

**The Revised 2020 SEJ Questions for an Episcopal Nominee  
Rev. Edith Gleaves—North Carolina Conference**

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

The Wesleyan way of being a disciple of Jesus Christ has been part of my faith DNA for at least four generations. God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace has been active in the lives of my father's father, and my grandfather's father who were all Methodist pastors. These same wonderful graces were active in the lives of my parents, who both actively served in the local hometown Methodist Church in which I and my younger sister and brother were baptized as children.

Through the nurture and modeling of my parents and my church family I gave my life to Christ at eleven years old. However, for as long as I could remember, I understood that I was a child of God, loved and claimed by God, and a believer in and follower of Jesus Christ. I was confirmed at twelve, becoming a member of my home church. Up until that time I had been part of the children's Sunday School and ministries. Over time I as a young person became the Sunday School secretary, taught children's Sunday School, sang in the children's then adult choir, and even played the piano as a youth for the church during a time when we were temporarily without one.

All of these rich experiences helped to form and shape me as a Christian rooted deeply in Wesleyan theology and practice in head, heart and life. It seemed to come as no surprise to my parents, my pastor, and those who knew me when I shared I had heard the call to into ministry at sixteen years old. I had been praying for the Lord to send workers into the fields which were ripe for harvest. Growing up in Robeson County, one of the poorest in the state, and one of the most distinctive, evenly divided between Black, White, and Native American people, I saw there was much human need--physical and spiritual. I knew they needed a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, who loved them, and cared about their physical, financial, emotional needs, and the need for justice.

God answered my prayers by setting my heart on fire and calling me into full time ordained ministry. God has been doing remarkable things with me, in me and through me ever since.

I was blessed to receive my Master of Divinity at Duke Divinity School where I learned more deeply and broadly about the Wesleyan tradition, about the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, experience and reason, about how this tradition involves both personal and social holiness, and about the centrality of the Scriptures. In addition to the practice of daily disciplines of prayer, and weekly corporate worship, I learned of and began journaling and fasting.

**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 blessed me to be the first woman of color to be ordained in the history of the North Carolina Annual Conference. God has also blessed me abundantly in giving me experiences of serving the Church locally and globally in a variety of settings which include a small, black local church as pastor; an associate in a cross-racial appointment in a large suburban church; as Director of Multi-cultural Ministries, Spiritual Formation and Social Concerns for the N. C. Annual Conference; as lead pastor in another cross-racial appointment for a midsize suburban church; as Deputy General Secretary for Mission Personnel for the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM); as associate in a cross-racial appointment in a large suburban church and then as a District Superintendent. Currently I am blessed to serve as Lead Pastor in a large, multi-staff, cross-racial appointment.

In each of the local church settings there were increases in professions of faith, in average worship attendance, in outreach efforts and small group formations. Even during the COVID pandemic the congregation I am now serving continues to increase in professions of faith. We began and continue to live-stream two of our three Sunday morning worship services and offer a hybrid of most of our small group studies and offerings as well. This has benefited in increasing our outreach to those who may not come to in-person gatherings for various reasons.

During my tenure at Resurrection UMC as their first pastor who was female and first person of color, I received the district's evangelism award. We doubled membership there from two hundred to four hundred. My service at North Raleigh UMC was the first cross-racial appointment of an elder of color in the Annual Conference, and their first appointment of a woman. My primary focus was the Youth Ministry which grew steadily in my service there, again in partnership with laity leadership. My role also included preaching and small group formation. A Sunday School class I founded is still active some 30 years later.

The work of the General Board of Global Ministries connects us with the local church. During my service at GBGM, I led in oversight of the recruitment, training, deployment, and support of some one thousand global and domestic missionaries, who came out of their local churches. I also worked across the USA and in over 40 countries to visit with missionaries, problem solve, consult with our mission partners, and church leadership. My work included oversight of program staff and offices in New York and Atlanta, and a budget of over \$28,000,000. I was the first female elder of color to serve on the GBGM Cabinet. One of my most treasured accomplishments was the commissioning of some four hundred new missionaries across those years, and the development of two new categories of missionaries—the Home Missioners, the male version of the Deaconess, and Global Missionaries, focused on Global Health. I did so with

the help of some forty dedicated and faithful staff in the New York and Atlanta offices, and with church partners in the U.S. and across the world.

