Reverend Delores 'Dee' J. Williamston

635 Georgetown Ct. Unit A, Salina Ks 67401 revdjwilliamston@gmail.com phone:785-554-1562

Education:

Topeka High School 1979-1981 - General Education Diploma | October 1982 | Topeka, Ks
Bachelors of Science | December 1, 2000 | Manhattan Christian College, Manhattan, Ks
Management and Christian Ethics
Masters of Divinity | May 18, 2007 | Saint Paul School of Theology | Kansas City, Mo. |
Specialization: Evangelism and Black Church Studies
Doctor of Ministry in progress, January 2019| Phillip's Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Ok|
Transformational Leadership in Intercultural Community

Appointments:

Associate Pastor – Highland Park UMC, Topeka Ks, October 2002 – June 30, 2007
Senior Pastor, Mentor UMC, Mentor Ks, July 1, 2007 – June 30, 2009
Senior Pastor, Mentor and Quayle UMC: July 1, 2009 – June 30, 2010
Senior Pastor, Independence First UMC – July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2014
District Superintendent, Salina-Hays* District - July 1, 2014, to Present (*2017)

Leadership Positions & Community Leadership:

Chief Missional Strategist - Salina-Hays District Superintendent 2014 to present,
Conference Connecting Council 2014 to present,
Board of Trustees Kansas Wesleyan University 2014 to present,
Conference Board of Ordained Ministry 2012 to present,
Delegate 2018 Christian Communities Together Ecumenical Concerns. (COB)
Delegate to General Conference 2020
Member Conference Diversity Task Force 2010-2013 & Conference Episcopacy Committee 2012-2013.
Chair of Parsons District Committee on Ordained Ministry 2012-2014.
Organizer Parsons District Clergy Women 2012-2014.
Chair 2013 Martin Luther King Jr Celebration Independence, Ks
Chair 2012 Community Thanksgiving Dinner Independence, Ks.
Member Salina Health Education Foundation – board member 2017 to present
Chair of Religious Affairs – NAACP – Local Chapter, Salina Kansas

Previous Military Career & Awards and Training:

Kansas Army National Guard: Sargent First Class - retired 2004 -22 years of service. (1982-2004)
Chief Supervisor of Accounting & Finance Operations U.S. Property and Fiscal Office – Topeka, Ks (2000-2003)
Military Account & Pay U.S. Property and Fiscal Office – Topeka, Ks (1987-2000)
Award - Soldier of the Quarter 1985: 42nd Rainbow Division Finance Company in NYC.
Award of Excellence – Government Accounting (National Guard Bureau). 2001, 2002, 2003.
Army Basic, Advance Initial Training, Primary Leadership Development, Battle Skills, Basic & Advanced Commissioned Officer Courses, (Acting - Interim First Sargent and Platoon Sargent for weekend duties)

Family Information: Divorced – One adult son Jerome and wife Mercedes in Wheatridge, Co. Seven grandchildren Neva, Nisha, Abigle, Jazarah, Henrietta, Jerome, and Alonzo. Mother, Henrietta and a host of family and siblings live in Topeka, Ozawkie, Oskaloosa, Atchison, Lawrence Kansas, Kansas City Mo, and Chicago Il.

Episcopal Candidate Questions for 2020
South Central Jurisdiction

1. Why are you willing to be considered for the episcopacy?

Since 2002, when I answered my call to pastoral ministry, my heart's passion has been to serve the Lord with all my gifts and graces. During my time, as a pastor and now district superintendent (since 2014), family, friends, and colleagues have affirmed my passion, gifts, and graces to serve in the leadership of the church. Many continue to encourage and challenge me to step forward and offer myself to the ministry of the episcopacy.

In a long season of spiritual discernment and reflecting in this liminal season of The United Methodist Church, I believe the church on the horizon will need a resilient leader. I believe the church will need a leader, who will take risks and step forward courageously to lead the church into a diverse mission field and is committed to doing the following:

- Convey the transformational power of the Holy Spirit by focusing on a compelling vision of revival for the potential future of the Church to reach all people.
- Inspire the general church, conference, laity, and clergy, to strategically focus on revival, evangelism, and faith sharing as the Church moves forward to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Influence the conference, district, churches, laity, and clergy, in reclaiming the power of Pentecost in the mission field.
- Provide intentional leadership by seeing the intersectionality of life in diverse and multi-cultural communities and with the awareness of the unacknowledged voices of various populations of people and generations.
- Make wise decisions from a heart of grace using practical knowledge in the care and love of people, the mission context, and the community of faith, mindful that there is always room to grow and learn.
- Innovate and build creative entrepreneurial opportunities and collaborative relationships between church, society, and global mission.
- Lead with the boldness and gumption and the conviction of the Holy Spirit to inspire the general church, conference, laity, clergy, to take risks in mission and ministry.

