

**Questions for an Episcopal Nominee from the
Southeastern Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy**

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

I am a proud Methodist from the cradle and my Wesleyan roots run deep. I am a fourth generation Methodist. My great grandmother established a Christian benchmark for her family after the period of enslavement. My grandmother faithfully attended her one room school in the Methodist church. My mother was determined to find a welcoming place and space in the United Methodist Church and sent her children to Morristown College a Methodist two-year institution for a sense of grounding. Under the influence of Wesleyan theology, spirituality and practice, they forged a pathway to establish a sense of urgency to become a Christ follower for my siblings and me. They instilled in me the will to fight for social justice and equality for all just as John Wesley did.

It is important for us to take pride in the heritage of John Wesley as one of the first prominent church leaders to resist enslavement as an institution. Wesley also took a strong position on social and political forces that drove the economy and positioned certain people for the accumulation of wealth. Wesley's commitment to equality and access, has been a guiding force for me throughout my life. My days spent in Sunday school, vacation bible school, confirmation class and seminary paved the way for me to have the opportunity and privilege to serve as an elder in full connection and become an endorsed episcopacy nominee. I am proud to sharing with others what it means to be Wesleyan.

I am committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines. My rule of life is "God First" and I am committed to the ongoing practice of life-long spiritual formation through the use of spiritual direction. I am a Christian leadership coach and I am currently working on a certificate in spiritual direction. I write a daily Facebook post, The Prophetic Edge: Defining Words in Difficult Times. Also, I am part of an Emmaus community and practice spiritual retreat and observe a weekly Sabbath day as part of my personal self-care. I offer spiritual direction to others and believe in the power of fasting and prayer. I embrace the Wesleyan spiritual conceptualization of the quadrilateral and rely heavily upon the scriptures to inform my theology along with reason, experience and tradition. I have always been a champion for social justice, equity, inclusivity and ecumenism. I strive to live my life creating opportunities for all people to be spiritually formed in the image of God. I believe in my heart of hearts that I was created to do difficult things and under the unction of the Holy Spirit, I endeavor to be a change agent for God.

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

God has been faithful in giving me creative ways to offer Christ to others which has resulted in adding souls to the kingdom. I believe that people come to church and to Christ based solely on relationship. In the local church my motto has always been “raise up leaders, raise up a church.” I use a three-prong method for church growth and increased vitality: leadership development, small group creation and spiritual formation. My leadership model also includes calling people into a relationship with Christ and others built on character development. I do not believe that people will follow a leader they cannot touch. Leaders must be accessible and accountable to others. As key leaders, our priority is to “only say what we mean and mean what we say.”

I have been blessed to author several books regarding character development and leadership. *Mark the Perfect Man: Leading and Living with Character* is one of those books and is currently being used by leaders in various ecumenical settings. This book promotes leadership development centered on ten key principles: belief, purpose, integrity, right response, commitment, dependence, courage, determination, humility, and giving.

My record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church involves increased attendance, regular professions of faith and missional outreach that involves social justice. I have been blessed in small membership churches, rural churches, inner city churches and large university campus ministry to experience overall vitality and growth. Each church I served experienced spiritual, programmatic and numerical growth with an emphasis on multiculturalism and community involvement.

Each church I served developed spiritual markers of increased giving, diversity, Character Based Leadership development, social justice advocacy and sustained spiritual formation. Our faith communities planned, developed and implemented sustainable programs for children, youth, families, seniors and leaders. My skills set includes grant writing and program development, which greatly benefits the churches I serve.

I have been the first female pastor in several churches, a chaplain and a mentor and have developed a strong lay servant ministry resulting in at least 5 people entering into full or part time ministry. Also, as a result of my early leadership development, one church in particular has sustained growth and is one of the more racially diverse churches in the conference.

While in seminary as a student pastor, I was assigned two small churches that were three hours away from my seminary and in a different time zone. These churches needed to believe there was hope and light at the end of the tunnel. At both of the churches, we experienced numerical and spiritual growth. This was the first time in many years that both churches gained a greater sense of confidence regarding who they were and who they could be as a church. Together, we discerned what kind of contributions we could

make in God's kingdom. We started a charge Bible study with a special emphasis on the development of youth and young adults. We found that within the larger community, we were able to set aside our denominational differences and build stronger communities together. The overall community was ignited. Both of the churches I served received conference awards as churches of excellence during my tenure.

