

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

Theology and Practice. Wesleyan theology challenges us to consider life as more than “either/or” ways of thinking and being. As the **Theological Task** in the Book of Discipline, ¶ 105. SECTION 4 reminds us: theology is both critical and constructive, individual and communal, contextual and incarnational. We live in humility and expectation within liminal tension.

Grace and Personal Piety. Wesleyan theology begins and ends with the Triune God’s gift of grace. Jesus Christ informs The Way I interpret, live, and extend grace. Through God’s prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace, we are being made perfect in God’s gift of love. The more deeply I am drawn into the life of the Triune God, the more grace and love flow from my life and ministry toward others. And the opposite is true, as well. When love and grace are in short supply in my life, I am awakened to the importance of spiritual formation practices, receiving the sacraments, and intentionally watching over one another in love.

My life is shaped by stillness, listening, scripture, Upper Room devotional “A Guide to Prayer,” silent retreat, therapeutic counseling, forward thinking Ted Talks from other disciplines, covenant from divinity school colleagues, and annual retreat with a trusted spiritual director.

Scripturally Rooted. Like Wesley, I believe in the primacy of scripture. My desire is to allow scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit to change me. In our present divisive ecclesial environment, I lean on Jesus’s words to his disciples “...whoever isn’t against you is for you” Luke 9:50. We are called to ongoing testing, renewal, elaboration, and application (**Theological Task** in the Book of Discipline, ¶ 105. SECTION 4). Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, shapes our testing and renewal.

Jesus. The quadrilateral framework (scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) is reshaped when we add the second person of the Trinity. When we say “Word of God,” is it disconnected from the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus? The quadrilateral is clarified with a fifth dimension – the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus as the fulfillment of scripture and Jesus’ chief commandment *to love God with entirety of heart, soul, and mind and to love neighbor as self* are paramount. The Word made flesh in Jesus is central to how I do life, interpretation, church, and discipleship.

Joining God’s Mission. Jesus’ prayer, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be in us, so that the world may believe....” (John 17), is an invitation to see the reality of our lives. *Do our lives demonstrate we are “in God” participating with God’s mission?* For example, my first experience of ministry with homeless persons (25 years ago) involved spending a night in a shelter. I was uncomfortable with the plight of sisters and brothers entering the shelter with their entire life’s belongings in a grocery sack. I began overcompensating with hospitality. A homeless guest approached me and said, “you’re trying too hard.” My heart sank. I could not fix the multi-faceted complexities of homelessness (inequity of distribution of resources, mental health, substance abuse, poverty, domestic violence, racial inequity and so much

more). My discomfort was displayed in a Pollyanna façade. The Spirit redirected me to be fully present with each person and join what God was already doing. This experience also uncovered for me our broken systems/policies which contribute to the plight of many, and the need for advocacy and mutuality, not maternalism/paternalism.

Witness and Social Holiness. John Wesley said, “There is no holiness but social holiness.” Our witness during this renewal season in the life of The United Methodist Church requires a posture of humility and discernment. Holiness is not reflected in what a disciple “knows.” Scriptural holiness is embodying a transformed life that demonstrates the fruit of the Spirit and acts of mercy.

Connection. Jesus’ commission exhibited in the United Methodist Church’s mission statement ***to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*** requires connection both locally and globally. Our polity reflects our connection. From appointment-making to mission share giving, the UMC is unique in our practice of connection through shared mission. My ordination as Elder to Word, Sacrament, Order, and Service is presupposed by connection!

With a team, I’ve set up creative *systems for connection*: rethinking district alignment and superintendent supervision, aligning resources for efficiency and effectiveness, reallocating district financial resources for sustainability and mission, creating spaces and developing leadership for racial healing, assessing and repurposing facilities for nimble ministry.

2. Describe your record of pastoral fruitfulness in the local church.

In my first appointment, prior to my arrival, the congregation decided to remain in the city rather than relocate to a suburb. The congregation had a strong, small group of faithful worshippers who were open to the changing demographics around the church. By the power of the Holy Spirit, the church grew numerically, became ethnically and socio-economically diverse, and illumined the life of the downtown community.

As Executive Director of The United Methodist Hour, we expanded the broadcast area across the Southeastern U.S. By faith and the generosity of extraordinary board members, we purchased a new facility that offered seating space for audiences to participate in “live tapings” of telecast and radio programs. The gathering space significantly deepened relationships among local churches and viewers.