One of the greatest accomplishments in outreach and mission was at Wrightsville UMC in partnership with laity there in the establishment of the Mission of Hope: Rotifunk Hospital. We founded it with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. It embodies the priority of all United Methodist people to engage in ministry with the poor and in global health. This partnership has grown to be a Harbor District and Annual Conference Mission Initiative. The lives of mothers and babies are being saved in the name of Christ through this ministry outreach, and community-based health care has been established.

District Superintendents are the primary mission strategist in the district. In partnership with laity and clergy leaders across the district we have twelve primary areas of focus. As the first District Superintendent of color for the district, and only the second female, I take particular sense of accomplishment in the growing partnership with our African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches in efforts towards fostering racial reconciliation and justice. Amid racial tensions which exist in our current society, one such gathering included Wilmington's mayor, and the Chiefs of the Law Enforcement Agencies as UMCs and AMEZs churches honored our local law enforcement officers with a joint worship service and dinner, in a local AMEZ church. Along with joint worship services and outreach mission projects, I rejoice at the partnering of individual local UMC and AMEZ churches and seeing fruitful church and personal relationships developing across racial lines which promote healing, wholeness, and justice. Another exciting result of this partnership is my leading in beginning the development of a new faith community between our UMC and the AMEZ of the area.

I have also been blessed with many invitations to preach, speak, and lead workshops and plenary sessions within the District, the Annual Conference and globally. This includes preaching twice for the Sierra Leone Annual Conference, most recently in 2019. For most of the local churches where I preached I am the first woman, and certainly the first clergywoman of color, to be afforded the opportunity. I have been profoundly blessed by the openness and warmth of the reception in most of these settings.

**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?**

Giving thanks to God for the natural and spiritual gifts and graces given to me for service, I would bring honed skill sets, knowledge, and abilities which include: years of faithful leading of small, medium and large fruitful, growing congregations. This involves effective visioning, preaching, teaching, worship leadership, working with small groups, partnering with the laity, supervising staff, pastoral care, encouragement, conflict resolution, administration, and courage. I have also been blessed to have expanded these and other skills to focus on the

mission of Christ at district, annual conferences and general church levels. The world has literally been my parish. I have led international mission trips via the local church, and I bring the experience of overseeing recruiting, training, sending, and supporting hundreds of mission personnel in the U.S. and around the globe in our denomination's missions agency. I worked collaboratively with U.S. and international church leadership, laity and clergy, traveling extensively and partnering in missions with persons of various cultures, ethnicities, languages, and experiences. I bring supervisory skills in negotiating instances of conflict and hurt, including misconduct by missionaries, clergy, and laypersons. I have given administrative oversight of small to large, multi-million-dollar budgets. I would bring to the office of the bishop patience, a non-anxious presence, resilience, flexibility, and the ability to shepherd and minister to and with all persons. Most of all I bring a deep, abiding faith in God and a relationship with Jesus Christ, out of whose Spirit I would seek to lead wherever I serve. I love Christ and His people.

Most of us know that Annual Conferences cannot go on with 'business as usual'. Like so many I wish there was some simple yet profound, ultimate solution, and pray we will accomplish it sooner than later. While I believe we will arrive on the other side in God's good time, I do not believe this will happen easily, painlessly, quickly, or without great complexity.

Profound changes that I think will be most fruitful for annual conferences begin with reclaiming and proclaiming our first love—Jesus Christ. He is the One who teaches us the greatest commandment is to love God with ALL our heart, ALL our soul, and with All our mind. The second command is like it—love our neighbor as ourselves. Everything else that matters hangs on these two commandments! (Matthew 22: 37-40) I believe it's time to adopt as our own the prayer Jesus prayed for all of us who would come to believe in Him through the message of His disciples. John 17:21 says "I pray that they will be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." Leaders who will lead in God's love, power and wisdom are what it will take to bear good fruit. Then a multi-faceted and clear vision with strategies will lead us into the good future God has in store. It will take holy listening and conversing in humility (not humiliation) with one another in ways we have been reluctant and unwilling to do. It will mean taking risk, changing, redefining, restructuring, and preparing to encounter disappointment, grief, and pain as we move forward—always acting justly with kindness. There is where the joy in participating in God's unfolding future comes. As in Wesley's prayer when we '...freely and heartily yield all things to Thy pleasure and disposal,' the struggle to be faithful and support Christ's mission is won.

