

## **A Response to Questions for an Episcopal Nominee from the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy**

**By Tom Grieb**

**Kentucky Annual Conference Nominee**

### **How do you reflect a life of ministry rooted in Wesleyan theology, spirituality, practice?**

My ministry is rooted in a faith-filled response to God's grace in Jesus Christ. Since an early age I found myself drawn to Christ. I understood his presence and experienced his love. Looking back, I realize that God was clearly at work, leading me to the place of a wholehearted response. Persons and circumstances were used to awaken me to the very things God was doing.

Early in my adolescence I wholly dedicated myself to Jesus. I began a journey that continues to this day. Christ took hold of my heart. He not only forgave me, but offered new life. None of this was of my own doing, but was a matter of grace. As with Wesley, who in commenting on Ephesians 2:8 in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, I turned to God "with an empty hand and without any pretense." I received "the heavenly blessing" and experienced the new life that was mine in Jesus Christ. I was made right with God and my life has never been the same since.

It wasn't long after this awakening to God's love in Jesus Christ that I began to feel God's call to enter full-time Christian service, a call I continue to affirm to this day. I have felt the support of the church throughout. Early in my high school years I was given opportunities to preach, lead discipleship groups, and reach out to the lost. These practices that began at an early age form a foundation for ministry that has become a way of life.

The same grace present at the time of my salvation continues to be evident. I do believe that God's grace is at work in my life to the end that I am becoming more and more Christ-like. While by no means perfect, I do feel I am maturing in love because of God's love at work in and through me. Flatly said, God's love informs the way I deal with people. His grace enables me to respond in ways that are consistently grace-filled. God's grace is the very thing that leads me to live a life representative of one who follows Christ. I don't want to do anything that would misrepresent God's good work in my life.

I live a life that not only rejoices in a changed heart, but seeks to reach out to those in need. From a heart changed by grace has come a deep desire to reach out to the least and last of this world. I have a great affinity for the poor and have tried to support them in ways that are helpful. If anything, I have tried to be a good friend to those who are less blessed materially. I have reached out individually and have led groups to do the same. I have lent support to ministries

whose mission it is to support those in need. I have learned as a follower of Christ that I am a part of an expansive Kingdom. This has led me to be involved not only in the broader United Methodist connection, but beyond United Methodism in concert with other denominations.

It is my every desire to tend to the means of grace, realizing their place in leading me to experience God more deeply. By maintaining a disciplined approach toward acts of piety I have grown as a disciple. Prayer, Bible study, Christian community, and attention to the sacraments have helped me experience the depths of God's love and forgiveness. By engaging in acts of mercy I have seen the face of Christ.

While I have a high view of God's providence, I recognize the place of free will in my life and the lives of others. I have struggled alongside people, sometimes in the midst of some of the worst tragedies of life, helping them to understand God's will in a particular situation. I consistently lift up the fact that God's will is always to love and support. I seek to align myself to God's will on a daily basis. In seeking the episcopacy I rest in that will. While I may have made a decision to enter the process, the real decision was to submit to what God has in store, however that might play out.

**Describe your record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church.**

During my thirty-five years of ministry, the churches I have served have been marked by membership growth, professions of faith, strong financial stewardship, and evidence of reaching into the world during my tenure.

One good example of this includes my leadership at Centenary Church in Lexington, Kentucky. During my tenure there, 597 people have joined the church, and of that number 282 were by profession of faith. We have maintained a nearly \$2.6 million Ministry Budget, while underwriting a debt reduction campaign in excess of a million dollars.

We have also had an increase in the number of persons involved in well-focused discipleship groups designed to lead persons in a balanced life of renewed relationship with God, strong relationships with others, and an intentional presence in the world. Those involved are also being trained to lead others in the same sort of experience.

We continue to show an increase in the number of persons who participate in short term mission experiences. We have even had a handful of persons, all of whom are young adults, who are now involved in missions full-time.

