of All Christians and The Social Principles. Along with the work of global consultations on the Social Principles, and GCFA's work with the The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters to cosponsor a proposal for global funding of the global church we will live and minister into a stronger global witness.