I humbly believe that I am equipped with the capacity and grit for this journey and have demonstrated in ministry my resilience, ability to lead, create, discern, inspire, and encourage the Church forward.

2. How should the United Methodist Church go forward into the future? What are the most critical issues? How would you respond as a bishop of the church to these issues?

There are multiple avenues the Church can take to navigate and go forward towards the future, such as:

- Directing our focus on our unique movement origins to strengthen the potential to reach new people in all areas of ministry.
- Refocusing the energy of the Church on revival, evangelism, and faith sharing through intentional equipping of laity and clergy.
- Casting a compelling vision that is also informed with unusual and unacknowledged voices from a broad spectrum of people, socially, economically, and culturally.

- Faith and trust that the power of the Holy Spirit will transform the Church and touch the lives of people.

The most critical issues for The United Methodist Church are the continued matters of race, human sexuality, class, gender equality, environmental concerns, and abortion. These are deeply troubling matters with no easy answers on how to eradicate, yet their weight continues to saddle the church with deep conflict. More legislation in these areas does not fix or alleviate these critical matters. The vital need is for fearless dialogue by having open, honest, and hard conversations. Without space for such conversations, these critical issues will continue to impair the church on the horizon.

Concerning these issues, as a bishop, I would respond with hope for fearless and intentional dialogue in the general church, conference, district, and in the broader community, in hopes that people will build relationships and see each person's humanity. As a bishop, I would respond by influencing ways that seek to topple systems that support discriminatory practices. I would also respond with immediate grace and a heart of compassion and peace by asking questions. I would respond with the hope that hopeful dialogue can happen at that moment and through the framework of the Wesleyan quadrilateral and without condemnation. I would respond with the expectation that the transformative power of the Holy Spirit will lead us to better understanding our neighbor and the work of Jesus Christ.

3. Where do you see God at work on the margins of the world? How would you embrace and encourage new, emerging forms of church among new people?

When I think about seeing God at work in the margins of the world, I think of the stories in the gospels where Jesus continually walked in marginal places in the community. On the margins, Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman, the Canaanite woman, the lepers, the woman with the issue of blood, and Lazarus in the tomb, to name a few. Jesus often walked where the least, the last and the lost were placed, while confronting the rich and powerful.

Through God's disciples, I see God at work in the margins of the world in the roughest urban neighborhoods and the rural, isolated, unincorporated towns. I see God at work in the margins when non-government organizations (NGO) and not-for-profit initiatives tackle concerns of humanity by digging wells, providing health initiatives, and dealing with deadly but preventable diseases. I see God at work in the margins with the AIDS epidemic, polio eradication, and stopping the use of extraordinarily addictive and dangerous drugs, including the ravages of vaping. I see God at work in the margins in multiple movements like MeToo and Black Lives Matter, in the concerns of health care for the working poor, and advocacy for a living wage. I see God at work in the margins, reading to children in schools and shelters, and addressing the needs of food deserts and access for the elderly. I see God at work in the margins working in collaborative ways in many cities and small towns to make a difference.

As a bishop, I would embrace and encourage new emerging forms of church to engage new people by doing the following:

- Intentionally focusing on revival, evangelism, and faith sharing with new communities of people.
- Embracing the power of social media to encourage new forms of ecclesiology for the 'none's and done's.'

- Developing, modeling, and encouraging honest conversations about cultural and social issues of concern in the community.
- Engaging and recruiting field experts from the gifts of laity and clergy to lead in emerging mission fields to inspire vital ministry in the Church, and conference.

I would embrace the creative opportunities in the Church at every level to instigate a way to encourage and support emerging forms of church with new people in unconventional ways.

4. How would you lead the church in reaching its mission field across divisions of age, economics, ethnicity, and culture? Share how you have done this in your current ministry setting.

