

Questions for an Episcopal Nominee from the Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy: Sharon G. Austin, 2022

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

My faith has been a deeply held, vibrant reality I've sought to practice throughout my life. I have always loved the church, reading, praying, and applying the scriptures. The United Methodist Church illuminates the importance of personal holiness, which includes accountability to God, self, and others *and* its relationship to social holiness. I commit to remaining in a Church where personal and social holiness is vital to the practice of our tradition and where the sacraments are administered and celebrated as ongoing reminders of God's inimitable grace in my life and those I serve.

The quadrilateral has framed my ministry in leading people toward a more comprehensive, disciplined life of faith. My reading of scripture, recording sermon notes, journaling, prayer life, and preaching are enriched through a quadrilateral approach to personal study and devotion. I love the *staying power* of devotional readings, i.e., the annual editions of Moravian Daily Texts and re-reading Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals.

God's love has been manifested, and it has been the motivation that speaks to me and inspires the work of transformation of my heart, mind, and life. Justification by grace through faith has made a difference in my life, shaping my testimony in ministry with others. I desire to be in a relationship with others while acknowledging my inadequacies. I respect others for their journeys, knowing that God speaks into their lives as God speaks into my life. I trust in God's love and forgiveness, evident in my brokenness.

The Christian life modeled in the Wesleyan tradition has constantly reminded me of the need to hold myself accountable. Accountability should always be prayerful and never resort to mercy/grace for me and guilt/judgment for others. I have grown in new ways since joining an African-American clergywomen's covenant group, which uplifts, encourages, and challenges me to reflect on the spectrum of cultural concerns and leadership nuances. I pray to live a life of gratitude regardless of the circumstances. My life is a work in progress as I go on to perfection by God's sanctifying grace.

2. Describe your record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church. For example, increase in worship attendance, professions of faith, small groups, missional engagement, and social justice.

In one congregation with a recorded membership of 700, I noticed that many of the relationships self-identified by 'snowbirds' were those developed with people from the townships of their permanent residences up north. My goal was engagement and not just attendance. Opportunities such as worship, but more to the point, Wednesday suppers and cantatas, were often attended by seasonal friends who were not United Methodist back home. I learned how

to lead with a non-Floridian, non-United Methodist influence in the church. I also realized that an additional untapped opportunity in every church I served was that of inviting these persons to be received as affiliate or associate members.

Several confided that they never felt *official* in their seasonal congregation in FL. Their memberships were *not* counted as professions of faith, though their ministries impacted the many ways in which churches invited people to discipleship and mission. I believe their testimonies became witnesses for others who eventually made professions of faith. Affirmation of their discipleship increased the membership by twenty-five persons. I also extended intentional invitations to discipleship during every worship service. I was always profoundly gratified to baptize infants and their parents and to baptize children during their Confirmation.

Some of the members joined Study Circles, unique small group experiences. These Circles invited churches and other community residents to address places of racial inequities and flawed historical narratives. Our clergy collective included a rabbi and an imam and their members, which resourced our congregations for continued dialogue, growth among differences, and shared mission in the community.

3. What skill sets, knowledge, and abilities would you bring to the office of the bishop, UM Church, and annual conference leadership? What profound changes to “business as usual” as a yearly conference do you think would be fruitful?

The Discipline defines The United Methodist theological context for the ‘set apart ministry’ of bishop with the primary tenet of servant leadership. I love Jesus, and his love, ministry, and salvation are the foundations of servant leadership. Serving presupposes giving the best of oneself and sacrificing extended for others. The scriptures refer to aspects of character. I seek to serve others by modeling a willing spirit. Willingness emanates from an active prayer life, reading the scriptures, fasting seasons, and practicing other spiritual disciplines that keep me fortified. I endeavor to be a called, convicted leader who can facilitate healing and wholeness in every season of the church’s life. While I have experienced many opportunities in ministry leadership, receiving a unique opportunity, being a ‘first’ in many settings, and breaking barriers, have led to a humility that I might otherwise not have developed. I did not grow up in The UMC; I *chose* to become UMC and now to #BeUMC. *In compliance with the word count maximum, I offer this list:*

- a. Bless others with new leadership opportunities, especially young persons
- b. Experiences of marginalization and exclusion have taught me to be sensitive to the experiences of others.
- c. Spent most of my life in multicultural or cross-cultural settings. Differences inspire and compel me to observe and learn. I join the church on its mission to become a worldwide antiracist, inclusive movement.
- d. A willing learner and an encourager, I trust people with leadership responsibilities, and fail or succeed, I invite them to share lessons learned. If we never fail, we’re not often trying new things or new ways of doing things.
- e. A leader who speaks truth to power. I develop healthy relationships beyond the church, as well as in the church, to avoid compromising that message.

