

**Rev. Dr. Theodore “Ted” Smith**

**Episcopal Nominee Questions**

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

I chose the United Methodist Church at the age of ten, leaving our family Baptist church as I had become greatly disturbed by the constant hell, fire and brimstone messages. After worship one Sunday, I expressed to my mother a feeling of being eternally condemned and of little value. My mother’s response was that I could attend church elsewhere. I felt accepted and embraced at Central United Methodist Church and found many wonderful mentors in the congregation. Reverend Garry Shelton’s clear messages about three-fold grace captured me and challenged me to think for myself. As a teen I fell in love with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, became fascinated with the scriptures and began to practice the spiritual disciplines. My love of God and my fascination with Wesleyan Theology have been foundational in shaping my core values and have become a source of spiritual strength. *“The joy of the Lord truly is my strength.”*

My journey towards perfection, wholeness, and holiness has been deepened and strengthened through the education provided and relationships formed while attending three United Methodist Schools of Higher Education. Throughout the years I have been encouraged to grow in spiritual maturity enabling me to be a blessing to others.

My ministry has been a continual journey of going deeper! I am a lifelong learner with a willingness to push through frustrations and difficulties. My Scriptural inspiration is Luke 5:4-7:

*“When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch. Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.”*

Now, some forty years after first discovering the spiritual disciplines, I continue to embrace them and use them to go deeper in my relationship with and service to Christ.

I start each day with a daily devotion, I pray for my district lay and clergy leadership, and I pray for challenging situations in God’s world. I have helped others go deeper by developing a spiritual disciplines workshop, Bible study, and a spiritual disciplines game. The game has been used within the Virginia Cabinet covenant groups. It is a game, but much more than a game. It is a way of comfortably asking one another the hard question of “How is it with your soul?” and of supporting one another through difficult moments.

The spiritual disciplines game has also been introduced to our district ministers for use in their cluster accountability groups.

I remain attentive to growing in grace and continually adding to my skill set (also referred to as my ministry tool bag). I model self-care by guarding my Sabbath days (Fridays), I take three days per quarter to get away for a prayer and study retreat, and I enjoy renewal through vacation and rest. My quarterly prayer and study retreat is something I started as a practice after facing a major crisis of calling in 1996.

The spiritual disciplines have kept me open to hear God speak and allow God to speak and work through me especially when standing in places of conflict or ongoing crisis. The spiritual disciplines also sustain and guide me when serving as a mentor for clergy. Fasting and partaking of the Sacrament of Holy Communion regularly strengthens my faith. Reading and meditating on the Scriptures informs my world view and enables me to be Spirit led whether I am on the road, with the Cabinet, talking with a teenager, or studying Scriptures with others.

**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 have been blessed to lead congregations in decisive deeper spiritual maturity. Members moving into deeper places of spiritual maturity and greater biblical literacy is a hallmark of my 30+ years in ministry. My track record regarding professions of faith and creation of new small groups is one of steady growth and increases with the exception of my first appointment on the three point charge. My track record of worship attendance reflects ebbs and flows. My ministry goal has been to tackle the long laborious task of forming and shaping Christians who become ambassadors for transformation of the world.

There are many well developed modern models of disciple making, but none rival the model Jesus demonstrated. So, the Jesus model is my preference. For more modern variations I turn to three sources, “The Lost Art of Disciple Making” by Leroy Elms, “Making Disciples” by Ralph Moore, and “Membership to Discipleship” by Phil Maynard. I find each of these resources to offer valuable understandings regarding disciple making.

An additional key tool for forming and shaping life-long disciples has been to pair together bible study with community outreach, UMVIM ministries, and tangible expressions of social justice ministries. Whether in small congregations, middle size congregations, or in the large church setting, I’ve seen spirits catch a spiritual fire through the combination of study and hands on action.

The most inspiring and exciting example offered at St. Stephen’s when a group of 11 year olds demanded the right to organize (in entirety) a potato drop. With much skepticism,

we adults agreed to let them try. What we witnessed was a group of pre-teens expertly coordinate every aspect and detail of the potato drop without assistance from the adults. They organized hundreds of volunteers, they coordinated pick up of the bagged potatoes, they raised funds to cover the cost of the event, they hired the Steel Drum band, they organized activities for the younger children, and in essence, managed every detail. This is an example of what happens when disciples are formed and shaped in the image of Christ.

