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South Central Jurisdiction
Episcopal Candidate Questions

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

During my six years as Provost for the New Mexico Annual Conference, and especially after I was the first elected clergy delegate to the 2020(ish) General Conference, I was asked many times if I felt “called” to the episcopacy. Frankly, the answer has always been “no.” It was not a role or an office that I felt *called* to. My calling has always and simply been to serve and to go where I could serve best. Earlier this year, a colleague asked if I would be willing to offer myself to this role if others were to lift up my name for consideration, as they saw in me a giftedness, experience, and certain set of skills that might serve the Church well in this time. My answer was (hesitatingly), “let’s talk some more.”

In conversation with this trusted colleague, in discernment with my family, my spiritual director, my therapist, and other colleagues in ministry, I have come to understand that my calling to serve includes a willingness to serve the Church in this way. I recognize how my unique experience in conference leadership (in congregational revitalization, new church development as well as a wide portfolio as New Mexico’s equivalent of a Director of Connectional Ministry) and in the wider church (especially at General Conference) might be well-suited to this role. I also recognize how my thoughtful, non-anxious, relational, and imaginative nature could serve the Church in this current moment. I offer myself as willing to serve if the Church were to discern that my gifts and graces could be useful for this role.

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?

The most critical issues are manifold, but at the top of the list must be (1) emerging from the global pandemic and its consequences; (2) navigating the choppy waters of the splintering denomination; (3) re-imagining and clarifying our calling and purpose from the General Church down to every local congregation; and (4) strengthening and equipping lay and clergy leadership for 21st century ministry and mission. Leading towards these objectives requires both a practical, pragmatic style of leadership—a steady hand—as well as a view and a vision for the farther horizon.

To be sure, the short-term, mostly administrative needs of our Church will be front-and-center as annual conferences deal with disaffiliating churches and the accompanying loss of revenue bringing financial stress and strain at the conference level and at all levels of the denomination. I would hope to bring a steady, non-anxious, roll-up-our-sleeves-and-get-to-work style to address these concerns.

At the same time, however, there *will* be a future for the Church beyond our immediate horizon, and everyone in leadership should be working towards that reality as well. Envisioning

and naming that distant, preferred future, and laying the necessary foundation through leadership recruitment and development, equipping local congregations for a post-pandemic, post-separation ministry model, and, importantly, doing new things in new ways will be crucial.

I would hope that as a bishop, I could engage at *both* levels—addressing the short-term, mostly administrative crises that we are (and will be) facing, as well as addressing the longer-term vision and strategic needs—with courage, integrity, and confidence. My hope would also be that the whole Church would move forward with that same courage, integrity, and confidence.

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

Whether we recognize it or not, God is at work everywhere and at all times: at the margins as well as at the center. I currently see God at work on the margins through the unhoused gentleman who is choosing to live on our property here at St. John's, and how our congregation is trying to figure out what God might be up to in his life and how we might best join God in that. I see God at work in the young woman who came up to me after worship recently and thanked me for preaching a message of love and inclusion, because that isn't what she's heard in other churches before.

In order to “embrace and encourage” what new, emerging things God is up to, it requires (first and foremost) paying attention and noticing. I think it also requires an attentive sort of leadership willing to companion what the Spirit is already doing in spite of potential messiness, awkwardness, or uncertainty. It might also require being a sort of “midwife” to bring about what is currently only a possibility. But it is also important to support the work of the Spirit without institutionally quenching it with burdensome requirements or outdated or ill-fitting expectations. Finally, for those who find ourselves at the center, we have an obligation to advocate for and champion and share the story of why these new things are *central* to our calling as the Church, especially for those who fail to see (or understand) what God is up to at the edges.

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?

While God, and the reign of God, is no respecter of distinctions, it sure does seem like the Church sometimes is. As a middle-aged, middle-class, straight, white male, I acknowledge the undeserved privilege that has been afforded me for reasons I do not fully comprehend or even fully appreciate. It is imperative for all of us in leadership (but especially for those of us who have been privileged) to work intentionally across differences and divisions in order to fully realize how God is at work in all of our lives together.

In previous local church appointments, I worked regularly and consistently to include and center different, younger voices in leadership. I also have a habit of gently nudging

congregations beyond themselves in missional ways to engage a different mission field from who those who currently sit in our pews. That has been manifested through partnering with ministries and programs for those experiencing homelessness, to coming alongside established farmworker ministries in rural areas, to a vibrant community garden, to simply walking and seeing the mission field with new and fresh eyes.