- f. Active listener. While I don't desire an onslaught of negativity from people, I am comfortable inviting people to push back, check with me on what they heard, determine if their worst fears were confirmed, or if we can seek and find common ground.
- g. Leading from the context of social holiness *and* trying to unify the church so that the gospel is proclaimed and the mission of making disciples for Christ is fulfilled. In recent years we have realized that unity and inclusion must find a balance.
- h. Intentionality regarding my self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and temperament and the learning from a considerable amount of CPE continues to be valuable. I am a flawed person. I am considerate of the feelings and experiences of others, and I believe in extending grace. I served as a district superintendent in two seasons of my ministry, and I think people would describe me as compassionate, fair, and exacting 'tough love' when needed. The laity frequently asked me, "why didn't someone tell us this before?"
- i. Love to worship and lead worship and celebrate contextual worship that stretches a congregation in ways that deepen relationships with God, each other, and the community.
- j. Bishops are administrators and leaders of their episcopal areas and engage in collegial work within the College and the Council on behalf of the church's mission. I claim the importance of being accountable to episcopal colleagues, the clergy, and the laity of the Annual Conference and The Connection. I am grateful that the superintendency and connectional ministries have prepared me for extended missional strategy and accountability, networking, and alignment throughout the church.
- k. Broad ecumenical background compels and excites me to extend welcome to new people across the lines of differences and offer hope to all people, especially 'nones' and 'dones' on behalf of a fully inclusive church.
- l. Setting goals each year for incorporating new and different leaders for district and Conference ministries. It may make for smaller teams initially, but it could lead to greater diversity among the leaders. We audit our local church membership but should audit our leadership as volunteer teams and staff. If the goal is diversity in a new and fresh expression of church, we must represent those voices.
- m. Let's require local churches to track their engagements with various ministries within the Connection (for purposes other than scholarship applications). What learning opportunities, growing, making disciples, doing the work of anti-racism, etc., did a local church engage, and what were the fruits of those engagements? Significant network opportunities are overlooked, and time is spent reinventing or never exploring resources that agencies continue to spend time and money developing.
- n. Would have every church create a Living Will, the healthier the congregation, the more critical this work. In this way, churches would determine early on and not under threat of discontinuance what constitutes a decline in vitality. They could work with the DS incrementally to 'take its temperature' regarding health. Disciplinary paragraph ¶212 would be an integral framework for such a document.
- o. Would ask the question of the conference that we often ask of congregations per The Disciplinary ¶213 process. Instead of asking what a community would be without a particular church, we might ask what the annual conference would be without specific ministries. Theoretically, remove all ministries except those required by The Discipline and then rebuild, holding all to a set of criteria (including how we lead the *Disciplinary* ministries) by standards or strategies designed for effectiveness, resilience, and

sustainability. Allow some programs and ministries to 'lie fallow if failing.'

4. How have you demonstrated the spiritual gift of leadership? (For example, give examples of ministry contexts where spiritual leaders were discovered, developed, and deployed for a Kingdom task)

- A. I met a woman whose father had been a UM pastor in my first appointment. She was an introvert by nature, and she would say that she and the church were 'disappointed with each other.' She was a talented yet reluctant leader and always wanted to assist behind the scenes. In considering something new, I always encouraged her to begin something new with what she 'knew.' During a church member's funeral, I invited her to speak because I knew she could affirm the person's ministry in a way that would comfort her family. She reluctantly rose and slowly began to talk about someone whose life we mourned. Three congregations later, she has provided leadership assistance with numerous ministries in each one. She served on trustees, nursery, children's ministry, Latino worship, and as lay member to Annual Conference, as a local missionary and managed an income-generating ministry in her current congregation, using gifts and skills she did not think she possessed.
- B. In my last local church appointment, we arrived at a season of discernment regarding the church's vitality. I can attest to the strain on myself, my family, and the congregation. The SPRC chairperson was reluctant to continue in her leadership capacity. We were near the end of a spiritual gifts' discernment gathering, and she came to me and confided that she just didn't think she could continue. I told her that I understood and suggested she not serve. I thought she was going to burst into tears. I don't think she realized that saying "no" could evidence spiritual gift discernment. She expressed gratitude for my support and instead became a leading advocate for justice in our community Study Circles.