My local church experience has included a two-point open country charge, a relatively new church start, a larger county seat church, and two larger church appointments in metropolitan

areas. In each of those appointments I have shown an ability to adapt both to the context at hand, as well to the varied changes those churches were facing at the time.

Each experience has helped me develop skills for ministry that have informed every new setting. The two point open country charge taught me the value of relationships in building community. The new church start, while clearly dependent upon the building of relationships, put my focus on evangelism and the assimilation of the numbers of people we were receiving into the life of the church.

During my ministry at the larger county seat church I gained a deeper appreciation for the place of tradition. I also honed my skills in working with a larger staff. One of the two larger churches I served in a more urban setting was marked by a good deal of diversity, theologically and socially. I navigated those waters with respect and love for all. Presently, I am learning to do ministry in concert with large groups of people, both staff and volunteers. Mine is a job of casting vision, inspiring those involved, and shepherding all concerned to do the works of ministry.

### **How have you demonstrated the spiritual gift of leadership?**

I am a firm believer that leadership makes all the difference when it comes to our common life together as a church. I understand the importance of casting a vision and working from a stated set of values. As vision and values are stated and consistently shared, others will come along offering their leadership as well.

Just recently at Centenary, I led a year-long process of discernment in seeking God's direction relative to the church's vision and values. They now inform the direction of the church. I have made certain that the vision and values of our church are front and center and because of that they are defining who we are as a congregation.

I have tried to model servant leadership. As I lead the life of a servant, I have found that others have followed my lead and offered themselves as servants as well. I understand those things that are central to my place within the body of Christ. I pay particular attention to those and see to them to the best of my ability. I also look to pitch in where I can be helpful. Whether it's getting involved with a community service project or setting up or tearing down for an event, as people see me helping out, I find them more apt to help as well.

I love working with people. I take great satisfaction in seeing them succeed in ministry. I am ready to model and mentor to that end. As the circumstance demands I am open to nurture, stand alongside, or let go so others might prosper. I would much rather work collegially, than autocratically. Presently, I have intentionally taken time each month to work with the

Chairperson of our Church Council. We have prayed together, dreamed together, and have worked together, all with an interest of enhancing the ministry of the church. Our Chairperson is a young adult which has made the experience that much richer.

Serving at the conference level has provided me the opportunity to listen intently to all points of view. My leadership style is to work with others toward a common goal. Years ago I was instrumental in starting a relatively large outdoor Christian music festival as an outreach of our conference youth ministry. This would not have happened if I had not worked with the large number of people required to pull it off. When I was President of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration we undertook a massive revision of the way conference apportionments were figured. Again, this would not have happened without a willingness to work with others, both when the revision was formulated and eventually implemented. As Chairperson of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry I worked collegially in mix of sometimes divergent opinions. We always came to good place having worked together. More recently as Chairperson of the Board of Trustees at Kentucky Wesleyan College, I am balancing the interests of the Board, administration, and faculty in a somewhat stressed environment. A listening ear, coupled with attention to the overall mission of the school is moving us to a much strong position.

I am thankful for the number of persons who claim me as a mentor in ministry. I am sincerely humbled by that. There are a number of persons in ministry with whom I regularly touch base who appreciate me sharing from my experience base. I am also involved in a small group of men who I am attempting to disciple toward a more fruitful life of ministry. It is always an honor to stand alongside people, whether clergy or laity, with an interest of helping them be more effective in ministry within the church and beyond.

**How have you demonstrated a willingness to be held accountable for results and an ability to hold others accountable, with grace, for their results?**

I affirm the importance of the connection that binds us together as a church. I take seriously the notion of accountability, individually and corporately. Whenever a bishop or district superintendent has sought to inform my life and ministry I have listened intently and attempted to respond. Whether that involved moving to a different appointment, offering my services to a board or agency, or encouraging lay people to connect with the broader church, I have tried my best to do everything to remain faithful to our covenant.