In my current ministry setting at St. John's UMC (just over a year in), I have begun some of these efforts by working with our nominations process to cast a wider net beyond the "usual suspects" and encouraging the congregation (even as we continue to discover what a post-COVID world looks like) to engage the mission field in new ways. We currently are in the process of discerning whether and how we might partner with a local agency to host a Safe Outdoor Space for persons experiencing homelessness. I am grateful for the willingness of our congregational leaders to step boldly beyond their comfort zone as a typical suburban, middle-class church and engage in ministry with and for persons very different from ourselves.

In my previous conference-level appointment, I can point to various ways that I engaged in working across differences, starting with including younger and more diverse persons in conference committee work and leadership, especially in our nominations process. I'm proud, for example, that our CF&A secretary is a young adult who joined the committee right after graduating high school.

In my role as the chair of New Church Development, and then as Conference Provost, I supported and advocated for new faith communities such as Community of Hope (in Albuquerque) that served and is led (in part) by persons experiencing homelessness. Similarly, I supported and advocated for Good Medicine Way, a new church start that is intended to reach and serve the large indigenous population of Albuquerque with a culturally relevant (non-colonialist) approach to ministry.

Most importantly, however, I'd like to point to my work with the Four Corners Ministry on the Navajo Nation. Early in my tenure in the Conference Office, I was called in to mediate and negotiate a way forward for the ministry, which was mired in conflict. Previous conference-led efforts to address the conflict were, frankly, unhelpful and culturally insensitive. Rather than sweep in as the "white savior," I gently and patiently came alongside the conflicted board and leadership and *listened*. I freely acknowledged the past misdeeds and gross neglect of conference leadership that either caused or simply made possible their current plight. I was slow to speak, only offering suggestions or guidance when asked, and sought the counsel of indigenous leaders within and beyond our conference. Although this work was challenging, I unwaveringly felt that it was vital, both to repair the past damage done (if possible) and to find a new way forward for all of us. It was difficult, slow, frustrating, good, and necessary work, as any of this work is and will always be.

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

“Risk” is a tricky and often subjective concept. From my background in the social sciences, I know that there is also overwhelming evidence that human beings are *terrible* at calculating and understanding risk. I’d prefer to speak of courage. We can all point to moments when foolishness led us to engage in risky behavior, but we can probably also point to moments when it took great courage to do the right thing or something hard for the right reasons.

In my case, I would point to initiating, facilitating, and leading several listening sessions in 2018 in the New Mexico Annual Conference on the Way Forward and the upcoming 2019 General Conference. With guidance and input from Bishop Bledsoe, the Cabinet, and other leaders, I developed the format and content for some critical but hard conversations in an annual conference that has a culture of conflict avoidance and a habit of not ever having hard conversations. Leading these conversations by myself was challenging but necessary, and I was grateful for the opportunity to serve my colleagues and the annual conference in that way.

In a similar vein, notions of “success” and “failure” are also slippery. I have found that those moments that took courage, whether on my part, or whether I have encouraged others—which, by the way, is also critical—have led to many lessons learned, regardless of “success” or “failure.” I have always taken mis-steps or mistakes as an opportunity for growth, and invite others to do so as well.

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?

Honestly, I’d start by reversing the order in which this question is asked. The strength of an annual conference is first and foremost largely dependent upon the health and vitality of its congregations, and that is often dependent upon the emotional, mental, and spiritual health and maturity of leaders in those congregations.

To that end, while I can share some insight gleaned from my role in congregational development in New Mexico (from our implementation of a version of a Healthy Church Initiative, to efforts to start new faith communities designed to reach new people, to various leadership training events and workshops including a sustained program of Creating a Culture of Renewal with Rebekah Simon-Peter), the first strategy would be to find out what the current health and state of well-being of the churches of an annual conference might be, as well as what strategies are already in place or have previously been implemented.

Further, while I have questions and concerns about the spiritual, emotional, and mental health and well-being of many of our lay and clergy leaders, I don’t know if there is a one-size-fits-all approach to building or sustaining vital congregations. I would work collaboratively with annual conference leaders to identify the place of greatest benefit to strengthening lay and clergy

leadership, whether that is a focus on emotional intelligence, or deeper spiritual formation for leaders, or learning to work across differences of race, ethnicity, economics, or social status, or other areas where the need seems greatest.