5. How have you demonstrated a willingness to be held accountable for results and demonstrated an ability to hold others accountable, with grace, for their results (staff or volunteers)? Describe your track record of doing the "right thing" in difficult situations.

- A. The most difficult decisions have required me to self-differentiate myself from work and people's feelings—differentiation, *not* disassociation. I have learned to remain focused amid professional attacks and the circulation of misinformation. I recall having a talented and influential volunteer in my church who became a voice in the anti-gay movement. He was convinced we should terminate a staff member due to the individual's gender orientation. He began to wonder if the challenges experienced by our church were due to God's displeasure that our church had not formally declared the LGBTQ+ lifestyle a sin. He wanted to terminate the individual despite the years of accomplished, faithful service. I began a conversation about his lack of acceptance of LGBTQ persons and moved to the lack of integrity and illegality of this course of action. I widened the dialogue circle and set up a meeting with the Conference Chancellor and an employment attorney who echoed the same sentiments. The member appeared defeated and resigned to acceptance following the meeting. I even became aware that he and his spouse met with another area UM pastor

whose views were more in keeping with theirs. Nevertheless, I committed to serve as their pastor during my tenure at that appointment.

- B. A Caucasian church member struggled with addiction. He was engaged to a woman who was a Pacific Islander. When he drank, he was verbally abusive to her. He also practiced verbally abusive, macro-aggressive racist behavior. For example, he delighted in learning that The UMC had a Central Jurisdiction. He left offensive messages on my voice mail, would email me with invectives, and copied other leaders. Leaders came to me quietly to apologize. I explained to the lay leader that while they apologized to me, his behavior was an affront to the Lord and the Church and that they should meet with him in the spirit of Matthew 18:15-16. Too often, ‘that’s just the way someone is’ becomes an excuse for not doing the hard work and disables transformation. I committed to serving as his pastor during my appointment but had to regularly speak the ‘truth’ to him. He was so consumed with hate that he even sent me an email after I became a DS.
- C. My ministry has repeatedly been informed and blessed by faithful laypersons who taught me on every level of ministry we served. As a DS, I experienced unique challenges in supervising clergy colleagues. The consequences, which often accompanied chargeable offenses or generally unacceptable behavior, signaled a desire for some to expect pastoral care to supersede supervisory authority. I realized that my leadership with a pastor and congregation might include the need for a mature SPRC chairperson to stand behind a pulpit on Sunday morning and enjoin the prayers of the church family as the pastor and spouse faced an impending divorce. The laity and I were part of a caring team representing Christ’s love to the clergy. My goal was a redemptive, integral approach for the pastor and congregation.

6. What has been your exposure to the Annual, Jurisdictional, and General Conference? (For example, cabinet experience, service on a committee, board, or agency.)

- A. **July 1, 2022** – marked the beginning of my fourteenth consecutive year on the FL Conference Cabinet, where I have served with two remarkably gifted Episcopal leaders. District Superintendent for five years, with 90 churches and missions representing the complexities of rural, suburban, and urban communities. Dean of the Cabinet my last year during the transition of bishops. My current role is that of Director of Connectional and Justice Ministries (‘Justice’ portfolio since 2016). As DCM, *ex officio* on the Conference Boards of Laity, Trustees, CFA, BHECM, BCRM, and the FLUMC Foundation, etc. In February 2021, I began preparing to serve as a Co-Interim District Superintendent *simultaneously* with my role as (DCJM) through December 31, 2021.
- B. Delegate to General Conference 2012, 2016, 2019 (2020/2024)
- C. Secretary, The General Board of Church and Society (2016-Present). Served on the Social Principles writing team (2017-2018).