I would lead the Church and conference to strategically include those we want to reach in the mission field to engineer the change in these areas that the Church and conference are seeking. I would lead by strengthening and building relationships with the various demographics by intentionally including and inviting these voices to the table to help the Church and conference understand what is really important to the mission field. I would lead by communicating to the Church and conference the reality of the deep intersections of age, economics, ethnicity, and culture to the everyday person.

I would lead by identifying leadership to equip laity and clergy to study the demographics and discern what is unique about the community, region, or area and cultivate an awareness of who is missing from the conversation. I would lead by searching for the right questions to ask from the dance floor and balcony view. I would lead by including the unheard, unusual, and odd voices from various spectrums of age, culture, ethnicity, and economic status. I would lead by looking at the historical world of scripture and today's world to understand that the mission field has always been about age, economics, ethnicity and culture.

In my current ministry setting as the chief missional strategist and district superintendent I have led in the mission field through;

- Involvement with a local community health foundation to address the economic concerns of health care for the working poor and food instability, especially in rural, isolated locations.
- Intentional relationship building with youth and young adults to understand their views and perceptions of the Church, by intentionally including their voices.
- In the local church, I led young adults at the junior college in conversation and relationship building by initiating a college ministry through the athletics department.
- Initiating and casting a vision with collaborating agencies to develop a temporary cold-weather shelter for the homeless. This endeavor began first by building a relationship with the director of the local rescue mission.
- I have convened an ad-hoc gathering of international laity and clergy of color to strengthen connections serving in cross-cultural and cross-racial appointments in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

5. What risks have you taken in ministry? How do you leverage what you learn from failure and success?

The first risk was to quit my full-time job in the Kansas Army National Guard to serve as a part-time local pastor and attend full-time seminary while my son was in his last year of high

school. I risked leading a large children's ministry every Friday evening. in the urban core of a community with children who were labeled 'at risk' in a zero-tolerance zone targeted by the city.

The risk that I have taken in ministry while serving the local church was to start new ministries when all the mechanisms of the ministry were not thoroughly in place. Often the status quo confronted my leadership and reminded me that it would never work; however, each time the Holy Spirit came through. And the ministries generated new life, such as college students attending worship and children coming through the doors for a time singing, eating, and testifying on a Friday night.

Another risk I took was demanding that a local junior college play the National Anthem for the women's basketball players before their game began. The school's practice at the time was to play the anthem at the end of the women's basketball game and at the beginning of the men's basketball game. I shared with the director of the athletic department that not playing the anthem before the women played suggests that the women players were not good enough if they only played it when the men's team played. I pointed out; it suggested that the women's team was not as important as the men's team. And I said it was not fair to the women and an issue of inequality and the college needed to change that practice. And they did! My next stop was to address the same issue with the community high school. I spoke to the school board; however, by the fall season of the girl's high school basketball, I was reappointed.

The risks in ministry I have taken as a district superintendent are around matters of appointments and, in one situation discontinuing a charismatic pastor from a local church due to inappropriate circumstances. The removal led to an angry and animated meeting of the congregation that required my presence; however, with the support of the bishop and cabinet, I continued to lead the congregation through their anger and disappointment pastorally. This situation happened early in my tenure, where I failed to listen and moved to quickly. I learned from this failure that sometimes slower is better than moving too fast in some cases. I learned a valuable lesson about how deeply and dearly people love their pastoral leaders even when that leader has crossed boundaries. I had taken the risk by leading the district in one district church conferences and network conferences when the churches preferred to meet individually with the district superintendent for their annual meetings. I have learned from my failures at various times in the local congregation to look to the gifts and talents of those in the congregation who can also influence lead change to strengthen the ministries.

Finally, I am currently taking a risk in the process of episcopacy, especially in the current climate of The United Methodist Church, with a possible division on the horizon. I am taking a risk as a first-timer attending General Conference, and offering myself to the episcopacy. But through these risks, successes and failures, I continue to learn, adapt, and challenge myself to continue to take more risks to call forth change in hopes of making disciples Jesus Christ and transforming the community and world.