3) **How have you demonstrated the gift of spiritual leadership (for example, give examples of ministry context where spiritual leaders were discovered, developed, and deployed for Kingdom tasks)?**

Being a spiritual leader is among the highest honors the Church bestows. It is an honor that requires: prayer without ceasing, deep spiritual maturity, a solid grounding in biblical reading and application, and unceasing accountability. My practice has been to guide others in the way of Christ using the spiritual disciplines to help them grow in spiritual maturity and grace. Prayer undergirds my search for leaders, my conversations with potential leaders, and my follow-up with laity ministry partners. I was recently amazed by a call from a missionary serving in Sierra Leone. He mentioned that my Methodist friends in Sierra Leone recalled a teaching lesson I gave on the sins of domestic abuse and battering. The request was to provide additional guidance and resources for a refresher discussion. As requested, I provided the resources.

In 1987, I arrived in Virginia to serve a three-point charge. Since then I have served: the small church, in campus ministry, the mid-size church, and large church appointments. My current ministry setting since July of 2011 has been as the District Superintendent of the Fredericksburg District. The first task I undertook was to charter the district. Through a strong partnership with my lay leadership we drafted, presented and implemented a district ministry vision. Throughout my ministry I have kept before me two firm standards: to leave the ministry setting better than I found it, and to use my God given gifts and graces to bless others as I have been blessed. While the congregations of the three-point charge had few professions of faith, there was still significant disciple making within the congregations. In many of my other appointments we experienced growth in: professions of faith, membership, stewardship, and spiritual maturity. Additionally, I have moved my congregations into deeper levels of mission and outreach ministries. My tools for guiding ministry settings into greater effectiveness are prayer, Bible study, creativity, vision, teaching, and preaching. I also enjoy opportunities to assist clergy with mock interviews in preparation for Board of Ministry interviews.

The Fredericksburg District was chartered in 2011. We have crafted every event around our four-part mission focus which is comprised of Unity, Equipping Laity, Spiritual Formation, and Mission Outreach both domestically and internationally.

Additionally, the district inherited a twenty-four acre parcel of land in our Hartwood region in Stafford County. Through a process of prayer and discernment the district created The Heartwood Center which functions as a regional mission training center and a ministry to poor and underprivileged children. The Heartwood Center ministry began offering Vacation Bible School, Teen Mission Camps, and a Backpack lunch program in partnership with a significant number of community partners. In our first summer the backpack lunch ministry served 97 children from one public school. The Heartwood Center ministry has experienced tremendous growth and now operates year round serving more than 250 children from five schools. The ministry is sustained by our UM congregations, our community, school administrators, ecumenical faith partners, the local Parent Teacher Association, and local political leaders. I am amazed by how God has used and grown the ministry, especially given that we currently run the ministry without a building. Construction plans are underway, but our discernment and the needs of the community made it clear that we could not hold off offering this ministry.

Last, but not least, I strive to be a faithful servant leader particularly in response to directives from our Bishop and the Cabinet. In response to the needs of our conference and the Cabinet, five of my colleagues have entrusted to me the care of their districts during their renewal leaves. In addition, I responded as an act of faith when called upon to serve as the Alexandria District Superintendent for five months in 2014 while also serving as the Fredericksburg District Superintendent. It was my honor to step in after the untimely death of my dear friend and colleague, the Reverend Kenneth Jackson.

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)?**

I think accountability must be viewed from both the narrow lens of where we currently are and the broader lens of how our decisions impact future generations. My twenty-one-year old, spiritually mature, Bible reading daughter tells me that her generation will eventually move the United Methodist Church closer to the kind of faith community God intends it to be, and her generation will resolve the conflicts that we the “old guard” decision makers fight about. I not only believe my daughter, but pray that her generation (when they become the predominant decision makers) will leave their children and grandchildren with the United Methodist Church God envisions. I believe my daughter and her generation will be faithful in their efforts. I am hopeful and believe that her generation can move the church forward through continued prayer, holy conversations, and struggle. In the meantime, we remain accountable to one another to pray together, wrestle in grace, and trust God through the difficult conversations. We are all accountable to God and to our faith community. Ordained clergy are expected to live in a covenant of accountability to and through the Orders, be they Ordained Deacons or Elders. I believe we must also answer to the community that has entrusted us with power, position, and authority. I believe covenants are both a means of grace and a source of strength.