In my appointment to Duke Divinity School to serve in Field Education, we revised mentor training, produced videos for local church training, and established new teaching congregations. We redesigned the evaluative processes for students, supervisors, and placements that positively impacted the local churches and the students through focusing on spiritual formation, education, and intentional mentorship of students.

In my appointment to Galloway Memorial United Methodist Church, Jackson, MS, the unexpected growth in persons engaged in mission and ministry was inspiring. The weekly

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telecast expanded ministry across the metro area and connected Galloway across racial and socio-economic lines. The ministry to persons who called the streets of Jackson “home” expanded. Innovative ministry emerged beyond food and clothing distribution. Relationships deepened. The former conference office building was repurposed to serve as a gathering place for vulnerable persons. Staff was healthy, vibrant, creative, and collaborative with high trust.

In my appointment as the Conference Director of Connectional Ministries and Communications, I facilitated the birth of a new conference structure to “form spiritual leaders, faith communities, and connections so more disciples of Jesus Christ transform the world.” As DCM, I stewarded disaster response in MS. UMCOR’s staff (setting up leadership circles to do long term recovery) further shaped my leadership. UMCOR’s core values of “equality and justice, respect with dignity, and good stewardship” fueled my coordination in local communities’ recovery. We intentionally included marginalized persons at the decision-making table for distribution of financial and human resources. This inclusion led to stronger, more vibrant rebuilt communities.

As District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist alongside my District Leadership Team, we have engaged anti-racism work by participating in racial healing circles, facilitating healing circles, and hosting a book study on “White Too Long” by Robert P. Jones. I’ve cast a vision in my district for every church to create a new place for new people. The responses: dinner church; “conference call” Bible Study, Barn Church, and many new worship experiences for the unchurched.

Our district is engaged in mission leading to fruitfulness in the local church. One church is addressing food insecurity and supported Extra Table with an Advent offering of \$146,000 feeding 350,000 Mississippians for two months! Our disaster and early response teams have served 500 flood victims’ homes and tarped many roofs damaged by tornadoes and hurricanes. Africa University received \$100,000 and No More Malaria \$50,000 from our district. We support our district Hispanic ministry and engage and sustain families impacted by the ICE raids of 2019. We’ve provided coats for students at Trinity Mission. District churches connect with congregations in Honduras, Jamaica, and Costa Rica. Many congregations in the district gather to prepare meals for Stop Hunger Now.

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?

Skill sets, knowledge and abilities

Communication: Clear verbal and written communication with vast experience in television and radio broadcasts is the strongest skill I bring to the office of the bishop. My educational formation and communication degrees (Bachelors: Radio, Television, and Film, Masters: Public Relations) position me to clearly tell the story of Jesus through the Wesleyan lens. My ten years of experience on the television and radio broadcast, The United Methodist Hour of MS,

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has gifted me with a unique ability to connect with the listener/viewer through video and audio. This skill equips me for relational connection in continued paradigm shifts and the potential for oversight of multiple episcopal areas.

Discernment: My desire to hear God's desires is paramount in all that I do. Whether it's studying scripture for preaching/teaching or preparing for a conflict-ridden local church meeting, I create space to listen deeply to the Holy Spirit. I practice group discernment for direction and decision making. I seek out disciples who embody Philippians 2 and empty self to companion me through deep seasons of discernment. Next steps in this liminal time in the UMC demand humility and courage.

Financial Acumen: I led both the local church and the East Jackson District toward reducing the financial baseline. In my tenure at Galloway Memorial United Methodist Church, we focused on increasing a permanent endowment to relieve the financial burden of building/trustee costs. In six years, we increased the endowment from less than \$250,000 to approximately \$3,000,000 generating \$100,000 per year income to help offset physical plant expenses.

In the East Jackson District, with my finance team's support over the last seven years, we have incrementally decreased spending. We are now stewarding over four years of reserves for sustainability. In 2022, we decreased our district budget by 30%. Strategically lightening financial expectations from the local church increases resources for mission in the local community.

Self-Awareness. Much hostility and division in the UMC results from a lack of self-awareness and intentional care for mental, emotional, and spiritual health and therapeutic work. While real disagreements are present, the way we disagree with one another impacts the health of the Body of Christ. To increase my self-awareness for generative engagement toward healthy relationships, the following assessments help me process how I relate to others through communication:

Enneagram – 3

Myers Briggs - ENT/FJ

DiSC - iD.