One flagship ministry that was developed while I was the pastor was a women's conference that is in its tenth year: Those River Women. Also, during my tenure at this church, I laid the groundwork for a successful merger of two churches. Also, I have served as the lead pastor in a five-point charge (Parish Ministry) that developed leaders who continue to serve at the district and conference level.

I also served as the Executive Director and lead pastor of the University of Tennessee Wesley Foundation (college ministry) in Knoxville, Tennessee. When I was appointed there, we had major capital challenges: leaking roof, asbestos in the building, broken commercial stove, water heater cited by authorities as inoperable and a very small board. I overwhelmingly achieved strategic goals at the UTK Wesley Foundation to increase the diversity of our student population.

I currently serve at Emory & Henry College as the Director of Church Relations & Faith Based Diversity, Equity Inclusion & Belonging. My primary duty is to foster a greater connection between Emory & Henry College, one of the 122 institutions affiliated with the United Methodist Church and the Holston Conference to create mutually beneficial relationships. I also provide diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging training and development for churches, other colleges and universities and community and non profit organizations.

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 an annual conference do you think would be fruitful?

I am versed in change management, collaborative leadership and dismantling racism skills. We must embrace a culture of change to earn trust, influence and to become relevant to people in order to carry out our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. People have changed their expectations and needs. People are considering sustainability and equity. We must become innovative and attractive by deepening our relations with all humankind. We must engage more fully, we must start a different dialogue, and we must deliver authenticity consistently.

Business as usual will not advance the United Methodist Church. We have never been here before. Things have not gone like we planned them and we cannot panic. We have to stay the course during this crisis in potential leadership. I think we have to look at our internal and external messaging, welcome everyone's thoughts and suggestions, reward

consistency, create a space that works for our conference and believe that by faith, God is in control. Our annual conferences need an infusion of collaborative leadership to accelerate our impending transformation. Collaboration is a necessary element for the future of our conferences benefiting both clergy and laity in leadership and the United Methodist church as a whole. We must find the right way forward that includes all humanity. Collaborative leadership enables us to embrace the potential in all humankind. Change, agility and resilience are necessary for transformation. Also, it is critical that we find creative ways to accelerate the engagement and commitment to the change that we are experiencing. I think it is important to implement a comprehensive communication strategy that increases awareness and mitigates resistance to change. Research provided by Forbes suggest that the best way to disrupt “business as usual” is to (1) offer something radically new, (2) value creativity and innovation over “best practices” and (3) to put technology and data to work. As an annual conference we must offer genuine love that welcomes and respects all people. We must accept the role technology has played in our life since Covid-19 and use it as a tool of productivity for our future. We will have to be nimble to approach the changes that are occurring within our denomination.

I think the leadership in the annual conference must be disruptive and exploratory. The United Methodist church must find its purpose while dealing with impending change and align our faith culture with the teachings of Jesus (become true Christ Followers). We must rigorously test our religious assumptions, start our church in the direction of radically making disciples, foster ‘*open hearts, open minds and open doors*’, navigate the gray space by being nimble, rethink our strategy and focus on sustaining our church by holding on to what unifies us rather than what divides us. We need a strong change management model for transformation (design a change management strategy, implement organizational change, measure and accelerate change adoption instead of reacting to change as it happens, use it as an opportunity to innovate and differentiate).

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

My life long endeavor has been in pursuit of leadership. I have written several books on leadership development and believe strongly in the power of mentoring others and modeling strong leadership skills. My gifts and graces have allowed me to discover leadership gifts in others and cultivate and stir up the gifts that lead to transformative changes. I have mentored several individuals and have helped them travel the often difficult journey from the pew to the pulpit to the community. I mentored four individuals who have completed local licensing school and are now serving in our conference, one of which is in a cross racial appointment. I have routinely grown cadres of lay servants and certified lay ministers. I have served on both the district and conference Board of Ordained Ministry and helped to deploy kingdom builders.

I have a successful track record of recognizing leadership gifts and graces and have helped people by giving them both roots and wings to answer their call to ministry. I am skillful in helping others walk the path from the pew to the pulpit with measurable success. As lead pastor at the UTK Wesley Foundation, we developed leaders using a spiritual direction model. Our creative Bible study was centered around the exposure to various spiritual disciplines. One bright spot is that after a spiritual discipline session on ‘fixed hour of prayer,’ four male students (freshmen/sophomores) decided to meet each morning before class to pray. “Raise up leaders, raise up the church!”

