

Biographical Sketch for Sharon G. Austin Florida Conference 2022 Episcopal Nominee

Sharon G. Austin was selected as the Florida Conference Episcopal nominee in 2020 and was recently affirmed as the Florida Conference Episcopal nominee for the 2022 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference. Her pronouns are she/her/hers. She has been a clergywoman for over 40 years and has celebrated twenty-five 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 has served as the Conference Director of Connectional and Justice since 2013. She has served five Cross-Racial/Cross-Cultural Appointments: including appointments to three local churches, and then as a District Superintendent (of the former South Central District). She had oversight of a complex district comprised of ninety churches and missions 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 the Florida Annual Conference. She also serves on numerous boards and agencies, such 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 Conference and has represented the Florida Annual Conference at General and Southeastern Jurisdictional Conferences in 2012, 2016, and General Conference 2019. She was the host District Superintendent for General Conference 2012 in Tampa, FL. Last year, she served as Co-interim District Superintendent of the Gulf Central District simultaneously while serving as Director of Connectional and Justice Ministries.

Her leadership marks are her willingness to make difficult missional decisions and speak the truth in love and power.

Born in 1955 (see Episcopal Question #8. f.), and is a native of Jamaica, New York, who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement. She was baptized in the Congregational Church and raised in Lutheran Churches on Long Island, 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 1940s and 1950s. Austin was actively involved in her neighborhoods, churches, schools, girl scout troops, and dance classes. The culturally diverse membership of these organizations significantly informed her passion for and expectation of diversity and inclusion. The family later moved to Florida and joined the Baptist church of her grandparents. Her father responded to a call to ministry, as had several generations of Austins before him.

Austin experienced her call to ministry while a student at Berry College in Mt. Berry, GA, where she met her husband, 'Mike,' and was attracted to the ministry of a young United Methodist campus chaplain who influenced the course of her future vocation. He officiated their wedding, invited her to preach at the College Chapel, and remained a friend and confidante until his untimely death. 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. She was a founding member of Candler's Baptist Studies Program. She was inducted into Omicron Delta Kappa in Seminary (a National Leadership Honor Society). She joined Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church while in seminary (which was dually aligned with the Progressive National and American Baptist Conventions). When Austin graduated from Candler with a Master of Divinity degree, only one previous class included an African-American woman.

She was later licensed and ordained by Ebenezer Baptist Church, 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 woman to join the pastoral staff.

Austin has served as a clinical chaplain for a women's prison, completed 8.5 units of Clinical Pastoral Education in several hospitals, served as adjunct faculty at the Interdenominational Theological Center (The I.T.C.) and Candler School of Theology, and served as a hospice chaplain. Following her move to FL, she attended and graduated from the Barry University Doctor of Ministry program in Miami, FL.

Over the years, she has received numerous accolades and awards from civic groups and sororities. Among her social engagement has been membership on the board of Planned Parenthood, a Domestic Violence Shelter board, and law enforcement Citizens Advisory Boards. She has been quoted in newspapers and magazines and appeared on "Good Morning, America." Her broad ecumenical exposure uniquely positions her to reach out and connect with people and populations across a broad spectrum.

She is married to Michael Holliday (retired), and they are the proud and grateful parents of four gainfully employed children; three daughters, Erin, Genise, and Desiree, and one son, Nicholas. Nicholas and his wife Nerli have two sons, Collin, and Dillon, who are a joy!

She enjoys traveling and eating locally sourced foods, cooking favorite foods for family gatherings, reading, gardening, and dancing (described by some as the reason she is no longer Baptist)!

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.