Given the state of our denomination, however, I think a more pressing concern is how to frame our current conflict and help local churches navigate their own way forward as well as they can. Resourcing congregations with the tools necessary to have difficult conversations (fact-based, non-anxious, and pastorally focused) is going to be critical. Our goal should be that all of our churches have a healthy future regardless of denominational strife and the paths that they might choose, so that all of these churches are effectively making disciples of Jesus Christ.

At the annual conference level, the great uncertainty of disaffiliation and the future of entire conferences—let alone our world-wide polity—means that steady administrative leadership will be critical. We do not yet know what the implications will be for annual conference budgets or staffing, for example, if a large number of churches disaffiliate. Again, working collaboratively to identify the softest landing as possible for annual conferences will be key to the long-term health and strength of these bodies.

At the same time, we *will* have a future beyond this current, fraught season, and conference leadership will need to focus not merely on the immediate future, as messy and complicated as that might be, but on what lies *beyond*. Identifying next-generation priorities and strategies will be critical to being faithful to our mission. I imagine, for example, that local churches will need help grappling with the emergence of a digital mission field, and our whole connection will need to explore fresh expressions of what it means to be a “church,” and, ultimately, we will all need to learn how to engage faithfully in some of the real questions and concerns our neighbors are experiencing—whether that is questions of justice, or economic disparity and uncertainty, or increasing diversity, or the heightened polarization of our culture. I would welcome the opportunity to be a part of such a both/and conversation regarding our future.

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?

At their core, these questions tap into a sort of undifferentiated but real anxiety about leadership: do we have enough of the right, effective leadership for this present moment for all of our churches? Questions of the recruitment of new leaders, or what we do with ineffective leaders then come front and center.

Recruitment strategies typically work to (1) lower the barriers of entry into ministry through streamlining the Byzantine processes of candidacy for ordination, or lowering the financial burden of seminary or License to Preach School, or even offering financial incentives to consider entering ministry, or (2) structurally cultivate (or strengthen) pathways into ministry through heightened attention to youth programs, camping programs, campus ministries, or (better still) by launching new and different expressions of churches that are often more

effective at raising up new and different leaders. I also am intrigued by the possibilities created through special events or programs such as Exploration and the Young Clergy Initiative from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. I also think, however, that annual conferences and their leaders could do far more to create a “culture of calling” by repeatedly sharing stories of *our* call, and intentionally inviting others at every level of ministry and at all ages to consider *their* call (1 Cor. 1:26). Too often, it seems, we fail to simply invite people to consider a call, and I have been struck by how many times merely asking the question, “have you ever felt called to _____?” leads to such wonderful and wondrous discernment. Any and all of these strategies are essential, worth doing, and, indeed, are being implemented in some fashion throughout our connection.

Addressing ineffectiveness is a slightly different challenge. We can likely all point to persons in ministry who seem to have thrived in one setting only to struggle in another. Those persons, however, who seem to *continue* to struggle should be handled with care and grace. Discerning the roots of ineffectiveness would be key to how we address such ineffectiveness. For those who are burning out, do we provide adequate resources for renewal? For those whose ministry settings exceed their equipping, is there a training or program that can nudge them along? It is important for bishops, cabinets, and boards of ordained ministry to prioritize such renewal and training opportunities, which many, if not most, undoubtedly already do. In much the same way, however, I think resourcing transitional leave options, and opportunities for ministry and vocation outside of our typical “career paths” is an underutilized strategy for addressing ineffectiveness. Further, it seems that this is something that could take the same or similar investment that many have made in recruiting new leaders at the annual conference and at the General Church level.

My concern, though, is that *both* the question of recruitment *and* the question of addressing ineffectiveness seem to work at the surface level (the symptom of insufficient numbers of effective clergy) rather than recognizing or addressing deeper or greater challenges. While actively engaging in the strategies discussed above, leaders at every level must also name the social and cultural headwinds that make this question of leadership more complicated in our time than in any other time in recent memory. The demands of leadership are greater and more varied than most of us recognize. It’s also not clear that we fully understand what is really needed of leaders in this moment, although we catch glimpses and glances of it from time to time. Also, we know that it is now the norm for a person to shift careers at least once if not several times throughout their lifetime. What might the implications for recruitment (or addressing ineffectiveness) be if we were to abandon the implicit assumption of a typical 40-year career in local church ministry? Other contemporary cultural shifts such as the Great Resignation and “quiet quitting” surely complicate questions of leadership as well, although I don’t know that we fully grasp the risk (or the opportunity) that these shifts present, either.