- 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.**

Through my work with the Annual Conference and District Boards of Ordained Ministry, and as a District Superintendent where I oversaw 86 charges of over 100 local churches and local pastors, I have been blessed to develop and mentor leaders.

An example of leadership is my commitment to an inclusive church through open itineracy. An accomplishment of which I am proud is the cross-racial appointments of this District's first Asian-American pastors to local churches. I made four such appointments in the four years of service. These appointments saw fruits of growth spiritually and numerically. Also, at least 20% of new appointments made each year in the District I served were Clergywomen, many of whom were the first woman pastor to be received by their churches.

I also recall a layperson who subsequently became the leader of the Mission of Hope: Rotifunk Hospital. I had invited him along with three others to travel with me to Sierra Leone, West Africa. Those persons were profoundly impacted by that trip, and the subsequent work we did to develop that mission. Now, many lives are being transformed and saved through that ministry because of these spiritual leaders who were 'discovered, developed, and deployed' for a Kingdom task.

Perhaps some of the most exciting and life-giving encouragement of development of leadership are the three persons of color, two of whom are women, who have become UMC clergy, recognizing and/or accepting that calling while I was their local church pastor.

As mentioned earlier, one of my most treasured accomplishments was with GBGM, with the recruitment, training, commissioning, and sending of some four hundred new missionaries across those years of service. The development of two new categories of missionaries—the Home Missioners, the male version of the Deaconess, and Global Missionaries, focused on Global Health, happened under my leadership and in partnership with the Deaconess Program, and the Global Health Offices.

When I came into this current position as Lead Pastor, we were in the midst of the COVID pandemic. The congregation was not meeting in person. Over time we have returned to meeting in person from one, two and now three in-person Sunday morning worship services. We continue to adjust and adapt to keep everyone well through safety protocols we have developed, while at the same time offering vital, life-transforming worship and discipleship growth experiences.

**5. 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)?**

As a clergy person, Annual Conference and Global Agency staff leader, a former District Superintendent, and now a lead pastor of a multi-staff congregation, I know the crucial importance of supervision and effective responsiveness to concerns. As Wesleyan Methodists we are blessed to have sound structures in place to assist us in providing accountability.

Whenever I had staff in a local church or Conference or General Agency, I held us accountable in regular meetings, usually weekly, where we reviewed, planned and shared. We also did annual evaluations and looked for ways to commend and improve performance. Training and continuing education opportunities were also provided as needed.

At the district level I intentionally worked to have a visible presence within the district through regular clergy meetings, (both active and retired), charge conferences, preaching, visiting district churches to hear the pastors preach, UMW meeting presentations, and other special gatherings. At the Annual District fall 'Set Up' meetings I invited the Lay Leaders as well as the local pastor of our churches as a way to emphasize the importance of lay/clergy partnership in the local church. Together we worshipped, fellowshiped, and shared expectations, goals, and important information.

When appointed to my current congregation I intentionally requested to meet monthly with the Staff Parish Relations Committee during the first year of my service here. We drew up and renewed a mutual Covenant of Relationship which we revise at least yearly. This is one of the ways we hold each other accountable while offering prayerful support to one another as we together lead this wonderful congregation.

At the same time, I am subject to individual and personal accountability. I take the covenant relationship of the Order of Elders to heart and hold myself to it. When I serve in a local church setting, I hold myself accountable to the Core Values of that church. I have sought out and found trusted, respected persons in my life who are clergy and laity, family, and friends, who know my strengths and my weaknesses, who will speak truth in love, offer guidance and pray with and for me.

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

The areas of **Annual Conference Leadership** include District Superintendent, Harbor District (2016-2020), Cabinet Representative SBC-21, Harbor District Committee of Ordained Ministry, N.C. Annual Conference Session Bible Study Leader, N. C. Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, N. C. Conference, Director of Multicultural Relations, Spiritual Formation and Social Concerns, N. C. Annual Conference (1990-1995), N.C. Conference Memorial Service preacher (2021)

The areas of **Jurisdictional Leadership** include service as a General/Jurisdictional Delegate (2020), Jurisdictional Delegate (1994), Jurisdictional Reserve Delegate (1990), General Conference/Jurisdictional Conference Delegate (2020)

The Areas of **General Church Leadership** include currently, General Conference/Jurisdictional Conference Delegate (2020), General Board of Global Ministries (2000-2010) as Deputy General Secretary of Mission Personnel, General Board of Global Ministries; Deputy General Secretary,

Special Projects; General Conference, GBGM Staff Representative; 2020 General Conference delegate for N.C. Annual Conference.

