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2022 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
of The United Methodist Church



Episcopal Nominee Information 2022 North Central Jurisdictional Conference



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Conference: East Ohio

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Current Appointment: First United Methodist Church, Cuyahoga Falls

Family: My wife, Kattie, and I have been married for 17 years and we have six children: Nehemiah (14), Ruth (12), Joy (10), Hadassah (7), Tobias (2), and Zebediah (8 mos). We are blessed to be completing the adoption process for Tobias this year.

Formal Education (please also include significant Continuing Education):

B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies (2007) – University of Akron

MDiv, Concentration in Justice and Peace Studies (2011) – Iliff School of Theology

Major Continuing Education:

Mosaix Learning Cohort – Multi-Ethnic Ministry – 2018-2019
Wesleyan Methodist Evangelism Order of the Flame - 2017
East Ohio Conference New Church Start Academy – 2012-2013

Ordination Dates and Conference of Which You Were a Member:

East Ohio: Commissioning – 2012, Ordination – 2014

Previous Work Experiences and Pastoral Appointments:

First United Methodist Church, Cuyahoga Falls – 2018-Current – Lead Pastor
Ashland Team Ministry – 2015-2018 – Co-Pastor
Three Crosses: A United Methodist Fellowship – 2011-2015 – Lead Pastor
Akron United Methodist Church – 2009-2011 – Student Local Pastor
Chase Bank – 2006-2009 – Personal Banker
MBNA/Bank of America – 1999-2006 – Business Analyst, Assistant Manager/Sales Coach

Connectional and Ecumenical Church Experiences:**1. Current:**

East Ohio Conference Taskforce on Clergy Wellness – 2022-Present
Jurisdictional Conference Delegate – 2020-2024
East Ohio Conference Board of Ministry – 2014-Present
2020 – Present - Chair

2. Previous:

DCOM Secretary/Registrar, Mid-Ohio – 2014-2018
UMVIM NCJ Board Member - 2015-2016
East Ohio Conference Board of Ministry – 2014-Present;
2014-2016 - Board Development Committee
2016-2020 - Registrar of Elders

Community Service Activity:**1. Current:**

Cuyahoga Falls Ministerial Association – 2018-Present

2. Previous:

Mayor's Taskforce on Religious Diversity – 2018-2020
Ashland City Schools, Chess Coach – 2015-2018
Discovery School, Chess Coach – 2013-2015
Clear Fork Youth Soccer League – Coach – 2012-2015
Worthington Township VFD Chaplain – 2014-2015
Butler Merchants Association, Treasurer – 2013-2015
Lions Club – 2009-2015
Royal Family Kids' Camp counselor – 2005-2007, 2016

Publications, Awards, Honors:

The Real War on Terror, Wipf and Stock, 2006

Special Interests and/or Hobbies:

Walking and playing with our great dane, singing, biking, hiking, reading, genealogy and history

Faith and Leadership

Describe Your Understanding of the Nature and Mission of the Church:

The Church is the community of those who receive God's grace through Christ and have responded to the Spirit's call to gather and be gathered into a community for the healing of the nations. We are "that place where the first signs of the reign of God are identified and acknowledged in the world."¹ We are a royal priesthood reconciling the world to God, the servant of the Lord serving God's will as our own, and the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood of the new covenant which is given for the forgiveness of our sins and the sins of many.²

The United Methodist Church is on a mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. As the Spirit draws us into a relationship with God, the Church draws us in and nurtures us toward our shared task of working for the transformation of the world through the reign of God in our hearts.

Share Your Vision for The United Methodist Church:

God is at work among the people of the United Methodist Church and we are in a crucible of change. Where we have done harm through exclusion, the Spirit guides us to become more inclusive. Where we have been bureaucratic and rule-bound, the Spirit guides us to embrace administrative simplicity and relational wisdom. These movements toward inclusion, simplicity, and relationality open the greatest possibilities for justice, peace, and growth in the continuing United Methodist Church. However, there is much work to be done in response to what God has begun.