The historic questions asked at ordination are just as important today as the day I answered them. I take them to heart and seek to live them out daily. I have studied “our form of Church discipline and polity” and, to the best of my ability, and, with God’s help, have sought to live them out. I have always gone where sent with the firm assurance that God is at work wherever I

am. I firmly believe that I am to live an authentic Christian life founded in Christ's love and guided by the Holy Spirit. I have been careful not to do anything that might adversely affect my witness or bring harm to the church.

I believe that ministry is not lived out in isolation. Autonomy can lead to places we do not need to be. Given that, I have done my best to seek the support, counsel, and reproof of my peers, including those who are in authority within the church. I have always been in a small group with the expressed intent to have others hold me accountable and am appreciative of the support I receive.

Leadership requires the ability to hold others accountable for their fruitfulness. This is lived out as I seek to shepherd the various staff persons with whom I have served over the years. In that context, I have always sought to be forthright, transparent, and clear about expectations. I hold high expectations for myself and do so of others. In certain circumstances, after a time of prayer and discernment, coupled with a season of remediation, I have not been hesitant to end a relationship with a staff person when deemed necessary. All along I have been careful to follow what personnel policies were in place and have sought the counsel and direction of the Staff Parish Relations Committee.

I believe as Chairperson of the Kentucky Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry for eight years, I acted with the same degree of fairness, all the while maintaining a dutiful attention to due process. While I was Chairperson of the Board we dealt with any number of situations requiring that sort of attention. All along we took seriously the question asked at the beginning of every Clergy Session of the Annual Conference, "Are all the clergy member of the conference blameless in their life and official administration?" When that wasn't the case we acted with fairness, respect, and the good of the person and church at heart.

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

Doing the "right thing" is a matter of expressing love. It is a reflection of love for God and love for others.

My intent has always been to try and do "right" by scripture. In my view scripture is authoritative for life and ministry. It is an inspired Word and a present revelation of what God wants to speak into the lives of people, the church, and the world as a whole. I take seriously the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, yet consider scripture standing over and above tradition, reason, and experience as primary for guidance. In an age where values are being evaluated and tested, scripture provides a guiding light. I am consistently challenging people at those places where culture is in conflict with scripture, particularly when it comes to self-centeredness, selfishness and greed.

I have also sought to do “right” by people. I take to heart the words of the Apostle Paul when he writes, “Make love your aim.” Making love the “aim” goes a long way toward doing right by people. I have always had a heart for the least among us. I have been quick to establish relationships when others have been slow to do so. Presently, I am in an on-going relationship with a person challenged not only by serious illness, but a severe lack of finances. In this instance, I have provided a listening ear, a supportive presence, and a helping hand.

In the same vein I have desired to do “right” by the church. It is my every desire to strengthen the church in its ministry—with those who make it up and those who are not yet a part. I have fiercely defended the church and its place as light in an otherwise darkened world. While not always easy, I have been involved, as have others in the churches I have served, in standing with and for those who by the world’s standards seem powerless. In particular, I have been involved in the defense and support of children. My involvement with a community group called 4Kids has given me the opportunity to reach out in support of those who are the most vulnerable among us.

### **What has been your exposure to the Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conference?**

With a strong regard for our connection as a church I have chosen to involve myself in the life of the church beyond my given appointment, understanding that the local church and broader church are intrinsically tied. In making that decision I have been afforded a number of wonderful opportunities to serve.

My annual conference experience includes a variety of experiences. I served for six years as Conference Youth Coordinator, founding, along with others, a Christian music festival that bore much fruit for twenty-six years. I served as President of the Conference Council on Finance and Administration and Chairperson of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry. Presently, I serve on the Conference Board of Pensions, heading up the Benefits Committee, and as Chairperson of the Kentucky Wesleyan College Board of Trustees. While serving on the Conference Council on Finance and Administration I took seriously the importance of being a good steward of the funds under our charge. I gained an appreciation for the vast ways the United Methodist Church is involved in worldwide mission. I gained a deeper understanding of the church’s work near and far. On the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, I found myself in the crucible of many tough situations, all of which affected numbers of people. Many of those situations demanded strong, even-handed decision-making. In concert with others on the Board we were able to meet every challenge.