Further, our current system is producing precisely the amount and the quality of leaders that we are designed to produce. Addressing our current anxieties around leadership—or, more importantly, addressing the kinds of leadership we will need in the future—will require a broader, richer, deeper conversation with bishops, cabinets, boards of ordained ministry, other

conference leaders, seminaries, and general boards and agencies. While we *can* engage in recruitment efforts and work to address ineffective clergy in the present moment, we *must* engage in the bigger conversation and work diligently at broader systemic levels to create the types of shifts that will produce the kinds of leaders the church will need in the future.

8) What is your philosophy of appointment making?

My philosophy of appointment-making is, simply put, finding the best “fit” for leadership and ministry in every local community. The challenge is making that happen for every appointment every time. On that point, let me add that appointment-making is clearly more art than science, and the *how* of appointment-making is critical.

I had the opportunity of serving with the joint cabinets of the New Mexico and Northwest Texas conferences during appointment-making, and some of our practices in that process are worth elevating, namely the degree of honest, transparent communication and trust that really good appointment-making requires. To be sure, there was always a temptation towards groupthink (“this appointment will be the best thing since sliced bread!”) but divergent perspectives and alternative viewpoints and suggestions beyond the “usual suspects” were not only offered but were welcome. There needs to be a creative spirit in the process that can only take place when those around the table trust each other and are willing to push back or push the boundaries. The need for creativity and imagination in this work is greater now than ever before.

In a similar vein—and only in the later part of my time on the New Mexico cabinet did this happen in more substantial ways—there must be a recognition that appointment making ought to be at its best a spiritual discernment process. Those involved in appointment making should engage in practices of personal discernment, including the necessary homework related to knowing the churches, but also much prayer and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this work. Collectively, cabinets could (and should) engage in intentional group spiritual discernment practices throughout the appointment making cycle (and beyond), lest the process becomes too mechanistic and stale. Having leaders who are individually and collectively attuned to the work of God’s Spirit is essential to effective appointment making.

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?

By now, I would hope that it’s clear that my preference is to always work collaboratively with others. This is especially true of my work with the laity, both in the local church and beyond. I trust, respect, and have come to rely deeply on the insight and wisdom of the laity, who often have an understanding of the Church, its mission, and the mission field that seems to elude clergy. In my current appointment setting, for example, I have worked closely with a core team of leadership that includes key staff members, chairs of Finance, Trustees, Staff-Parish, and Administrative Council, along with our lay leaders and lay delegates to Annual Conference on a number of issues. We are in regular, constant, two-way communication and I am grateful for our collaborative efforts to find our way in a post-COVID world, clarify our common vision,

trouble-shoot issues and concerns, and lean forward into new ministries and mission. Other lay persons at St. John's know me as available, responsive, and attentive to the whole congregation.

In the New Mexico Annual Conference, we have been blessed by the work of the Spirit through our Certified Lay Ministry (CLM) efforts. Serving as Provost, I had the honor of working alongside the lay and clergy leaders who imagined and sustained these efforts over the past few years. I happily and regularly taught the polity and history modules for our CLM trainings and co-led the CLM retreat last year at camp. In leadership, I advocated for this work, supported it, and, more importantly, when it was helpful to get out of the way, I got out of the way.

I hope these examples demonstrate my unwavering support and respect for the work of the laity in our Church. Laypersons that I have worked with have regularly and consistently affirmed my support, wisdom, and insight to our shared ministry.

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?

One of the things that I deeply appreciate about our Wesleyan theology is that we understand that God's grace is available to *all*, even if we struggle with the full implications of that expansive and inclusive perspective. I consistently and regularly preach and proclaim the wide, inclusive nature of grace: there is room at the table for us all.