6. ***What types of strategies would you emphasize to accomplish the mission of the church in two areas: To strengthen annual conferences? To increase the number of healthy, vital congregations effectively making disciples of Jesus Christ?***

I would first emphasize the need to identify what the vision of the conference is by asking three questions. Who are we? Where are we going? How are we going to get there? I would emphasize to the conference the need to cultivate our compelling story, to share the witness of

where God is at work in the conference. Some strategies and tools I would use to guide the conference into the mission field to strengthen disciple-making are:

- Use of practical evangelism and revitalization tools such as the FRAN plan of asking Friends, Relatives, Associates, and Neighbors.
- Intentional usage of social media, podcast and other tools to enhance the visibility of the conference and witness of the good news Jesus Christ.
- Restrengthening, the understanding of the Methodist Movement through renewed efforts to form Methodist bands and class meetings, especially in declining areas.

To increase the number of healthy, vital congregations effectively making disciples of Jesus Christ, I would begin by accessing the currently known statistical data and narratives of healthy and vital churches in the conference. This data would guide collaborative conversations with the cabinet, congregational excellence, and essential lay leadership of the conference to do the following:

- Identify cultural trends and set achievable outcomes such as increasing the number of professions of faith, baptisms, and other small group opportunities.
- Create regional leadership summits with healthy and vital churches to provide training to help other locations in the conference.
- Celebrate "turn-around" churches experiencing new renewed vitality.
- Champion the variety of gifts represented in the conference through the use of a narrative platform.

I would emphasize that the leadership needed already resides in the conference. And with an intentional focus on the gifts of the laity and clergy so the conference can reach its mission field. I would encourage the usage of tools from United Methodist agencies and other resources to assist the conference in strengthening its commitment to making disciples and increasing the number of healthy vital congregations.

7. One of the greatest struggles in appointment making is access to sufficient numbers of effective clergy. How would you work to recruit new, effective clergy? How would you address the issue of ineffective clergy?

The 2016 Book of Discipline outlines the duties and responsibilities of the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee in ¶258. The S/PPRC's ministry is to identify persons who are possibly experiencing a call to ministry. I would lead the conference to encourage the work of the staff pastor-parish relations committee to intentionally create annual opportunities to identify children, youth, and adults for ministry in the local church. These opportunities can guide the district and conference and church leadership to create greater visibility for potential candidates to explore a call to ministry.

For clergy effectiveness, I believe intentionally addressing the need for effective clergy early in the ministry process is key to preparing for effective clergy leadership. I think that designating teaching churches through-out the conference would allow the candidate to explore their calling, and it would provide new life, purpose, and vitality to some churches. It would also become another way for a congregation to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

In this model, the district superintendent can assign a mentor or coach with a consultation with the Clergy Excellence, Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, and the District Committee on Ordained Ministry to support the candidates' ministry. The candidate, with the support of the

teaching congregations, would have the liberty to experiment, innovate, and create projects for ministry. The teaching church would provide supervision and feedback with the candidate and the district superintendent to evaluate for effectiveness.

In the situation of ineffective clergy, the 2016 Book of Discipline in ¶359 on Administrative Location provides a current process to guide the evaluation of a clergy person whose ministry effectiveness is in question. Before this formal process, I believe an intervention can happen with the district superintendent, in consultation with the bishop and cabinet. This process would include providing written corrective measures to guide a clergy person to re-evaluate their fitness for ministry and their effectiveness in ministry. Included in the intervention is consultation among the district superintendent, pastor, and SPRC so that a plan would be designed with attainable goals, outcomes, and expectations and with a stated time limit (e.g., nine months) to assist the clergy person in revitalizing their effectiveness in ministry. If, after the time limit, there is no improvement, the district superintendent would recommend that the bishop initiate the process in ¶359. If effectiveness is not achieved based on the ¶359 plan, the clergyperson can request a voluntary leave, or the district superintendent or bishop may request involuntary leave with approval residing with the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry.

8. What is your philosophy of appointment-making?

My philosophy of appointment making is to make every effort to provide pastoral leadership to strengthen the church's mission and vision to reach the mission field. Important to sending and appointing clergy is their ability to transcend and navigate the culture and context they are appointed to serve. Continuous learning and adaptability are skills all clergy need to develop in any appointment.

I believe the itineracy system in appointment making has its advantages; it also has its disadvantages. For example, an advantage of the itineracy system is receiving the diverse gifting of clergy from other places and appointing clergy from other conferences, jurisdictions, and cultural contexts as cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments. In part, cross-racial and cross-cultural appointments testify to the commitment towards inclusion and diversity on one level.