We must find ways to achieve healthy accountability and processes without bureaucratic and rule-bound rigidity. Until General Conference is able to meet again, by God's grace in 2024, we must ensure that the mutually agreed abeyance of charges for matters related to human sexuality is preserved. In addition, the UMC of the future will do well to simplify our denominational structures to be more adaptive to the world around us, learning from our colleagues outside the U.S.A.

Over the last several years our world and our churches have felt a number of divergent pressures. The disconnection and social adjustments from COVID precautions, years of contentious politics, erupting tensions over racial injustice in America, already declining congregations, mistrust of institutions - not to mention the proposed separation within the UMC - have all brought about conflict and fighting and an abundance of walking away from one another. Some among us are not willing to live in a more inclusive community with others who disagree on these matters. They will need a gracious and equitable-for-all way to exit as soon as is practical.

However, the bulk of us who will remain in the United Methodist Church can serve as a city on a hill to the world showing how people can live together, love one another, and work together despite our differences. Our world sorely needs this faithful Christian witness to Jesus's prayer in John 17 and Paul's proclamation in Ephesians 4 that we Methodists can bring.

As we step into our future, I believe that the laity and clergy of the United Methodist Church are our most important assets. The challenges we face will require renewed clarity and refined vision toward our primary task as the Church of making disciples for the transformation

¹ 2016 Book of Discipline, ¶102, p. 50

² 1 Peter 2:9, 2 Corinthians 5:20, Matthew 20:26, Luke 22:42, 1 Corinthians 12:27, Service of Word and Table I

of the world. A vital clergy community of tomorrow needs the best support, rhythms of work and rest, opportunities for ministry appointments, healthy workplaces, training and resources today – as well as robust clergy recruitment through a coherent culture of call in our churches, camps, and annual conference ministries.

I intend to lead the Church, following the winds of the Spirit, to become more truly inclusive for all persons, more practical in our administration and polity, and to give ourselves to Christ in relational ministry with one another and in the communities we serve. This will require that those of us who choose to stay must lay down the spears and swords with which we have fought one another for the last 50 years. We must beat them into plowshares, no longer fighting within the church as liberal against conservative or progressive against traditionalist but instead working together for the good of all, that we all might grow as disciples of Jesus Christ and transform the world by the power of the Good News.

Describe Your Concept and Style of Leadership:

In my leadership, I look to Jesus and to the principles of the Wesleyan movement. I look first to serve and love those who I am responsible to lead, using a relational accountability that recognizes we are all more likely to follow and receive any necessary accountability and supervision when we are known and we know we are loved. Most importantly, I seek first the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all things I am asked to lead. Two examples may illustrate what I mean by this.

When I was asked to consider the nomination to chair our Board of Ministry, my first prayer was to ask God for vision for the work that the Board needed over the time I would serve. Though I was serving at the time on the Board as its lead Registrar, I couldn't accept the leadership role as chair unless I had vision from God for work of the Board over that time. This is because I believe that those who are tasked with leadership in the Church should have a calling from God, a vision from God for what needs to be done by the position being considered, and the call of the Church itself to lead. This is also how we handle the nominations process for leadership positions in the churches I serve: calling from God, vision for the work, and the call of the Church to serve.

A second example comes from my appointment as the Lead Pastor of the congregation I now serve. For this role, the process for discerning and developing a vision from God was slightly different. When I became Board chair, I'd been serving on the executive team for several years with many of the leaders who would continue with me as chair. At the church, I was totally new, as was one of the two associate pastors who was joining the appointed team with me. We needed to develop relationships with the staff, leaders, and congregation to learn what God was doing there already in order to be able to discern God's voice most effectively for charting a course forward.