Therefore, I humbly submit myself to and seek constructive feedback from the District Committee on Superintendency, and my Bishop. I believe all Christian ministers have a mandate to live in accountability as part of discipleship. I have worked to put this into practice throughout my 30 years in ministry. I practice this accountability as mentor, mentee, colleague, and coach. I believe it was Rev. Dr. Rodney Smothers who said, “Everyone should at all times have persons they are mentoring and should be a mentee, sitting at the feet of wise ones.” In my five-and-one-half-year District Superintendent tenure I have remained attentive to the balance of grace and accountability. To date I have had the honor of guiding eight or more clergy from ineffective ministry to deeper levels of effective ministry. In balance, I have also guided eight clergy out of ordained ministry including voluntary surrender of orders, retirement in good standing, acceptance of the denomination buyout, and administrative location. My grateful blessing is that in six of the eight transitions of clergy out of ministry I remain in fellowship with the former clergy.

I am grateful for constructive criticism from my family and my Committee on Superintendency; particularly nudges to maintain better self-care, and an insistence that I take a Sabbatical, as well as feedback from my lay leadership to honor and remain faithful to our four-part district vision.

Laities are Christian ministers and are called through scripture to live worthy and accountable lives. Properly used scripture verses (like Matthew 18:15-17), Book of Discipline paragraphs on Just Resolution, and other resources provide the means of grace and the tools to transition us from conflict and disagreement to resolution and restoration. While some may view parts of the United Methodist Book of Discipline as a source of conflict, I view it as our faith community’s voice containing the potential to combat chaos.

5) **Describe your track record of doing the “right thing” in difficult situations?**

My honest opinion is that the ministry of Superintending provides a plethora of opportunities and situations that serve as training moments for shepherding as an Episcopal leader, as well as an abundance of opportunities to do the right thing. In my first three months of serving as a District Superintendent I encountered several major crises including multiple cases of embezzlement, clergy with chargeable offenses, and the disappearance of a clergy person. Each crisis held its own unique challenge and learning lesson. Additional local church experiences and opportunities to “do the right thing” have been:

- Creating a conflict Boot Camp for clergy arriving at deeply conflicted appointments;
- Having difficult conversations with concerned parishioners who wanted me to give special privileges to wealthy members who were large financial donors. Through prayer and conversation I was able to change that expectation;

- Facing cultural racism causing a hospitalized member to refuse a pastoral visit from me. Through a single insistent visit, singing of hymns, Bible reading, and prayer the congregant ultimately transitioned from resistant to a posture of becoming angry with anyone who spoke critically of me;
- Having a very challenging conversation with a local sheriff seeking my cooperation in a plan to arrest the parents of a deceased infant following the child's funeral to prevent the parents from fleeing justice;
- Conversing with a teen who begged for my prayer, counsel, and help after having given her soul in a blood oath to Satan. Through the power of scripture, of the Holy Spirit, and the prayer warriors in our congregation, God proved evil to be a deceitful liar and reclaimed that young woman;
- Encountering many occasions during my five years of Superintending to do the right thing by calling unhealthy congregations or congregational leaders into "come to Jesus" conversations to address their dysfunctional behavior. I have been compelled to speak truth in love making it clear that I would not consider sending a new pastor until the congregation worked to address their long standing conflicts. In every congregational conversation, the Holy Spirit showed up and showed us the way forward;
- Being compelled, as previously stated, to stand in the difficult place of guiding clergy either back into effective ministry, or guiding them out of ordained ministry. While it was a challenge to guide eight clergy out of ordained ministry, the action was the right thing to do and was for the good of those individuals and the kingdom.

God has blessed me with a clarity of vision and a conviction of spirit regarding facing difficult situations. My theological, professional, and personal belief is that I am called to stand in very difficult and challenging places, rather than believe that I am called to take on difficult challenges. I willingly accept the Christ model of standing in difficult places, meaning I stand with fear and trembling, and stand in challenging moments trusting in God. Our Lord provides for this task with the equipment of prayer, scripture, wisdom from seasoned and trusted colleagues, and resources like the books, "Difficult Conversations" and "Thanks for the Feedback," both written by Stone & Heen. The tools and willingness to stand in difficult moments was particularly helpful on the occasion when I was called upon to assist the Virginia Conference Personnel Committee in staff realignment and terminations. One can imagine the pain, tension, and need for grace as the Conference Lay Leader (also Chair of the Personnel Committee) met with Conference staff to inform them of either continued Conference employment or the termination of their position.