Spiritual gifts: shepherding, healing, and administration.

StrengthsFinder: strategic, relator, arranger, connectedness, and learner

Profound Changes: Dislodging Business as Usual

Risk Taking and Trust Building toward Alignment, Nimble Processes, and Prioritizing:

- **Risk-taking** and experimentation are required at every level of the UMC to break the bonds of the status quo.

- **Relationship building** among Cabinets with clergy/lay leadership must be among the highest priorities.
- **Aligning conference leadership and resources** with the longings of faithful congregations and faith expressions will birth healthier discipleship systems.
- **Fruit bearing, nimble processes** created with an understanding of “why” give meaning to clergy and laity who engage the processes. Conference leadership communicating the “why” of processes such as SPRC clergy evaluations or lay leadership identification through nominations, increases morale for overburdened clergy and overscheduled laity.

Episcopal and Conference leadership **prioritizing** gives permission for cabinets, staff, clergy, and congregations to “let go” of ineffective processes to give space for creativity and innovation.

Evidence of Dislodging Business as Usual

- **Virtual District Office:** Learning opportunities during the COVID pandemic propelled our creativity to move the district office to a virtual office. Now: local churches host meetings, district staff deploy to local church communities, transition to digital filing systems, and the Methodist Foundation’s headquarters is the venue for confidential consultations. We are a thriving district enhancing the resources of our connection and prioritizing funding for sustainability.
- **Shared Superintendency Experiment:** As a District Realignment Task Force studies the district needs for our conference, I am participating in sharing oversight for a second district with three other superintendents.
- **Reducing the Financial Baseline:** See above #3, Skill Set, “Financial Acumen.”

4. How have you demonstrated the spiritual gift of leadership?

Empowering others is central to servant leadership. When pastoring in the local church, I often sensed gifts in a person and invited them into a specific role, office, or position to use those gifts. As an Enneagram “3”, I am wired to motivate others to greater accomplishment than they thought they were capable.

When serving in Field Education at Duke Divinity School, I guided students to discern and discover their vocational calling, pastoral identity, and gifts for ministry. Matching students with their contextual learning was a unique role of developing and deploying. **Theologically reflecting** with students gave opportunity to encourage, coach, and develop gifts. We created **training** videos for the local church supervision team to engage in reflection with the student. The replication of the training through compact discs was cutting edge at the time.

As East Jackson District Superintendent for the last seven years, spiritual leadership through **coaching** SPRC chairs and committees through pastoral transitions, clergy evaluation processes, and advisory conversations brings some of the greatest joy of ministry. Discerning

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alongside persons sensing a call toward candidacy is an important and essential step on the journey to develop leaders.

Modeling shared leadership in the district and conference evidence my high value for collaborative leadership between laity and clergy.

I am a trained onboarding facilitator by Claire Bowen of “Claire Bowen and Company: Atlanta, GA” for churches transitioning to receive new pastoral leadership. This leadership process has shaped how I **facilitate** to create safe environments.

I am deeply formed by the work of Spiritual Leadership Incorporated (SLI). I have integrated their values of forming spiritual leaders who model loving, learning, and leading together; creating environments that foster transformation and processes that bear fruit. I lead through **team ministry with spiritual formation** as our bedrock.

5.A. How have you demonstrated a willingness to be held accountable for results and an ability to hold others accountable, with grace, for their results?

Articulating clear expectations and gracefully holding accountable for stewardship for the lives we are entrusted is at the heart of the Gospel message. I try very hard to create an environment for those to whom I am accountable and for whom I have oversight to “speak the truth in love.” Whether it’s the bishop, cabinet, pastors, PPRC chairs, or laity, I invite people to hold me accountable when I have failed to do what I said I would do. And I have had to apologize more than once and dive into therapeutic counseling when owning my misstep, miscommunication, or process failure. I have a strong work ethic and expect it of the clergy in my district. We also have mutual accountability for boundaries and self-care. Mutual accountability is glue for faithful ministry.

John Wesley’s clear message of grace and practice of accountability through societies, classes, and bands is the foundation for disciple-making. In the local church, the nominations process is a clear path for discerning leaders, laying out expectations, and then following through with accountability. I observe disciples flourish with the simple practice of clear expectations, encouragement, resourcing, feedback, and accountability for the results upon which we agree.