Also, in the appointment-making process, I think the possibilities for clergy couples for some locations could be an advantage. However, the disadvantages of the itinerancy system can be from the length of the appointment, the difficulty in placing clergy couples, and the reality of appointing ethnic clergy to communities that do not express diversity.

I also think making specific mission field appointments to various organizations, such as campus ministries and other ministries are essential to the broader reach of the church. Constant equipping, identifying and encouraging the clergy to learn new skills is also crucial to appointment-making within the annual conference. Assessing the clergy's capacity for leadership in the local church, district, conference and general church is vital to the future development of our young clergy as the church swiftly moves into a fast-changing twenty-first-century community and world.

9. Describe how you work in partnership with the laity in the planning and execution of ministry. How would the laity you work with describe your work in this partnership?

Currently, I work in partnership with the laity by intentionally including them in district projects. I work to involve their participation and expertise in the planning of events or

ministries. For example, the district lay servant ministry was non-functioning for some years upon my arrival. After assessing the lack of activity, I found new leadership in partnership with the district lay leader. After a time of collaboration, a passionate layperson stepped into leadership as the new director. This intervention led to the recruitment of new team members and the initiation of planning meetings.

Within approximately ten months, the team planned and coordinated four lay servant course offerings. This team made it their objective to offer at least one basic course and three advance courses annually. Another example of partnering with the laity was the intentional inclusion of district laity in planning district-wide one church conference event. Their input was crucial in collaborating the best location, time, and participation in the event to maximize the success of the event.

I believe the laity would describe my work in partnership in these events and other ministries as careful, considerate, and concise. Laity would say I am mindful of the current demands of their time and participation in the ministries of the church, district, and conference. They would say I seek to maximize their unique gifts and passions they bring to the table. Laity would describe my leadership as direct, passionate, convincing, and inspirational to the objective of making disciples of Jesus Christ and furthering the mission of the conference and church.

10. Describe your understanding of the inclusive nature of the church. In what ways have you lived up to and fallen short of that understanding?

First, scripture prompts my understanding of the inclusive nature of the church. In Galatians chapter 3 verse 28, the Apostle Paul says: *"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* This scripture, for me, opens the door to all people of every station, location, background, or ability in this life. It gives me hope for those who have yet to come to faith in Jesus Christ, and there is a place for all people.

Second, my understanding of the inclusive nature of the church also echoes some of what the church states in the 2016 Book of Disciple. Paragraphs 124 and 140 indicate the inclusiveness or openness of the church is its mission and hope to include all people of every background, ethnicity, and ability in life. The church strives for the inclusion of all people, especially those from the margins of life. Yet, this is a work in progress for the Church.

On the one hand, I believe I have lived up to the inclusive nature of the church by living to include my neighbor no matter what a person's race, class, sexuality, gender, ability or ethnic background. I live up to the idea of inclusion as I seek to sit at the table with those who encounter a world where doors of opportunity are hard to open, for whom information is not equally shared, and who find that their bodies are unacknowledged and voices muted or unheard.

On the other hand, I have fallen short when I have not addressed the elephant from elements of frustration. Or, I have not verbalized a narrative to assist the majority in hearing the voice of the marginalized. I realize, at times, I have fallen short to speak up consistently to help the institutional church delve deeper to topple systemic issues that keep those marginalized on the margins. The good news is, it is not too late to recommit to addressing these concerns with new tools! For several months, I have recommitted myself through study, prayer, hope, and love, to understand and lead toward the depths of diversity and inclusion which God is calling the Church to embody holistically in a twenty-first-century world.

11. What do you feel has been the most significant contribution or difference you have made toward fulfilling our mission as a church in the local churches you have served? In your annual conference? At the general church level?

The most significant contribution and the difference I feel I have made fulfilling our mission as a church is found in my passion for preaching and inspiring people in discipleship to use their gifts to the glory of God. While in the local church and district, I continue to work to develop laity to serve in leadership in the church. I have made a difference in inspiring young people to seek God by using their gifts and sharing what is relevant to their lives. I have inspired and encouraged nearly eighteen people to become certified lay ministers or licensed local pastors. I have revitalized a defunct lay servant ministry with laity and clergy who are on fire to make disciples who will serve in our rural places in the district.