I have planned, developed, and written a book about Character Based Leadership. This leadership model holds all who use it to be accountable to God and one another. Key leaders are asked to help create and foster a leadership atmosphere filled with the following leadership skills:

1. Listen to the people and build trust.
2. Establish a cultural of care and gratefulness.
3. Foster an environment of fun, fellowship and feelings of security and safety.
4. Encourage risk-taking evangelism.
5. Plan activities and events outside the church.
6. Create small group membership that fosters a sense of belonging.
7. Celebrate success and reward positive behavior at all levels and repeat!

I meet with the president of the college biweekly and direct report to him. I participate in a district missional hub clergy group and an ecumenical lectionary group. I promote the use and model of evaluation utilizing two simple questions after every encounter or event, “What went well and what can we improve or do differently the next time”. I also participate in an ecumenical preaching group funded by a Styberg Preaching Institute Grant. I recently was invited as a fellow in the Black Theology & Leadership Institutional Womanist Fellow at Princeton, University. The selection criteria were based on Womanist Theological Leadership, Preaching and Activism.

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.

As a member of a socially marginalized group, I am often in spaces and places in the Holston Conference where I am the only African American. I often have to confront stereotypes and engage others in a continuous posture of utilizing anti-racist behavior. This is a difficult place to be in. As Methodist, we believe in dismantling “isms” and leveling the playing field and allowing everyone to have access to the same resources. In my four years as Chair of the Order of Elders, I have helped several women navigate through the often choppy waters of racism and sexism to either get through the

provisional or elder in full connection process. I have had to use our General Church Agencies such as General Commission on Religion and Race to reinforce information contained in the Book of Discipline.

At the 2022 Holston Annual Conference, we were successful gained a resolution that requires the Holston Conference to have at least 20% of the people on the Conference Committees be African American or Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPPOC). In the 2019 Annual conference, I crafted a resolution on behalf of Holston Black Methodist Church Renewal that was unanimously adopted that calls for at least one African American to be included in the decision-making processes of all conference workings. “A Seat At Every Table” works in conjunction with the conference nomination committee to lift up names of African Americans who are qualified and best suited to work on various committees.

As the Committee on the Status and Role of Women (CSROW) Chair, I also brought a resolution to the Annual Conference previously adopted including language regarding the full inclusion of women that was also unanimously reaffirmed. I also reactivated the conference CSROW after several years of inactivity. I have lobbied and gained the unanimous consent from the Board of Ordained Ministry to offer a mandatory anti-racism training for all clergy and I have helped to plan, develop and implement the Eight-Year Assessment process in the Holston Conference. I continue to lead by example in uncomfortable places and spaces with intentionality to the details social justice and reform.

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

Currently, I am a clergy delegate to General Conference. My exposure has primarily been to the Annual Conference. Over the past 20 years I have served in numerous capacities. I currently serve as the **Chair of the Order of Elders** for The Holston Conference. By virtue of this office, I serve on **the Executive Committee on the Board of Ordained Ministry** and work to ensure that diversity and inclusion are our top priorities. Also, I serve as the **Chair of the Committee on the Status and The Role of Women (CSROW) in the Holston Conference**. I was selected and attended the national training offered by the Committee on the Status and Role of Women (CSROW) regarding sexual ethics. As a result of this training, I serve on **the Sexual Ethics and Boundaries Committee** along with four of my colleagues who planned, developed and implemented a mandatory sexual ethics training for all clergy in the Holston Conference. We recently created a video that will be available for all clergy and others to show at their churches and events that highlights the voice of 7 sexism and racism in our conference. In the video, our clergy brothers read unscripted authentic comments made to clergywomen in

our conference. We believe this will increase awareness of the need for ongoing anti-sexism and anti-racism work in our conference.

I serve as **Co -Chair of the Strengthening the Black Church**, serve as a member of the **Outreach and Advocacy Committee**, the **Clergy Convocation Design Team**, the **Holston Center for Well Pastoral Oversight Committee**, **Holston Collegiate Ministries**, **Black Methodist for Church Renewal**, **African American Ministry Task Force**, and serve as a **Conference Clergy Mentor**.