In my role as district superintendent, I have clear expectations for clergy to lead their communities to develop a healthy disciple-making system, implement it, and create new places for new people. The accountability comes through charge conferences, ongoing consultations, and through district gatherings where we celebrate innovative ministry. All our year end statistics, fund balance reports/audits, review of MissionInsite, and mission share giving reflect expectations and accountability toward follow-up for innovative vision for the future.

The churches of the East Jackson District are inspiring in their consistent generosity and as a leading district in mission share giving. In my seven plus years as District Superintendent, here

is the East Jackson District's record of generosity by percentage toward mission shares (apportionment giving):

Year	Conference	District
2021	92.43%	99.27%
2020	91.37%	99.37%
2019	90.69%	99.40%
2018	93.30%	99.68%
2017	87%	95.18%
2016	88.91%	103.86%
2015	90.64%	95.91%

A difficult challenge in accountability is working alongside pastors whose effectiveness is waning. Through supervisory responses, I've helped some pastors exit full time ministry and helped other pastors refocus and become increasingly effective through clear expectations and accountability.

Alongside the bishop, I've facilitated *just resolutions* with pastors who have broken covenant. I have received surrendered clergy credentials after investigating a sexual misconduct complaint and restored pastors into active ministry through a healing process. I've worked closely with the Board of Ordained Ministry to respect each of our roles in these complex processes. The goal in all these situations is healing for all parties.

I champion renewal leave for clergy, with Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committees. I facilitate conversation for approval and planning for preaching, pastoral care, and staff oversight.

5.b. Describe your track record of doing the "right thing" in difficult situations.

I am willing to have *hard conversations* and address things immediately. I am "direct" and trust the Spirit to guide. When confidentiality is not at stake, I seek counsel from others and practice group discernment.

I've had to make challenging *personnel decisions* resulting in dismissing staff persons for the mission of the ministry. It was deeply painful in the local church, in the district, and in extension ministry, but proved to be necessary.

On the **Board of Ordained Ministry**, we collectively discerned the gifts, potential, and readiness for ministry for the credentialing process. "Deferring continuing" or "discontinuing" persons for ordination was painful but evidenced wisdom over time by doing the "right thing".

Perhaps, the most painful of all is receiving a *complaint on a clergy person*. Attending the faithful process of transparency and making decisions toward healing for all can create competing goals. Doing the "right thing" often includes receiving surrendered credentials and creating a path for restoration for individuals, families, and churches.

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.)

2013: Bishop James E. Swanson, Sr., appointed me as **Director of Connectional Ministries and Communications**. My first focus was to facilitate the birth of a new conference structure in Mississippi, the first in almost a decade. As DCM, I was the steward of the vision of the conference (as the Book of Discipline describes).

2015: I was appointed as **District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist of the East Jackson District** and now continue in my eighth year.

2022: the MS Conference is engaging in an experiment with multiple superintendents overseeing two additional districts. Along with superintending the East Jackson District, I am now overseeing twenty-five congregations and pastors in the **Hattiesburg District as superintendent**.

I served on the **Board of Ordained Ministry** (BOOM) for two quadrennia and served as conference relations chair for four years.

I serve on the **MS Committee on Episcopacy** to assist and support the Bishop for effective ministry.

I serve on the **Board of Pensions** as a cabinet representative and serve as a liaison between the cabinet and the Board of Pensions.

I am in my third term of serving on our **Southeastern Jurisdiction Lake Junaluska Board of Trustees** and serve as Vice-chair. I served on the Executive Director Search Committee in 2018.

I served as a **Southeastern Jurisdictional delegate** in 2000, 2004, 2012, 2016 first reserve, and was elected to serve as a delegate in 2020 (which is now 2022).

I served as a **General Conference delegate** in 2004, 2012, and elected to serve as a first reserve in 2020 (which is now 2024 if General Conference is postponed and not canceled).

7. Based upon 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.).

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As Director of Connectional Ministries and Communications, I worked closely with **United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)** by facilitating short and long-term recovery structures with intentionality toward inclusive tables of reconciliation across race, class, and gender for expansive recovery.

I served on the **General Commission on United Methodist Communications** for a quadrennium.

The **General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM)** is integral to my life with candidates for ministry beginning the process with the District Superintendent.