I have been elected as a delegate to General Conference six times, serving on both the Finance Administration and Judicial Administration Legislative Committees. I have been nominated to serve on the Committee on Presiding Officers at the upcoming General Conference. In regard to

service at the Jurisdictional level, I have been elected as a delegate to the Southeastern Jurisdiction seven times. I have served on the Committee on Nominations twice and held a seat on Southeastern Jurisdiction Council on Finance and Administration for eight years.

**Based on your experience, how do you relate to the global United Methodist Church communion?**

I am thankful for the global United Methodist communion. Our global connection offers reason for optimism moving forward. There is much we can learn from one another.

I have been honored to have been elected to the last five General Conferences and presently am elected to serve for a sixth time. I have learned much about our global connection and have been thankful for the opportunity to work side by side with persons from around the world. It has been good to have engaged in a broader dialogue. My experiences at General Conference have broadened my own appreciation for the work of Christ around the world.

I have participated in a number of short-term mission trips down through the years, one of which was a UMVIM trip to Costa Rica. I have also experienced mission opportunities in the Dominican Republic and Kenya. Just recently, Centenary Church helped establish an outreach to children through the United Methodist Church in Uganda. Childero, as the outreach is called is up and running and having great effect. We continue to have a direct relationship with the District Superintendent there and look forward to offering support for years to come.

Centenary Church also supports any number of missionaries worldwide, most notably United Methodist missionaries in Thailand and a United Methodist pastor and her family in Lithuania. Recently Centenary sponsored a mission trip to Lithuania and directly came around this pastor and her young family as they minister in challenging circumstances.

The churches I have served, including Centenary, have strongly supported the efforts of UMCOR with volunteers as well as financial assistance. Just recently Centenary has supported UMCOR's efforts in coming alongside refugees from the Middle East. I have been thankful for the church's generosity in helping out with what is an epic crisis. This support is no different than the on-going support we offer through the Kentucky Refugee Ministry.

**What is your response to these "hot topics in the United Methodist Church?"**

**Human sexuality**

Our struggle as a church continues in regard to human sexuality and seems to be particularly keen the closer we get to the 2016 General Conference. The subject of human sexuality has

captivated the energies of General Conferences for years and the upcoming conference will be no exception.

As always, the dialogue and decisions made in this regard are critical to the life of the church. In the past, I have voted to maintain our position as stated in paragraphs 161F, 304.3, 341.6, and 2702.1.b of the *2012 Book of Discipline*. I will do so again. Any decisions made on the subject of human sexuality need to be clear, hold those in leadership accountable, and adhere to scripture as authoritative for life, all of this while making love our aim.

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

There comes a time in the life of some congregations where closure is inevitable. Churches on the margin of viability should be given every opportunity to re-engage with their communities. Failing that effective re-engagement, closure should be considered as a viable option. In every instance those involved should be encouraged to unite with another United Methodist Church. All closures should be processed with respect, grace, and sensitivity to the pastoral leadership and the community of believers involved.

The establishment of new faith communities is vital to the future health and re-vitalization of the United Methodist Church. Annual Conferences, including Kentucky, have found that new faith communities provide an exciting catalyst for the overall ministry of the church and, to a large degree, offset membership losses that otherwise might take place. In Kentucky, we have learned that empowering leadership, clergy and laity, is the most effective way to birth a new faith community. We have long since abandoned a bricks and mortar, build it and they will come mentality. We have learned that yoking with an existing church is critical to the establishment of a new faith community. Second campuses or even new faith communities within the walls of an existing congregation have proven to be effective ways of broadening a church's legacy of ministry and outreach. I am excited about the broad array of churches that have been established, involving a number of ethnic and socio-economic groups.