I was instrumental in reactivating, planning and developing an agenda for a vital chapter of the Black Methodist for Church Renewal that has been strong for the past ten years. I helped to form the **African American Ministry Task Force** that remains as a multi-ethnic and racial group of pastors and laity whose primary interest is to ensure that African American and other ethnic issues are considered in the day-to-day life of the conference.

Also, I took the initiative, traveled to Nashville and met with Rev. Dr. Fred Allen, the previous National Director of Strengthening the Black Church and requested that the Holston Conference become partners with SBC21 to empower the few black churches in the conference to remain and become more viable. I co-chair this initiative with Rev. Dr. Barbara Doyle and we recently invited over one hundred people (primarily African American Pastors and their parishioners and the Bishop and conference staff) together on a cold snowy day to take an in-depth look at the current state of the Black Church in the Holston Conference and the General Church. It was an overwhelming turnout and we continue to do the work that is necessary for sustainability and growth of the Black Church.

7. Based upon your experience, how do you relate to the worldwide United Methodist Church communion? (For example, boards and agencies, publishing, short-term mission teams, UMVIM, UMCOR, etc.)

I believe that it is critical to reach out to all God's people. For many years, I have considered missions a viable part of ministry. A church that does not have a vision for global missions has a very limited scope. I have participated in life changing short-term mission teams to Australia, India and Africa. Specifically, the Holston Conference has a mission outreach to South Sudan and Uganda. I have traveled to both South Sudan and Uganda with the conference mission team. Also, I was instrumental in helping a South Sudanese woman to plan, develop and implement a successful ministry (Grace Works Initiative) for women and children that is currently operating today. When I met Sis Grace Nakajje, she was a reporter and photographer for the Global United Methodist Church. After leading her in a spiritual direction and discernment process, she is now the lead director of a much-needed ministry to women and children in Uganda.

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

I think mentoring, spiritual formation and vocational discernment is critical to developing leaders. One of my leadership strengths is the development and training of lay and clergy leadership. I have a proven history of leadership development. Recently I was at a district revival and a very humbling opportunity presented itself. I looked around the sanctuary and I actually saw five people that I had either mentored or encouraged to use their gifts and graces to discern their vocational calling in ministry. There were three local pastors serving churches who when I first met them in my various appointments were laity who had never explored or been involved in a discernment process. Through a process of discerning they became lay speakers, certified lay servants and local pastor now serving churches. The other two were individuals who had pursued seminary degrees but were not in active ministry through various reason. I lead and mentor them to reignite their calling and followed them along the path to ordained ministry.

One of my primary gifts to is recognize the calling on individuals and come alongside them as they journey to a deeper lever of leadership, both clergy and laity. I am able to see the possibility in people and situations and through courageous vulnerability help people navigate successfully for maximum potential.

9. What is your response to these topics in the United Methodist Church? Please limit your responses to two paragraphs for each topic.

1. Human sexuality

The foundation principles of (1) Do no harm, avoiding evil of all kinds; (2) Do good, of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all; and (3) Practice “the ordinances of God,” engaging in individual and communal spiritual practices such as prayer, Bible reading, worship and the Lord’s Supper are critical as we engage and have honest dialogue about human sexuality. The Book of Discipline recognizes the “sacred worth” of all persons but also states that “the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings and prohibits financial support to LGBTQ+ based groups.

The new Social Principles 2024 if adopted, calls for the affirmation and rights of all people acknowledging the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of all individuals. I think it is important for us to continue to enter into healthy dialogue as we navigate the murky waters of General Conference 2020 and beyond. I am committed to allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and guide me to all truths and will govern my actions according to the polity and discipline of the United Methodist Church now and in the future.

2. Local church closures and establishing new faith communities

I am a strong proponent of church mergers in order to promote vitality. It has been said that the average life cycle of a church is seventy years and if the church is to remain vital

afterward, the church must experience some type of revival. I think it is imperative for churches to address their “why” effectively and find and maintain a *raison d’etre*. We must constantly wrestle with the most important reason or purpose for our existence. The church exists to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” then, now and in the future. It is critical to foster flourishing churches that find and establish new faith communities. Under my leadership, UTK Wesley Foundation, planned, developed and implemented a “Fresh Expression Dinner Church in the inner city in East Knoxville, TN. We are offered a monthly service and have had over sixty children and parents in attendance. This ministry outreach is inter-generational and involves college students, children in an after school setting and their parents.