6) **What has been your exposure to Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conference (for example, Cabinet, service on boards, agencies, and etc.)?**

\* Delegate to General Conferences in 1996, 2004, 2012, and 2016

- \* Delegate to Jurisdictional Conference in 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, & 2012, and 2016
- \* Life Member, National Black Methodists for Church Renewal (B.M.C.R.).
- \* Member, SEJ B.M.C.R., 1987 to Present
- \* Member, Virginia Conference B.M.C.R., 1987 to Present
- \* President, The Heartwood Center, 2015 – Present. – a United Methodist Non-Profit ministry for poor and underserved children, teens, and their families created by the Fredericksburg District.
- \* Reserve Lay Member, Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Board, 2012-Present. Appointed by the Virginia Supreme Court to adjudicate Lawyer violations of the Codes of Ethics.
- \* Chair, Bishop's Joint Task Force on Hospitality & Recruiting, 2012-Present
- \* Cabinet Rep - Virginia Conference Equitable Compensation Commission, 2015-Present.
- \* Cabinet Rep - Virginia Conference Board of Global Ministries, 2013- Present.
- \* Cabinet Rep - Virginia Conference Mid-Size Church Development Team, 2014-Present.
- \* Cabinet Rep - Virginia Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries, 2013-2015.
- \* Member, Wesley Theological Seminary Board of Governors, 2013-Present.
- \* Member, Virginia Conference Church Development Team, 2011-2013.
- \* Lay Member, Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Board, 2005-2011.
- \* President, Stafford County Ministerial Association, 2008-2011.
- \* Member, Ashland District Committee on Ministry, 2008-2011.
- \* Regional School of Mission Instructor, Upper Atlantic, 2010.
- \* Virginia Conference School of Mission Instructor, 2009 and 2010.
- \* Lay Member, Virginia State Bar Disciplinary Board, 2004-2010, (Appointed by the Virginia Supreme Court to adjudicate Lawyer violations of the State Bar Moral and Ethics Codes).
- \* Member, Virginia Conference Common Table, 2005-2009.
- \* Chair, Common Table African-American Church Resource Development Team, 2007-2009.
- \* Lay Member, Virginia State Bar Standing Committee on Lawyer Discipline, 2001-2004, assisted in review and proposal of Virginia State Bar Moral and Ethics Codes.
- \* Member, Virginia Conference Initiatives of Hope Task Force, 2000-2004.
- \* Vice-Chair, Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, including training the Theology interview teams, 2002-2004.
- \* Member, Virginia Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, including Chair of the Sacraments interview team, 1996-2004.
- \* Member, Virginia United Methodist Board of Pensions, 1988-1996.
- \* President, Virginia Tech & State University Campus Ministers Association, 1991-1992.
- \* Adult Advisor Conference Council on Youth Ministries, 1988-92.

7) **Based upon your experience, how do you relate to the Global UMC communion (for example, boards, agencies, publishing, short term missions, UMVIM, UMCOR, and etc.)**

I have been greatly and amazingly blessed to have been able to travel extensively and to have lasting relationships with people around the world. My travel, relationship building, cultural world sensitivity, and worldview education has come through encounters with God's people in the following parts of the world and experiences:

- \* Spiritual Pilgrimage to Bupeoung Methodist Church, South Korea, 2014.
- \* Team leader, UMVIM to El Salvador, 2013.
- \* Team leader, UMVIM to the Child Rescue Centre, Sierra Leone, 2007.
- \* Guest preacher, Mozambique Annual Conference December, 2003
- \* Team leader, UMVIM to Tinga Tinga, Mozambique, July 2002.
- \* UMVIM team member, Pyatigorsk, Russia, 2002.
- \* South Korean Methodist Church development training trip, Incheon & Seoul, South Korea 2001.
- \* Team leader, UMVIM to Africa University, Zimbabwe, 1999.
- \* UMVIM team member to Cuba, 1995.
- \* UMVIM team member to Panama, 1983.
- \* M.Div. Studies exchange student, St. Paul School of Theology, Limuru, Kenya.
- \* Fellowship and bridge building in Cape Town and Johannesburg, South Africa.