### **Next Generation Leaders**

It is clear that over the next fifteen years nearly half of United Methodist clergy now serving will retire. That fact alone makes it imperative that the church seek quality leaders to fill the void. A culture of call that has been largely lost needs to be recovered. In Kentucky, while I was Chairperson of the Board of Ordained Ministry, the Board instituted the Isaiah Project, all with an interest of encouraging young leaders to discern a possible call while serving in a direct ministry experience. Fifteen to twenty young people each summer have taken part in the Isaiah Project many of whom have completed Candidacy and are on track toward ordination. Presently,



the Kentucky Annual Conference ranks third across the annual conferences in percentage of young clergy, due in large part to this initiative.

Personally, I have been supportive of any number of people who have experienced a call to ministry, many of whom consider me a mentor to this day. I have been present to help those persons discern how God might be leading. My work on the Board of Ordained Ministry and the District Committee on Ministry has given me an opportunity to help those considering ministry to attain their goals. I understand this work is critical to the life of the life and health of the church.

### **Impending death tsunami**

Dr. Lovett Weems has helped identify what we all know to be true. Our church is getting older at an increasing rate. As with our clergy leadership, so it is with our lay leadership. Overall younger people aren't involving themselves in the life of the church. For an institution in the people business we need to be concerned. Many of our churches are caught in the Catch-22 of wanting a strong and vital ministry to young families without having the young families necessary to provide the foundation for that type of ministry.

It is time for us to break from systems that have been in place for years and move into new ways of "doing church." New faith communities are critical to this effort as are daring initiatives undertaken by existing local churches. Doing discipleship where persons are better prepared to disciple others is critical. New forms of worship that stretch rather than cater to the comfortable are necessary. Letting go of long held centers of power and control will help. Raising up and welcoming new leadership locally and conference-wide will also help. In the midst of the challenges that face us a new optimism must be cultivated around stories where the Great Commission is being lived out.

### **Guaranteed appointment for clergy**

Ours is more the "assurance" of appointment, rather than the "guarantee" of appointment. I am of the mind that "assurance" of appointment serves us well. Doing away with the assurance of appointment where bishops can terminate one's service at his/her discretion is a tenuous position for the church. The covenant on the part of clergy to go where sent and the church to then send them is time-tested and has served us well.

All that being said, I fully realize we have suffered at times from ineffectiveness. We have generally dealt with that ineffectiveness by moving clergy from one appointment to another. Taking seriously the place of consultation in identifying strengths as well as growth areas and, in some cases, serious deficiencies is crucial. Such evaluations are not easy, but must be done

rigorously and consistently for the sake of the church. In cases where ineffectiveness is persistent the *Book of Discipline* provides ample opportunity for due process. To that end, bishops and Boards of Ordained Ministry should have simpler and more accessible processes at their disposal. I am for annual conferences making monies available so persons might exit gracefully in advance of any due process.

### **Term episcopacy**

I am in favor of term limits for episcopal leaders. Those elected should serve no longer than sixteen years as an active bishop. Those not of retirement age would then return to his/her respective annual conference to serve as an Elder until his/her retirement.

The church should benefit from a more frequent transition of leadership. Term limits not dependent on retirement alone will help that happen. We live in a day and age where things are changing so fast that being out of the local church for an extended period of time might very well put a bishop at the place of being disconnected with the reality of what pastors and churches are facing. Added to this is the fact that the General Church is pressed financially to support the episcopacy as it is presently structured.

### **The world-wide nature of the church: global *Book of Discipline*/global structure**

As I mentioned earlier in my remarks about the global United Methodist Church, I am thankful for our world-wide connection and the communion we experience today. I am of the mind that this global connection will serve us well as the world becomes more and more one community. The continued growth of technology and the interconnectedness it affords will all but assure this. Those in the United States can re-learn from their brothers and sisters from around the world that church is fundamentally about the making of disciples. Those around the world can learn from the American church the importance of systems that can help the church prosper as it grows. Over the past 25 years alone we have seen tremendous change take place in regard to the global church. The prospects ahead are exciting as we continue the journey together.

I affirm a global *Book of Discipline* that connects us in regard to constitution, doctrine, theology, social principles, and due process. The *Discipline* is the core of that which holds the connection together and needs to be consistent worldwide if, in fact, we are to be truly connected in doctrine and practice.