I believe that it is not the size of a church that matter, but it is the vitality of a church. I am convinced that sound biblical teaching and the invitation to be in full fellowship with Christ and others is everything that the church needs to be vital, successful and replicable. If we indeed follow the trajectory outlined by Lovett Weems and to some extent Leonard Sweet, we must be in the mode to personally assess our current way of operating. The expected death rates will greatly affect our current church model. The continued decline of church members and the financial support they give or do not give will create a dilemma that we have not adequately prepared for. If our energy is spent trying to upkeep aging buildings, and doing church the way our parents and grandparents did it, we are in for a major shock. I concur that the church has to make a decision about what is best for the church. The church will cease to exist if we continue to provide hospice care while at the same time looking for money to pay our utility bills and keep our buildings habitable. We must do more. We must become and remain relevant. We must seize the moment and decide to do church differently. We must look at the context and decide to extend our parameters beyond the survival circle. As leaders, we must seek to do ministry with evangelism in mind and not the reality of death or the purse strings so often attached to it. Spiritual vitality is key to our future and we must first seek to be vital and the rest will follow.

3. Next generations leaders

It is said that Martin Luther King Jr. began to lead the boycott at age twenty-six. Young leadership matters and help the church remain relevant. As a campus leader of diversity, equity, inclusion & belonging, I encourage “key leadership” development. I believe we must foster service opportunities and create environments for the next generation leaders to serve. We must provide vocational discernment opportunities at all levels and help individuals to see how they can best answer the call within their relevant context. Leaders can be developed within many different contexts and we must seek to do so at all cost. We must allow for innovation and have the courage to accept new ideas and ways to lead including technology and fresh expressions.

4. Guaranteed appointment for clergy

In our itinerancy and appointment system, clergy who have invested in securing the necessary required credentials, a Master's of Divinity and Associate Members status should be able to benefit from a guaranteed place to work in the vineyard. However, guaranteed appointment for clergy should not be a "rites of passage" for the cabinet to continue to send ineffective and underperforming pastors to serve in a church just because they are elders or associate members. There must be a balance in properly maintaining competent clergy for appointments. One benefit of guaranteed appointment is the concept of itinerancy. Conceptually, guaranteed appointments should help to ensure that clergy who have made it through the provisional, full connection and associate member process will not be denied an appointment based on gender, race or ethnicity. There are always opportunities to reform and or bring change to our appointment system. One thing I would like to see is to train our laity and pastors on the concept of open itinerancy as outlined in the Book of Discipline to make a more just system of appointment.

10. What do they see as the greatest challenge for the UMC? What are the greatest opportunities?

I see our greatest challenge and opportunity as interconnected. As Christ followers, we have been given the task of making disciples of Jesus Christ so that the world might be transformed. We have always faced this mandate as both a challenge and an opportunity. We must effectively deal with our current disruptive change in an innovative manner bathed in compassion. As the Church, we must address serious challenges like declining attendance, increasing age of members and noninvolvement of youth and children and the need to discontinue some churches and plan or relocate churches in areas where the people live and work. We must recognize the lived experience (epistemology) of all people and take the necessary social action to focus on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging for all of God's people.

Collaboration is primary key to foster and create win-win opportunities to achieve more success. We must foster and create healthy ways where the 'rules of engagement' are compassionate enough to navigate the change that is before us including, the human sexuality challenge, antiracism work and the clarion call to separate religion from politics. Answering all of these challenges or opportunities through the lens of a loving Christ follower is the task that we have been given. We have the opportunity to successfully mitigate our current change and see it as an opportunity for change in the future. In Martin Luther King's book, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, King suggests that even in the midst of perceived chaos, in the middle of real-life struggles, even we feel like we are surrounded with impossibility, we must see the possibility. We must have hope. We need hope in becoming more Christ like and continuing transformational discipleship making. We must reset our theological tasks. We must focus on the call to be change agents in an ever-changing and ever-evolving world. The stakes are high. If we don't make disciples, there will be no church. We have to make and keep the 'main thing, the main thing'. We can change our world by transforming people and equipping them with the power to go forth. We must rethink

and refresh the early teachings of the faith into modern relevant language so that all who hear will understand.