I have attended several trainings and am resourced by the staff of **Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW)** and value their important work around sexual ethics.

I am an emeritus member of the **Board of Visitors of Duke University Divinity School**, Durham, NC.

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

Relationships: As Rev. Junius B. Dotson reminded us in the *See All the People*, Discipleship Ministries curriculum, “Discipleship begins with relationship.” Then, you do the intentional work of identifying gifts, passions, and skills to deploy laity and clergy into vital ministry.

Systems: Leadership Development requires implementing systems to form spiritual leaders. Using processes of Spiritual Leadership Inc. (SLI), the District Leadership Team, made up of laity and clergy, meets monthly for spiritual formation, adaptive learning, and ministry action planning.

Training: Our districts hold Leadership Training Events each winter preparing new officers and leaders for the work to which they’ve been called and elected.

Small Group Accountability: In the East Jackson District, we have “County Connection Groups” where clergy engage the change process of SLI through Loving, Learning, and Leading. The goal of these groups is to develop clergy leaders (who develop lay leaders in their congregations), increase connection, trust, and shared mission. This leadership formation is essential for spiritual, relational, and missional accountability.

Modeling collaboration: Modeling collaboration is essential for developing leaders. Clear expectations, financial support for coaching, and training for clergy and lay roles makes leadership development thrive.

Young Adult Recruitment and Empowerment: As Director of Connectional Ministries and Communications, I recruited young clergy and laity to lead in planning and implementing the Session of the Annual Conference.

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:*

Human sexuality is a gift from God. Covenant relationship grounds human sexuality and relationships. I am committed to uphold the discipline of the United Methodist Church, and I dream of a church embracing full inclusion of all people: conservatives, progressives, centrists, LGBTQ and heterosexual orientations, gender identities, celibacy in singleness, fidelity in covenant marriage.

Faithful disciples of Jesus differ in their beliefs regarding human sexuality. I believe Jesus is inviting us to bear witness to the breadth of his Church. I’ve coined a phrase: the Wesleyan Quintralateral (Scripture, tradition, experience, reason, “and Jesus.”) I am deeply aware that in our understandings of Scripture, we are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst (BOD, p. 83), yet I continuously experience faithful disciples reducing the “Word of God” to words in the canon without the expansion of our Lord and Savior, Jesus. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection inform how I understand human sexuality and how I see the Body of Christ affirming and welcoming all people for ordination and for marriage. With the removal of language in the Book of Discipline regarding homosexuality and same gender weddings and ordination, I believe we can live faithfully as clergy and laity allowing one another to live into our convictions without demonization or characterization.

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

When disciples’ fervor for the good news of Jesus becomes contagious, new faith communities emerge. Forming leaders to cultivate and guide small groups to discern birthing new expressions and small groups is the DNA of the people called Methodists. Empowering healthy and vibrant anchor churches to spawn new places for people who don’t yet know the love of Jesus is essential. Congregations experience a life cycle. Sometimes decline is beyond the control of parishioners with industries fading and populations aging. In those cases, a merger, death or closing of a congregation is a faithful response.

Congregational decline is sometimes a response to the unfaithfulness of a congregation to welcome demographic shifts surrounding the church. This context demands a prayerful visioning process and ministry action plans to hopefully move the congregation from who they “have been” to who “God is calling them to become.” If decline continues and the congregation remains stagnant, closing and birthing a new community with leadership reflecting the broader community becomes a means of grace. In the event of churches closing, we trust in resurrection power and that God is doing a new thing (Isaiah 43:19).

c. *Next generation leaders:*

Mutual formation is required for the next generation of leaders alongside existing leaders. The next generation can learn history and practices from the past while existing leaders can be formed by the creative innovation and passion of next generation leaders. Conferences and congregations will be challenged to find financial resources to support next generation leaders creating new places for new people without traditional funding.

Next generation leaders ignite the church with passionate innovation valuing diversity, inclusion, justice, and deep spirituality. These values and practices will create space for God's transforming work in the world and in the church.

d. *Guaranteed appointment for clergy:*

Guaranteed appointments: empower the UMC to appoint pastors across race and gender expectations; gives strength to our value of open itineracy; serves the entire church through cross-racial appointments and the reception of clergy women as the "firsts" in a local church; allows pastors to be prophetic without fear of losing their appointment. The UMC gives clergy the support to preach the Gospel without (immediate) fear.