I have recruited senior district youth and college students to come on a ride-along with the district superintendent during church conference season. This opportunity helped them understand the role and ministry of the district superintendent. On these journeys, they were asked to participate and share their testimony at the church charge conference. Adding young adults and youth to the fall church conference season has been a powerful witness to many of the churches. It has encouraged many of the small churches to continue to reach out to children and teens in their communities.

General Conference 2020 is my first opportunity to serve on the delegation. I believe that my service to the local church, district, and conference since the beginning of my ministry is important. I am now having this opportunity by the trust of those who elected me to the delegation who deem that my gifts of inspiration, enthusiasm, passion, and commitment to the Lord are significant and needed in this time of the church. I believe that my unique experiences in life, in community, and as a former army soldier has prepared me for such a time as this. I believe the opportunities I have had in ministry are significant contributions to the delegation and the general church and are important to the narrative of the future of the Church.

12. John Wesley is often quoted as having said, "In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, diversity, in all things, charity." What constitutes the essentials for you?

I consider faith in Jesus Christ and his saving work essential for my journey. It is essential for me that God's love and grace be extended to every soul regardless of the circumstances someone may be currently experiencing. It is essential for me that the good news is preached and that words of life are spoken that compel people to seek change or transformation. It is essential for me that people know that God forgives our sins and will transform our lives, minds, and hearts. It is vital for me that love, hope, and faith override the negativity that is often encountered in the world and the Church.

It is essential for me that we see our neighbors and not walk by them as though they are half dead and lying alongside the road to Jericho. It is essential for me that the woman at the well have an opportunity to ask questions because it was she who went and told everyone about the man that told her everything about herself. It is essential for me that the Church is engaged in the mission field and making disciples, serving and engaging children, youth, and young adults and elders in need of hope. It is essential for me that every soul knows that they do have gifts, talents, and graces and that God can use them to help build God's kingdom on earth. It is essential for me that the church of Jesus Christ move forward into the future so that my seven grandchildren can have a place in the church where their gifts and graces are developed. It is essential for me

that the church reaches out in innovative ways to reach new places for new people. It is vital for me to build a life of devotion to the Lord, and remember that all I have to offer to the Lord is myself, and I pray that the Lord can use me while I have time on this earth to serve.

13. How would being elected and assigned impact your family? What challenges might it present, and how will these be addressed? Are there health, financial, or other issues that could possibly affect your ability to serve as a bishop?

If I am elected, the assignment would have minimal impact on my family. My son and his family live and work in Wheatridge, Colorado. My mother resides in a care facility in Topeka, Kansas, where we have numerous family members and church family. We will discern if my mother moves to the location of my assignment or remains nearer to the family. Currently, I spend my Fridays with my mother nearly every week, except during times of travel where I adjust the day. If elected, I will adapt visits with my mother and to my son and his family appropriately. My cat will move with me, or a new adoptive home found.

My health has significantly improved since the fall of 2017. Physically, I have lost one hundred pounds. I am also a breast cancer survivor, and I have been cancer-free since July 2012 and will continue to take a cancer drug until July 2022. Annually, I have regular medical check-ups for my total physical health.

14. Under the current rules, how many quadrennial terms would you be eligible to serve?
I am eligible to serve three quadrennial terms under the current rules if elected by the South Central Jurisdiction in July 2020.

15. How do you understand your obligation as a bishop to uphold the Book of Discipline?

As a former military soldier, I fully understood what it means to uphold regulations and policies. As a government accountant, I fully understood the rules and regulations to perform my work in compliance with federal funding. My understanding is that the bishop is obligated and charged to uphold the Book of Discipline, even as there is legislation to revise and perfect its governance in consideration of the global nature of The United Methodist Church.

I understand that the Book of Discipline orders the temporal and spiritual affairs of the church and that bishops are passionate about keeping the unity of the Church even in discordant times. I understand that the bishop is the general superintendent of the Church and is authorized to guard the faith, order, doctrine, and discipline of the Church even in chaotic and uncertain times (¶403). The bishop's work and witness of leadership, visioning, missions, teaching, promoting evangelism, and encouraging and making disciples is essential in upholding the Book of Discipline and are a bishop's primary responsibilities to the broader church (¶414).