- D. The SEJ Committee on Coordination and Accountability, (2013-Present)
- E. Member of Conference, SEJ, and National Black Methodists for Church Renewal
- F. Member of National Black Clergywomen
- G. Treasurer, National Association of Directors of Connectional Ministries (2018-Present)
- H. Chair, SEJ Directors of Connectional Ministry (2018-2021)
- I. SEJ Secretary's staff; assisted with ballot tallies during the 2016 Episcopal elections
- J. The SEJ Committee on Investigation (2012-2016)
- K. Served on a US Consultation team, GBCS, as the agency prepared to re-write the Social Principles (2015)
- L. Bishop's Initiative on Children and Poverty and the Conference Table (2002-2012)
- M. Member, The General Board of Discipleship, which included the Division of Ministry With Young People and Upper Room Ministries (2008-2012), GYPC, Germany, 2010
- N. Host District Superintendent, 2012 GC, Tampa, FL.
- O. BOM (2004-2008) and Cabinet liaison to the BOM (2008-2011)
- P. Conference Clergy Housing Committee (2002)

7. Based on 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.)

- A. Connectional and Justice Ministries enables the Conference teams to express the vision through resourcing local churches as they focus on the primary task of making disciples. It relates to the global UMC by designing partnerships between SEJ ministries, the local church, and General Agency staff through grants, curriculum material, leadership training, and global UMC initiatives. Additionally, the church has benefited from exchanging ideas around best practices between the FL Conference and agencies.
- B. General Board of Discipleship (2008), which included the Division of Ministry With Young People, was an opportunity for me to learn from and support the hopes and dreams of youth across the Connection—attended GBOD Board Meeting and Global Young People's

Convocation in Germany in 2010. Upper Room Ministries call us to the importance of spiritual formation in the life of faith and invite us to read scripture, pray and celebrate the opportunity to immerse ourselves in a formational journey with friends worldwide, each in their languages. I have written for The Upper Room Daily Devotional in the past. The program of Connectional Ministries significantly relates to Discipleship Ministries. Our conference is among those who still offer the Five-Day and now Three-Day Academy.

- C. Host DS of the 2012 General Conference in Tampa, FL, which served as an opportunity to extend hospitality to members of the global UMC and to experience our community and its diversity through fresh eyes.
- D. The SEJ COI (2012-2016). I appreciate that the SEJ committee helps provide accountability for the ministry to which I now offer myself.
- E. The SEJ CCA oversees the Jurisdictional Ministries (2013-Present) and expresses/connects the mission of the Jurisdiction.
- F. Traveled to Quessua Mission in East Angola and Africa University with a FL Conference delegation. Sponsored the AU choir at Annual Conference. Helped raise funds toward an endowment (2014).
- G. Participated on a US Consultation team sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society as the agency prepared to re-write the Social Principles (2015)
- H. Secretary of the GBCS (2016-Present).
 - i. Included in the GBCS video explaining and endorsing the proposed global Social Principles.
 - ii. Attended GBCS Board meeting in Germany (2018). Responded to the request of GBCS to review and hold Public Conversations on the Social Principles. *Facilitated FL Conference participation at a level enabling it to become the Annual*
 - iii. *Conference with the highest number of responses in the Global Church during our Social Principles Public Conversations (2018).*
 - iv. Traveled to The Democratic Republic of Congo in 2020 as part of a small delegation of clergy and GBCS staff, invited to teach the Proposed Social Principles.
- I. Chair, SEJ DCMs (2018-Present). This group represents one of the best collectives of lay, deacons, and elders, voices around the table with an equal sharing of views. Working relationship of shared resources, prayers, encouragement, programs, and commitment to work on racism and civil rights history.

- J. Treasurer, National Association of DCMs (2018-Present). I continue this role and consider my affiliation with this broader group of DCMs to be a way to contribute to and receive/exchange a more comprehensive ministry vision and resources within this season of the church's life.
- K. Returned to Quessua Mission in East Angola re: childhood malnutrition, visited Luanda in West Angola in 2022. Met with the Bishops of East and West Angola ACs. Participated in Marcy Cohort last year and Reconciliation Ministry in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 2022.

8. How do you encourage the development of future lay and clergy leaders?

Established and seasoned leaders should convey to future leaders that God loves them and that we will never be the church Christ has called us to be without their faith, wit, charism, and innovation. We must be careful about perceiving ourselves as gatekeepers of the faith, the church, or the ministry. The next best opportunity for ministry and mission may arise from an unexpected person or conversation. Our understanding of I Peter 2:5-9 reminds us of the priesthood of all believers and 'a chosen generation.' Being chosen is not confined to time and space but to every generation. Many seasoned saints serving today were once considered future leaders. Expanding opportunities to 'create the menu and not just extend the invitation to the table' is essential to development.