To do this, we spent the first year visiting with leaders and congregation members on a listening tour. Next, my associates and I pulled together a group of ministry and administrative leaders of the church (called the "Caleb Table") who were able to work directly with me to discern and discover what would become the six core strategic objectives for our congregation for 2020-2024. This process helped us to discover that building up our Discipleship pathway was one of our biggest strategic needs – leading us to bring the vast majority of our lay leaders and new members through Dr. Phil Maynard's "Disciple Like Jesus" curriculum over the course of 2020 and 2021.

This deliberate, patient discernment process has brought renewed energy and fresh vision to our large, historic congregation. This, at the time of COVID when we could have easily lost steam and momentum. Our most mature leaders have started nurturing new people to our congregation through the journey of following Jesus. They've begun anti-racism classes,

welcomed a congregation of Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees to be in ministry with us, and they have started new ministries that bring food to the hungry and share prayer and a listening ear in the places where people gather in our community.

Lastly, I always seek to learn and grow together with those I lead so that our relationships can provide strength to our common ministry. These relationships allow me to lead each person on my team from a place of knowing them and their gifts. In my denominational leadership, I have seen how sometimes our polity becomes the goal itself and can stifle authentic, Wesleyan disciple making. This same relationship-based leadership deployed within the ordering of the church gives us the ability to refine, renew, or replace ineffective structures and processes while still taking genuine care of our essential business – which is one another!

Describe Your Gifts and Graces:

It's easiest for me to talk about my gifts and graces in terms of where I believe God is leading the church to go, what God is calling the church to become, and then where my gifts intersect with what God is doing.

I believe that God is calling the church to become less harmful and more inclusive in the next season of our life together. To lead the church in this movement of the Spirit, God has granted me an ability to lead adaptively and decisively while remaining consistent to our mission through seasons of change. I naturally tend to lift up others through spiritual gifts of exhortation and encouragement. My Activator and Strategic (*Clifton StrengthsFinder*) strengths allow me to both plan for and navigate uncertain decisions on my own and to bring the creativity of others into reality. Lastly, my gifts of compassion and love allow me to listen to and embrace a wide spectrum of God's people, even those with whom I disagree. If we are to retain our historically broad welcome of a theological spectrum of persons, this will be vital to ensuring that all willing persons will have a home in the continuing United Methodist Church.

I also believe that God is calling the church to embrace a simplicity of administration. Though our denominational structures have and continue to provide healthy accountability and guidance, they can also hamper our ability to respond to rapidly changing circumstances – like the challenge of holding a large meeting of a global church during a global pandemic. Practically speaking, I have an ability to understand and apply our polity – from the administration of the local church, the connection of the annual conference, and within the complexities of our general church. I can understand the current rules and previous context (the “why” of the rules) in a way that allows me to apply those rules to ordering the church with integrity, consistency, and flexibility.

One example of this from my Board of Ministry is the reduction of the number of votes at our Clergy Executive Session from over 20 down to 5 through the use of a consent calendar. This freed up considerable time for additional celebration, prayer, and fellowship among our clergy during executive session.

In addition, in my spiritual leadership, I can apply a depth of theological and Scriptural study to bring joy and hope into any moment and bring new light onto the processes and order of our church helping the new processes to remain faithful to their purposes while becoming simpler.

Where we have been rule-bound, I believe God is calling the church toward a more Wesleyan accountability that begins with a greater relationality. I lead in a way that honors and celebrates the inherent goodness in all persons but retains my sense of self in a healthy, differentiated way. I can listen deeply to others, even those with whom I disagree or who are in emotional distress, without becoming enmeshed. This allows me to hear, care for, and earnestly engage in joyful community with others across a wide spectrum of differences.

These gifts give me the ability to shape the structures of our church to create healthy relationality which brings greater health. For example, during my time as Registrar for the Board we began to invite all provisional members who were eligible to apply for ordination, but chose not to apply, to a low-pressure conversation about life and ministry with members of the Board of Ministry Executive team. These conversations were healthy and enriching for the Board members as well as the provisional members who feel heard and connected to the Board as they continue to practice ministry, discern their calling, and prepare to apply for ordination.