However, we must guard against complacency and ineffectiveness with this guarantee. A challenge with guaranteed appointments is the potential for clergy ineffectiveness. Patterns of consistent ineffectiveness impact multiple congregations before an exit plan is realized.

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

The greatest challenge for the UMC is overcoming the lack of trust. The mistrust within the UMC with denominational leadership and the mistrust among people with theologically differing scriptural interpretations are diminishing both our witness and our capacity for connection.

How can we be faithful at this juncture? Trust begins by people being trustworthy. We extend trust to one another. When someone or a group breaks trust, it takes time and commitment to rebuild trust.

Conservatives feel trust has been broken when progressives disregard the present Book of Discipline around homosexuality and officiate same gender weddings and ordain practicing homosexual persons and elect a practicing homosexual bishop. Progressives feel trust has been broken when conservatives lack compassion for gay persons longing to live in the covenant of marriage and/or gifted, equipped, and called to ordination and/or the Episcopacy.

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Furthermore, the mistrust created by false narratives of disaffiliating groups contradict the essence of the UMC connection. The option for disaffiliation uncovers disgruntlement from churches wanting autonomy, independence, and control over their money and choosing their pastor. Groups suing the UMC over the trust clause is like suing over what a paternity test reveals. The trust clause is at the core of our DNA shared life together. Our connection is threatened when we no longer value our life together more than we value our life apart.

The greatest opportunity before the UMC is to create a church that is welcoming and affirming of all people. By removing the hurtful language around homosexuality, we become a church that allows churches and pastors to live in their convictions WITHOUT casting stones at each other.

Many of us have been on this discernment journey for wisdom and understanding regarding homosexuality for decades. My transformation (change of heart and mind) surfaced out of years of prayer, communal discernment, pastoral care for LGBTQ persons, traveling to other contexts, and seeking the Holy Spirit's revelation through the tenor of scripture. My clarity emerged through prayer. I asked God why it is that people's hearts and minds often change when someone they love (usually a child) comes out. In a clear moment of hearing, the Holy Spirit said, "Because they finally see my children as I see my children." The Spirit confirmed where my scriptural study and communal discernment were leading. And I know many of our United Methodists are struggling and need time and space in this discernment journey.

Can we allow folks who disagree to remain together without vilification? If the 2024 General Conference lifts restrictions in the Book of Discipline around homosexuality, I pray churches who have longed for full inclusion will be patient with those churches who still wrestle. And churches practicing full inclusion will offer to be a place to marry and lift up LBGTQIA+ persons for ordination and stand in the gap for those churches and clergy not there yet.

The greatest opportunity for the UMC is to reclaim the gift and celebrate being a big tent church with a clear mission *to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. Our toxic American culture steeped in divisive politics has bled into the church and shaped the UMC. We have an opportunity to change the tide as we stand together as disciples of Jesus, with the mission as our highest collective calling, accompanied by the Risen Christ, valuing our beautiful diversity.

I dream of a church for all people celebrating differing abilities, skin colors, cultures, sexual identities, socio-economic strata, educational backgrounds, and theological perspectives. I see the opportunity to delve deeply into our Wesleyan theology and polity with all the strands of personal piety and social holiness, head and heart preaching, connectional world changing generosity, and structures of oversight and accountability.

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I see the opportunity for the church to become nimble in her new expressions of worship, communal life, and mission. Collaborative clergy and lay leadership take on a posture of permission-giving instead of fearful road-blocking and paralyzed risk-managing.

I see creative opportunities for every United Methodist mission station to steward the bricks and mortar to serve the needs of people on the margins. I see a new opportunity for local churches to intentionally give ourselves away through sharing our multiplicity of buildings with community partners.

I see the opportunity for the connection to take risks and fail forward. From general agencies to local churches, it's time for us to take bold change steps instead of fear-filled incremental changes of self-protection and preservation. Our global governance structure is creating more harm than good as shared life can disintegrate into colonialism. I welcome a new governance structure that celebrates every region with an intentional eye toward mission and mutuality for partnership.

I pray that all who remain United Methodist and who embrace our diversity of theological thoughts, races, cultures, ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and regional contexts, will commit to lives of unity gifted by the Holy Spirit. No more vilification. No more demonization. When the UMC emerges from General Conference in 2024, may the Holy Spirit overwhelm us with a spirit of generosity toward one another so that the world is captivated by the counter cultural love we bear.