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

I have been blessed to experience John Wesley's phrase, "the world is my parish" in a local and global way in our wonderfully global United Methodist Church. My first introduction to a mission work team came as a youth. We simply cleaned up the grounds around an elderly women's mobile home. I will never forget the tears of joy that ran down her face and the hugs of thanks she gave to each of us. The love of Christ had touched her heart and ours through this simple outreach. A seed had been planted.

As a new, young pastor I participated in a Conference mission work team to Reynosa, Mexico where we assisted in building an addition to the parsonage for the pastor and family. I was so impacted by that experience I co-lead a work team the following year to the same place where we worked on the new sanctuary for this growing church.

All of this led to my position with the General Board of Global Ministries where I was Deputy General Secretary of Mission Personnel. There for nearly a decade I led the program area to recruit, train, deploy and support all categories of missionaries across the United States and the world. My work took me across the USA and in over forty countries to visit with missionaries, problem solve, consult with our mission partners, and church leadership. My work with GBGM also put me in interaction and partnership for various reasons with our other denominational agency leadership, such as the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Discipleship, Communications, and Pensions.

Once back in my home Conference as one of the pastors at Wrightsville UMC, which was very active in local mission outreach, I partnered with the laity and led us in establishing a global mission outreach partnership. The Mission of Hope: Rotifunk Hospital is the now Conference and Harbor District level partnership with the Sierra Leone Annual Conference. With the Methodist Church of Norway, we have rebuilt the hospital, brought in staff, and serve by saving the lives of mothers and babies in Christ's name.

Due to the impact of Hurricane Matthew and especially from Hurricane Florence the Harbor District suffered extensive damage and devastation to local churches, parsonages and community homes and businesses. My intentional outreach of presence, assisting churches to connect with Conference, UMCOR and other financial resources and UMCs who wanted to partner in prayer and assistance, and providing a time of retreat for impacted pastors were important ways of connecting the United Methodist Church communion. New Disaster Recovery Centers and satellites have been established in the Harbor District to be in mission to thousands. The needs will persist for years to come.

I am a trained and certified Emergency Response Team member and am proud of the fact that the local church I currently serve has a Disaster Preparedness trailer and trained, active ERTs ready to act as needed in times of disaster.

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

Prayerfully identifying potential lay and clergy leaders, equipping them for spiritual service by providing training and resources, and coaching/mentoring them are shared tasks and ways I encourage their development. Central to the task of discerning God's call to Christian mission, and whom God is calling to see and serve God's present and emerging future, requires conversations with, feedback from, and input from these potential leaders. I also encourage the ongoing development of spiritual disciplines (prayer, presence, gifts, service, witness) and a firm base in our Wesleyan foundations. I believe my role is leader/coach to assist the development of leaders by helping them find the right resources and best practices for their own calling. I also encourage the development of a plan of ministry as may be needed, with the systems to get the work done, especially incorporating a willingness to flex, adapt, and risk.

**9. What is your response to these topics in the United Methodist Church?**

**Please limit your responses to two paragraphs for each topic:**

**a. Human Sexuality:**

I agree with the statement 2016 **Book of Discipline**... "We affirm that sexuality is God's good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift." and that "All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence." And that ...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. "Par.161.G. I believe in the sanctity of marriage as a covenantal relationship between two adults, regardless of their sexual orientation.

The wind of the Holy Spirit blows to the ultimate oneness in Christ, regardless of race, age, class, marital status, gender, nationality, and sexual orientation. The mission of the church is to proclaim the gospel to all. All means ALL. I believe God includes LGBTQ people in the 'all' to be fully loved and fully included as siblings in Christ, that the gifts and calling of all includes LGBTQ persons for ordination, and the Christian marriage covenant is made available to two professing adults who love one another.

**b. Local church closures and establishing new faith communities:**

Across the United States we are witnessing the decline of church membership, the aging of our congregations, and the increase of church closures. We know that it is crucial to engage in ministry in new ways, for new faces and new spaces of faith. The North Carolina Annual Conference leads the nation in establishing new faith communities. As a District Superintendent I worked closely with our Conference Office of New Faith Communities and our



Mission Strategy Committee to increase faith communities especially through satellite or mother-daughter type church relationships. Prior to the pandemic our Annual Conference, through our District worked to do a new thing by partnering with our AMEZ counterparts in establishing a new faith community to reach across dividing lines and witness to racial reconciliation in Christ. While this act has been delayed, I believe the commitment remains to move forward with this plan. I also worked with the Conference Office of Church Transformation to make intentional effort in identifying and helping congregations discern the best path forward for health and strength in making disciples of Jesus Christ. This involves revitalization, reconfiguration, or becoming a legacy church which closes with dignity while still being a blessing to others in some way.