My current role enables me to regularly engage the ministry concerns and investment in Camps and Campus ministries which uniquely resource and bless the leadership of future leaders. Praying for future leaders and providing resources that are invested in them and set aside for future leaders shows the intentionality for a future for them, *with hope*. Asking them to share with us what's in their hearts, listening to their fears, uncertainties, and goals, and effecting a strategy toward accomplishing them is equivalent to investing in them. We need the energy and the benefit of their expertise as we move toward a future, they (and not necessarily we) will see. Committing ourselves to be allies and not adversaries models our commitment to them. They will embrace the future church differently if we support them in transforming those 'good old days' into the 'bright star ahead.' They will walk in that 'marvelous light' (I Peter 2:5-9) and call upon us as they wish for our experience.

9. 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

(Secretary of The GBCS *and* assigned to GC Legislative Committee C & S II.) I commend the Preamble of the 2020 Revised Social Principles, which frames the spirit of the Principles and not just the statements of the Principles. In the current version of Social Principles, we used two

phrases in ¶161.G) and ¶162.J) to affirm the sexual personhood that we now succinctly state in the revised Social Principles, The Nurturing Community, C. Biblical interpretation can be an obstacle to affirmation and transformation. We *currently* serve a Church with more differences than we can know or could name. Over the years, the church has identified selected people groups as problematic; Native Americans, Indigenous people, African-diasporic people, and other people of color and minority culture, the equality of women, ordination, and LGBTQ+ persons. We have incorporated language and policies in the church which exclude and harm our siblings. We do not all understand, agree, or practice the same expressions of attraction, love, and intimacy. *Vilification and limitations of the personhood of anyone as less than God's good creation are beyond the bounds of our purview.* Our exclusion, attacks, and violence have also perpetuated generational trauma and the loss of promising leaders to other denominations and the church. I'm uncertain how we expect to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission by defining *all* to mean *some*.

Two years ago, I could not have reported the recent, tragic occurrence in my Annual Conference of having two failed affirmative votes for Provisional Clergy during the clergy session. Sitting in the session held in a local church was an opportunity to see the candidates, the altar, the cross, and hear the speakers. *Votes have consequences*, and now we bear responsibility for leading in ways that acknowledge the guilt and shame that many feel that we punished a group of clergy colleagues because of our differences of opinion over sexual orientation. We also need to take responsibility for restoring their dignity and honor of living into God's call in their lives, the pride of their families, and their financial consequences and matriculation through our process. I share an affinity with them in a poignant way. As an ordained clergyperson who transferred to The UMC and was received as a Probationary (now Provisional) Elder in the FL Conference, I may never have become an Episcopal nominee if the vote failed for my class of Provisional Elders. When our 25th Anniversary class was recognized at this year's AC, I beheld and appreciated the gifts of members of that class.

b. Local church closures and establishing new faith communities

Benchmark conversations with congregations often elicited a myriad of emotions; anger, disbelief, betrayal (sometimes quiet relief), to name a few. The discontinuance of congregations is 'heartfelt heartbreak.' I would tell anyone that this work feels as personal to church members as if the bishop (and by extension), the district superintendent, and Cabinet walked into their living rooms and began loading personal belongings in a moving van right before their eyes. It is always important to reassure people that:

- a) Their faith is not being questioned; instead, the Church (mission or another ministry) has reached the end of a long runway.
- b) The changes were usual gradual, possibly almost imperceptible
- c) There *is likely a* new life for their ministry or property/other assets, but there is *definitely ongoing* life for the members
- d) God is not finished with them, us or property, yet!