Living up to full inclusion is likely impossible for all of us, but I have worked (as I have described in my responses to other questions) to widen the circle for others and to make room for everyone at the table, particularly when it comes to leadership and decision-making. I would also point to the sort of inclusion that works generously and graciously with others, regardless of ideological or theological differences. My more progressive colleagues and my more conservative colleagues have both said that they can trust me as an "honest broker", and I am humbled by the trust they honor me with. I hope to—and, indeed, try to—always work honestly with everyone, and, to my mind, that is the best example of how I have tried and still try to live up to the inclusive nature of Christ's Church.

I know, however, that I have fallen short of the ideal of full inclusion because of my own blind spots, ignorance, or even apathy. I have not always used my position of privilege to name or confront racism, or bigotry, or small-minded exclusionary behaviors. As in other areas of my life, however, when called on my shortcomings or failures, I have welcomed those opportunities for further reflection and (hopefully) amendment of heart and life. I pray that in this area, as in all areas of my life, I am moving on to perfection.

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?

I struggle with this question because it is not in my nature to claim success or “contributions” for my own work. Looking back at my time in ministry, however, I recognize (often through the eyes of others) consistent themes.

At the level of the local church, I have consistently worked towards a deepening of the spiritual life of the disciples gathered there as well as a strengthening of the outward impulse of service, mission, and witness. I would hope that every congregation I have ever served has seen its members grow inwardly in their own faith journey and grow outwardly in their service and witness in the community. In some cases, that has led to numerical growth, and quantifiable measures of strength and vitality, while in others the difference has been more qualitative, but unmistakable.

At the level of the annual conference, I hope I consistently provide steady, trustworthy, and relatable leadership. As I mentioned in a previous answer, colleagues would describe me as an “honest broker” and others have expressed appreciation for my transparency, competency, creativity, and vision. My leadership at the conference level has always been a both/and: focused on the health and vitality of local churches and grasping the scale and scope of vision and ministry at the level of the whole conference.

Beyond the annual conference, I have had the privilege of volunteering with the Secretary of the General Conference since 1996, most recently working in 2016 as the Legislative Committee coordinator. Out of great love and respect for the whole Church, I have always worked openly, fairly, and graciously with all camps and factions in the Church and I’m grateful to have been able to serve in that capacity.

I also served in leadership for the Association of Directors of Connectional Ministries (ADCM) for several years, most recently serving as Chair/President of the Association from January 2020 through June of 2021. As a leadership team, we re-imagined and repurposed our annual “gathering” during COVID. I was grateful that our team was able to offer an online leadership retreat with Dr. Gregory C. Ellison II on Fear+Less Dialogues and specifically how to engage in difficult conversations, primarily around race and racism, as many of us found ourselves needing those conversations not just for our ministry setting and context, but in order to help our conferences engage in some of these conversations as well.

12) John Wesley is often quoted as saying “in essentials, unity, in non-essentials, diversity, in all things charity.” What constitutes the essentials for you?”

I have been prone to say (sometimes ill-advisedly) that “everything is negotiable but the gospel.” What I hope that suggests—and what I believe this quote attributed to Wesley is trying

to suggest as well—is that while we stand firm on the core of our being, we remain graciously flexible and nimble around the edges.

The “core” for me, as the gospel, is the proclamation of the lordship of Christ and the love, mercy, forgiveness, and reconciliation that is available to all in His name. Another essential for me is our Wesleyan understanding of grace: particularly that God’s grace is available to all and that that grace working in our lives brings about an outward manifestation (social holiness) stemming from an inward working of God’s grace (personal holiness). I try to always embody, lead with, and call others to a deepening life in faith and walk with Christ, and a relentless invitation to live out that life in faith in ways that are visible, tangible, and make a difference in the world.

Lastly, I would name that, for me, a certain hope and hopefulness is essential. Even when things are difficult or challenging, I cling to hope that God is always at work and that God’s purposes will be fulfilled even in our challenges, roadblocks, or the myriad ways we ourselves get in the way. For this reason, I am always willing to learn, re-learn, or discover a new way forward, as we never lose hope.

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?

Susan and our children (both young adults living at home) and I have been in much conversation throughout this discernment process. My family supports me in this possibility, even as we may not fully grasp all the implications it might bring about.

For Susan, one consideration is that she is currently working towards being licensed as a Mental Health Counselor in the state of New Mexico—a process that requires literally thousands of hours of supervision. A possible move would undoubtedly affect that process, as each state has its own licensing requirements. This is a situation where we will simply have to cross that bridge when we get there.