16. If you could change any section or provision in the Book of Discipline, what would you change?

I believe there are several areas to change in the 2016 Book of Discipline; however the practices and procedures found ¶230-242 are a start. The three-year process to remove a member who has not attended the church in nearly ten, twenty, thirty years is outdated with the advances of technology. With the focus on vital congregations, vitality, and average worship attendance, it

seems that the United Methodist Church should rethink how we count or whom we count. Are we counting members, or are we counting the number of people regardless of membership? I find that the time it takes to remove inactive and non-attentive members is a long, drawn-out process with first-, second- and third-year readings. The local church apportionments are determined by the annual conference and no longer based on membership in the Great Plains; it makes sense to revise the process of membership removal.

Another area for revision consideration is found in ¶205 and ¶268 when dealing with issues of supplying ministerial leadership in isolated and depopulating towns and communities. With the number of small membership churches growing in depopulating rural locations, it has become challenging to appoint licensed or ordained clergy. More flexibility is needed to assign longer-term district assignments to these locations. Often, the persons assigned to these locations are working full-time secular jobs and tending to family farms or ranchland. The added requirements of making a decision towards a specific status as a certified lay minister or certified candidate are unrealistic in these situations. Mission field flexibility is urgently needed to address the length of time a person can serve in a district assignment status. Conversations with the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry and in consultation with the cabinet can facilitate some options.

I believe making positive changes, innovations, and streamlining the Book of Discipline of some processes, restrictions, requirements, and paperwork would give more time to the Church, conferences, clergy and laity to engage the mission field. And in the changing times in The United Methodist Church, missional changes to the Book of Disciple are needed to reach the twenty-first-century world.

17. When is the last time you led an individual to a profession of faith? Tell us about it.

In my previous church appointment, I recall a young man named Josh, who was about seventeen when he began to attend the church. He often came on his own, but then his mother also started occasionally attending with him. Over time, he slowly started attending the youth group but was socially awkward and did not connect with the youth. As I began to get to know him and his mother, I learned he was homeschooled and was also attending the junior college in town. Over time, the young man began to open up. I was then able to have faith conversations with him about Jesus Christ and God's saving grace. Months later, he made a decision for Christ and he asked to be baptized. He also became a faithful Sunday school attender and morning usher at that first worship service. I know it was by the power of the Holy Spirit that this young man made a decision for Christ.

Currently, serving as a district superintendent, my approach to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with individuals has been creative. Since I do not have a fixed location in a congregation, I often initiate random faith conversations with persons in the community. For example, recently, at the Dollar General, I was speaking with the cashier about attending church. This young woman had many visible tattoos and damaged teeth. As we were chatting, I asked her if she had a church home. She said that there are no churches in town that would accept her with all her tattoos. This comment opened the door for us to have a conversation. I was prompted to share with her that God accepts her and her tattoos and that I know a Methodist church where the pastor has tattoos and was starting a new group at a local tattoo parlor one block from his church. This relationship with her is just beginning.

Another creative example of encouraging people, is my office resides on the campus of Kansas Wesleyan University, and each year I intentionally reach out to build relationships with some of the students. Currently, I am building an opportunity to share the good news with a young couple connected to the university who has a two-year-old daughter, and in November 2019, I adopted four student-athletes. I have also participated in offering the prayer before games for volleyball and football and have preached at campus ministry worship services and purchased and distributed Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) bibles to students.

In 2014-2016, I built a ministry inquiry relationship with a young man who was a member of the football team from Lubbock, Texas. At that time, the Lord called me to encourage him in the faith as he continued his schooling. I invited him to attend church in Wichita, Kansas, to meet the pastor and to plant seeds of ministry opportunities with The United Methodist Church. The following semester, I built a relationship with a young woman athlete and encouraged her in her faith journey. She is now the praise and worship leader at a local church in the district.

I do believe that this creative approach allows me an opportunity to build unique and innovative relationships with diverse people in hopes that the Holy Spirit will transform their lives as they encounter Christ.

Reverend Delores 'Dee' J. Williamston
Salina-Hays District Superintendent, 2014-present
Great Plains Conference
GC 2020 Delegate
Great Plains Conference Endorsed Episcopal Candidate
South Central Jurisdiction Women's Leadership Team Endorsed Episcopal Candidate