The pandemic has somewhat delayed our looking at the possibility of forming a new congregation in our burgeoning population area. It is our hope that our current congregation may assist, perhaps by being an anchor church, for a new church start in a nearby town.

**c. Next generation of leaders:**

One of the most refreshing moves of the Spirit I have seen of late is that so many of our Conference delegates elected to the General and Jurisdictional Conferences are under the age of 40, including the election of our youngest youth yet! Our denomination needs the leadership insight and fresh ideas from our bright and gifted youth and young adults. We are seeing in these delegations the fruit of the necessary intentional process of identifying potential young people, and equipping, empowering, training and placing them in leadership positions where they can serve effectively. Our delegation is also perhaps the most racially diverse elected. This too is encouraging as we look like and model more closely the Kingdom of Heaven.

Our District Mission Strategy Team has as one of our primary foci resourcing our local churches on how to identify, invite, nurture, and encourage Millennials within and beyond the walls of the church. Under my leadership as a district superintendent, we developed a new resource which we shared with local churches across the district, with anticipation it would also become a Conference-wide resource. We must empower and equip young people to lead at all levels of the Church. The UMC will not thrive, nor survive without them.

**d. Guaranteed appointment for clergy:**

As a clergy woman of color who has experienced several open itineracy appointments, I have an appreciation for guaranteed appointment for clergy. It gives needed protection and justice to clergy from being denied appointment because of race or ethnicity, gender, prophetic ministry, or theological affiliations. In the future I anticipate sexual orientation will also be included for appointment protection and justice. It is important we do the right thing in working to ensure ALL pastors in good standing doing fruitful work has equal access to

appointments. I agree with our Judicial Council who has overturned the attempt to discontinue the guaranteed appointment for clergy.

Having been seated with Cabinet colleagues during appointment making sessions I realize more fully the impact of the guaranteed appointment as we agonize together over having to send regularly underperforming, even ineffective clergy, to yet another church. Frustration grows when gifted local pastors may not receive an appointment because the elder is owed one. I believe we have the answer— “All elders in full connection who are in good standing...shall be continued under appointment by the bishop *unless they ...have failed to meet the requirements for continued eligibility.*” (2016 Book of Discipline Par.337.1, 334.2,3) It takes the combined, willing, and prayerful efforts of the S/PPRC, dCOM, BOM, Cabinet and Bishop to speak the truth in love, and gracefully follow the processes we already have to exit ineffective pastors. At the same time, it is important that clergy excellence be fostered and promoted at the most basic unit of the local church and every level of the Church.

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

For me, the answer to this question is a two-sided coin. The greatest challenge for the UMC has been the same since the beginning of the Methodist movement which is to maintain— “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity. ” Whether said by St. Augustine of Hippo or by John Wesley, the UMC has been a wide umbrella seeking to practice unity, which is not uniformity, in Christian love.

After the Wesley brothers’ transforming religious experiences in 1838, they formed a movement with the goal to “reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” Almost from the beginning there were “conflicts between Methodism’s structure, values and American cultural norms (especially over episcopacy, race, and slavery) sometimes led to schism.” (2016 The Book of Discipline, A Brief History of the United Methodist Church, Ecclesial Heritage, p. 15.) Today schism over the American cultural norms of human sexuality, especially with regards to the ordination of homosexual clergy and performing same-sex marriages, threatens to undo us.

Our challenge and our greatest opportunities are not about schism or not to schism. Our greatest challenge is always about keeping the ‘main thing the main thing’ which is our mission to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World.” The vision for what that looks like and how to get there offers such great opportunities. With the unprecedented pandemic disruptions of the life of the church and how we do church, we have an unprecedented opportunity to pray and discern and act on God’s preferred future. I believe God honors our desires for wisdom and guidance when we focus on God’s primary calling. The Church needs to show up in our world, leverage our vast resources, and be the Church for all who desperately need to know Jesus Christ as Lord.