8) **What is your response to the “hot topics” in the UMC?** Limit of two paragraphs each

**a) Human sexuality:**

Using a baseball analogy, I believe the United Methodist Church has knocked the ball out of the park, specifically regarding the scriptural and theological clarity that every human being is created in God's image. Being created in the image of God comes with an inherent responsibility to engage one another as persons of great worth. I cannot imagine a clearer and better statement than our current Book of Discipline which says, "... human sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift." I pray that God will continue to humble me, enabling me to treat others as a gift in ways that align with my core values and are faithful to my ordination covenant.

**b) Local church closures and establishing new faith communities,**

Creative strategies of forming new faith communities include:

- Revitalizing an Anglo congregation with a Korean congregation. The Korean congregation had been praying for ten years to be blessed with a facility and property. Today, the two congregations worship together with Korean as the primary spoken language and with English interpretation devices;
- Infusing new life into a declining Anglo congregation through a merger with a Hispanic/Latino congregation;
- Aiding an African congregation in finding a new home with a declining multicultural congregation.

As a new District Superintendent in 2011, I stated my strong belief in every Charge Conference that God's vision for churches was not a vision of closure. I also vowed to commit resources to help our Fredericksburg congregations become more vital and focused in responding to those in their communities who were suffering. Our district

offers congregations multiple training programs and coaching designed to lead to deeper evangelistic ministry. As a means of educating myself, I began to serve on our Virginia Conference Church Development Team, including attending various New Faith Community training events. My District Board of Mission is currently creating new faith communities and preparing to launch more.

**c) Next generation of leaders:**

My ministry career has been centered on teaching, guiding, mentoring, and empowering the next generation in the now. My standard practice has always been to bring on board young persons, diverse persons, and persons who are underrepresented at the decision making table.

At St. Stephen's I said a resounding "YES!" to our nine to eleven-year-old children who demanded they be allowed to coordinate a potato drop. And coordinate they did! They raised the funds, managed the administrative details with SOSA, arranged pick up of the bagged potatoes, brought in a steel drum band, coordinated child care, and managed every detail of the event.

At Good Shepherd, in early 2000, we created a high school student Call to Ministry program. The program is now called "Calling 21" and has been replicated in the Virginia Conference and beyond.

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

**Friends, it is time for us to "put out into the deep waters!"** Yes, we have tried; Yes, we are tired, and yes, we think we have tried it all before. My preference is to address our challenges using our Biblical terminology and view the dynamic through our Scriptural context. Every fiber of my spiritual being tells me that the Christian Church and in particular the UMC is seeing the divine realization of John 15,

*"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful... No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."*

I see in our American culture a loss of trust and credibility in faith and the Christian community. I believe in divine will over statistical trends. I believe that faithfulness to Christ and the use of our Wesleyan Quadrilateral provide us the best opportunity to redirect resources and develop Christ-led vision which will show us the way forward.

**e) Guaranteed appointment for clergy:**

While the cultural conditions that led to a need for guaranteed appointments still exist, I believe guaranteed appointments will eventually be removed from our polity

and practices because it is not financially sustainable. It would be premature to discontinue it at this time. I pray that our denomination will come to a time when the need for it no longer exists.

**f) Episcopal Term Limits:**

There are stewardship issues, concerns regarding Episcopal accountability, matters of undue influence, and theological understanding that must be explored and discussed regarding Episcopal term limits. Episcopal term limits is a conversation that should be held. I understand the circumstances that have led us to discuss Episcopal term limits and believe we must consider this possibility the ways it could possibly strengthen our denomination.

**g) The worldwide nature of the Global Book of Discipline/Global structure:**

I value most our truly global connection. We have ongoing challenges and difficulties in being a global Church, but our connectional heritage and polity sets the United Methodist Church apart in positive ways from other faith communities. We need to wrestle with how our one voice – the Book of Discipline - will speak for regions of the body and for the whole. I support actions that will enable our Church to have some independent polity as well as interdependent connected polity. We are a global Church and need Episcopal leaders with extensive experience in the global community. I am blessed and thankful to have had experience and engagement in relationship building throughout the world, including, but not limited to Mozambique, Kenya, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Russia, Korea, and El Salvador.