Meyers-Briggs Type: INTJ

Strengths Finder:

Learner, Strategic, Activator, Intellection, Achiever

Describe How You Have Experienced the Call to the Episcopacy and How God Has Prepared You for the Episcopacy:

I first sensed the call to the Episcopacy during the 2016 General Conference and North Central Jurisdictional Conference sessions. Watching the business unfold and the seeing the ways that our rules of order and practices at times made the work more challenging than necessary, I experienced God calling me to serve the General and Jurisdictional Church. As I prayed about this call, God continued to urge me forward and to provide leadership opportunities in my annual conference and with the other BOM leaders in our jurisdiction to experience and confirm that call within me. During this time, God affirmed this call through several of my clergy colleagues in the annual conference and laypersons at the local church I serve who began to ask me if I would consider serving as a Bishop in my lifetime as they perceived the necessary gifts in me.

When I was experiencing a call to ministry as a young adult, I would dialogue with God about my call in a prayer journal. I recall being surprised as God used the phrases, “a pastor to pastors” and a “leader of leaders” in this prayer journal dialogue. In every local church appointment I have had and in my service to the annual conference, I have had opportunity to be a pastor to other pastors and to lead leaders. However, as a Bishop it would also be important to me to “pastor the pastors” and “lead the leaders” by providing pastoral care and leadership to the clergy and laity of an annual conference and to the entire Church.

Another of the ways that God has prepared me for the Episcopacy is through my first career in Banking. I spent the first ten years of my professional life, while completing my undergraduate degree part-time, working in financial administration, fraud investigation, and sales as a coach and assistant manager. I experienced, through the two banks I worked for, a positive corporate culture that put the people of the company first, particularly through their emphasis on people development and training.

As a young adult, it was formative to see the ways that the time and resources devoted to the employees of the company produced a strong and enduring workplace morale and health. As the spiritual and temporal leader of an Annual Conference, I would use many of these lessons I learned to work toward and maintain healthy clergy morale.

God has also been preparing me for the Episcopacy through the season of COVID in my roles and relationships as a parent and spouse, leader of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and Lead Pastor of a larger church in our conference. We have all had to navigate a seemingly never-ending stream of changes, challenges, ups, downs, disappointments, attempts to meaningfully grieve a loved one, cancelled celebrations, and making-the-best-of-it moments. I thank God that I was able to meet all of these challenges with the strength I found in my relationships with God,

my family, my fellow Board leaders, and local church staff and lay leaders. Parenting school-aged children has presented daily challenges and newfound compassion for teachers and other parents. Leading the Board of Ministry through these times has taught me new levels of patience and the need to communicate clearly and sometimes repetitively. It also continues to teach me lesson after lesson of what life is like in the leadership of an annual conference.

Leading a local church through these years has been a marathon of uncertainty, stopping and starting again with urgency, and being forced again and again to make decisions that we clergy couldn't have expected when we first pursued our calls. I have seen firsthand the utter exhaustion that pastors have faced and the myriad ways God has showed up in parking lot services, revised, new, and rescheduled events and ministries, and video-streaming worship and discipleship. I have also seen a renewing Spiritual energy bubbling up in the local church that can be harnessed by well-rested and nurtured clergy as they lead others to follow Christ.

Through this time, I have found God's grace new every morning and lots of laughter and joy with those on the teams I lead and in my family. It will be critical to carry the experience of pastoring through COVID into Episcopal leadership – bringing compassion, understanding, risk-taking creativity, help, and hope in Christ to those I will lead.

Episcopal Election Covenant has been signed and received by NCJ Secretary, Rev. Paul R. White.

Episcopal Candidate Forum:

The Rev. Jonathan Priebe will be participating in the North Central Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy (NCJCOE) video forum. This forum will consist of a fifteen-minute interview with each episcopal candidate who elects to participate. All interviews will be posted on to the North Central Jurisdictional (NCJ) website on or around September 1, 2022.