I also learned that if leaders understood that their church's decline was identified as more than income, I needed to be prepared to hold the line on health and vitality. I have recommended

discontinuing churches that were broken in spirit, vision, mission, people, property, and financial resources. I have recommended discontinuing a church with ministry potential and (an approximately) one-million-dollar mortgage. I have also recommended discontinuing a church with cash and property totaling millions. I led the district to gift a historical property to a downtown congregation (the offspring of the historic congregation) amid considerable controversy. To date, the property has been repurposed and redeveloped. Its missional outreach flourishes as a gathering and meeting place for the community and providing employment opportunities to homeless and unemployed men.

c. Next generations' leaders

We can learn so much from young leaders! Upon the inception of my current appointment, I accepted an invitation to have lunch with two young adult clergywomen who sensed a gap in our Conference resourcing concerning the development of a Children's Resource ministry. They stated their case and expected my acknowledgment and support for their planning to create a space for this development. They knew their bandwidth in creating this ministry and when to hand it off. Next-generation leaders have a vision and move toward it more quickly, sometimes without having all the funding, logistics, and permissions in place. They are driven by Kingdom 'urgency' and are willing to fail, fall, get up, learn, gather fellow travelers, and keep moving. They use organic strategies and social media better than organizing their work around committees.

One of our recent Annual Conference themes was *In Christ, For Others: Transformation through mentoring and reverse mentoring* attends to two of the UMC's Four Areas of Focus: Leading where God calls and Making New Disciples in New Places. It also reflects the aspirations and goals for my leadership as a self-described 'life-long learner.' The church will grow when it recognizes the wisdom and lives into innovation and energy offered by the next generation, thereby affording them the church they deserve *now!*

d. Guaranteed appointment for clergy

Guaranteed full-time appointments (including housing, pension, and health insurance) for clergy may not be a system we can sustain. It has primarily fulfilled its goal by providing Word, service, sacrament, and ordering the church's life. Deacons have an experience that few Elders have as they secure their appointments. The system has honored the vocational call of clergy who have substantially participated in and trusted a system from which they have also benefitted. It has also considered the sacrifices made by their families. Some groups of clergy have paid an inordinately high price. Some clergy have traditionally made profound sacrifices by their willingness to serve, either because of who they are or where they have been willing to serve. Some clergy have served amid threats to their safety and their families.

There are at least two issues that lie at the heart of challenges to guaranteed appointments. The first issue concerns the ability to sustain a system that we can no longer financially support in the same way. I assume that guaranteed appointments were a different discussion when finances weren't an issue. The second concern is clergy effectiveness. Growing Churches are less likely to

focus on the 'guarantee' issue because they have resources for ministries and believe missionally effective clergy are leading them. *The Book of Discipline 2016* addresses the appointment system in ways that allow for the continuation of appointments to elders in *good standing* and an itinerant system that provides full or less than full-time service. Bi-vocational options may eventually become the norm.

10. What do you see as the greatest challenge for The United Methodist Church? What are the greatest opportunities?

In the last half-century, the debate over full inclusion has rendered our church reminiscent of a play on words (of the improvisational TV game show) Whose Line [Church] Is It Anyway? At times we have been threatened to become a fragile flicker in the darkness instead of a flame, and we have compromised our witness in a world that has grown increasingly callous, vulnerable, angry, and selfish. The greatest challenge will be for our reclamation that there can be no winners when the church forgets that we are all sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Our church has a history with which it has not reckoned. Our church is replete with the history of thousands of incidents of exclusion. Whenever we formally discriminated against a group, it became easier for the church and individual local churches to discriminate against another group. In the U.S., we oppressed Native Americans, Women, African-Americans, other people of color, people *with accents*, people of certain ages and marital statuses, and people of certain gender orientations. When I served as a DS, I was requested not to support the Cabinet, even considering many of these persons for certain appointments. *If this is a liminal season, it is also filled with seminal moments.* Some of the decisions emerging from the 2019 GC and being used as a pathway toward the splintering of our church and the formation of subsequent Methodist movements, have also led to opportunities to call forth lay leadership, appoint clergy and elect episcopal leaders who will set a course for the church that determine what we bequeath to future leaders.

References to Fresh Expressions of Ministry or Missional Ministry appointments should not result in asking if they compete with local churches but how local churches can use their experiences, faith, and prayers to support the new things. We can worship in new ways, incorporate worship liturgies and advocate for a plethora of justice issues, i.e., climate justice. It will be a blessing when others see the entire UMC (and not just our work in missions, education, etc.) as a response to problems and injustices, not *the* problem and the injustice itself. Our ministries through UMVIM and African University, to name a few, are intentional bellwethers that have given evidence to the tangibility of God's love through service to others. I want to lead the church in answering the question, what comes next?