Our children, Eli (23) and Sophie (20) both live at home, and Sophie is an online student at Arizona State University. Because of the pandemic, Sophie has essentially done all of her undergraduate coursework remotely and will continue do that for the foreseeable future. Eli is a recent graduate of Arizona State University and will be looking at graduate school programs in Psychology in the coming year. I imagine that while our kids are both still at home and they may move with us if a move is imminent, they will soon be striking out on their own. There’s always hope.

There are no health, financial, or any other issues that would affect my ability to serve as bishop.

14) Under the current rules, how many quadrennial terms would you be eligible to serve?

Under the current rules, I would be eligible to serve until 2040, or four quadrennial terms, depending on how we count our current time-out-of-time quadrennium.

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

To begin, I understand and affirm the responsibility of bishops to order the life of the Church, to “enable the gathered Church to worship and evangelize faithfully” and to “facilitate the initiation of structures and strategies for equipping” the Church and “to help extend the service in mission.” (BOD, para. 401). Further, I understand and affirm the burden of bishops to “guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church.” (BOD, para. 403). Lastly, I understand and affirm the role of the bishop to “uphold the discipline and order of the Church by consecrating, ordaining, commissioning, supervising, and appointing persons in ministry to the Church and the world.” (BOD, para. 403.f).

I note, however, that these latter references to “discipline” are all lower-case. To my mind, that means a *general* understanding of order, unity, and mutual obligation to one another in Christian discipleship, rather than a *particular* obligation to uphold or enforce the *Book of Discipline*. That said, in ministry in the local church and at the level of the annual conference, I have always kept within the restrictive bounds of the *Book of Discipline* to the best of my ability. More importantly, in the spirit of a more generalized obligation to order, unity, and mutual accountability, I have always worked relationally and graciously (rather than pedantically or in a Pharisaical manner) with lay and clergy colleagues to keep that spirit at the center of all our work together. I expect I will always do so.

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

The temptation with a question like this would be to create a sort of “personalized” version of our *Discipline*, not unlike Thomas Jefferson creating his own version of the New Testament by removing all the passages he found difficult. While we all might like that opportunity (who wouldn’t?), it likely wouldn’t serve the Church well at all, seeing as we would still have to figure out how to be together in spite of our preferences and differences.

I, along with many, many others long for a leaner, simpler *Discipline* with fewer restrictions, guidelines, and “shalls,” particularly for the structures of annual conferences, but also for the working of General Conference, to name just a couple specific examples. Too much of our current *Discipline* is more burdensome than helpful and needs simplification.

Similarly, our structure and polity as a global connection will need substantial revision (and re-imagination) as we move forward from our current process of separation and division. I would hope these changes could come in tandem.

Lastly, but *importantly*, I would change the language around the “incompatibility” of homosexual practice with Christian teaching (BOD, para. 161.G and para 304.3). This terminology, perhaps more than any other text in our current disagreements over human sexuality, has done exceeding harm to persons that I love and care for. It has also undermined and harmed our witness as Methodists. As a denomination we should have the courage and temerity to tell the truth that we are not of one mind on these matters, even as we continue to struggle with and work out the implications of these differences as they relate to marriage and ordination.

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

I have found that often in ministry, I have invited people into a deeper experience of their faith rather than introducing them to faith for the first time. It is more typical that I have led persons from nominal affiliation with Christ and the Church into a more authentic and richer experience of Christ, the gospel, and a life in faith. Along the way, I have had many opportunities to invite persons to profess their faith after falling away, or to affirm a faith that was previously only superficial.

During my time in Las Cruces, I had multiple conversations with a young woman who was desperately searching for an authentic experience of Christ. While she had been exposed to Christ through a more conservative/evangelical campus ministry, she genuinely struggled with how to reconcile the “oughts” and “shoulds” of that Christian sub-culture with the liberating grace that she heard about from me and experienced first-hand at University UMC. I, along with many others, walked with her and encouraged her in her journey, and, ultimately, she made the decision to give herself to this winsome life in faith and asked to be baptized, and she wanted to be baptized by full immersion. Fortunately, the Nazarene church across the street had a baptistry, and, together with a small group of folks from University UMC, we baptized her into the faith one Sunday after worship. Her profession of faith was the result not merely of my time spent with her, but an entire community that surrounded her with grace and love.