




WE PRESS ON

2022 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
of The United Methodist Church 

**2022 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
Episcopal Nominee Information
for
Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai**



Website: www.bighamtsai.org

Name: Kennetha J. Bigham-Tsai

Conference: Michigan

Street/PO Box Address: 6137 Horizon Drive

City/State/Zip: East Lansing, MI

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Current Appointment: Chief Connectional Ministries Officer of the Connectional Table

Family: Kee Tsai, spouse; Keeton and Kamden Bigham-Tsai, children; and our German Shepherd, Kylo

Background and Experience:

Formal Education (please also include significant Continuing Education):

Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, MDiv, 2003
Harvard University, BA Sociology, 1982

Continuing Education

- ❖ **Adaptive Leadership**
 - ❖ Training and ongoing coaching with Eric Martin of Adaptive Change Advisors
 - ❖ Adaptive Leadership Training with Susan Beaumont (Alban Institute)
- ❖ **Congregational Vitality and Development**
 - ❖ Schools for Congregational Development
 - ❖ REACH Summits (annual Michigan-area initiative on congregational vitality and leadership development)
 - ❖ Multi-Siting—Michigan-area conference on church multiplication
 - ❖ Schools for Pastoral Ministry
- ❖ **Family/Congregational Systems**
 - ❖ Conflict Resolution/Family Systems Training (with Richard Blackburn of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center)
 - ❖ Training in Congregational Systems (Dr. Peter Steinke, Health Congregations)
- ❖ **Worship/Preaching, Trauma-Informed Ministry, Cross-Racial Ministry**
 - ❖ Many years of participation in Calvin Institutes of Christian Worship and Festival of Homiletics
 - ❖ Recent participation in 2022 Festival of Homiletics focused on trauma
 - ❖ Training events on cross-racial/cross-cultural appointments and ministry (GCORR, Michigan Conference Religion and Race)
 - ❖ Training and certification in Healthy Boundaries and Sacred Sanctuaries
 - ❖ 2022 HIPAA certification

Ordination Dates and Conference of Which You Were a Member:

Ordained elder in 2009 in the Michigan Annual Conference (former West Michigan)

Previous Work Experiences and Pastoral Appointments:

Connectional Table – Chicago, IL

2018 – Present

Chief Connectional Ministries Officer: Provide leadership for the Connectional Table (CT) as it seeks to discern and articulate the vision for the worldwide church and steward the mission, ministries and resources of the denomination in consultation with the Council of Bishops. Work with staff and board members to plan and execute meetings, oversee CT finances, facilitate internal and external communications, and help to shepherd the process of evaluation of the missional effectiveness of the World Service-funded agencies.

- ❖ Facilitated the CT's work to shape legislation for General Conference, including on regionalization; traveled the connection, listening to concerns about the future of the worldwide United Methodist Church.

- ❖ Built and nurtured collaborative relationships across the worldwide church, including with the COB, GCFA, general agencies, Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and Annual Conference bodies.
- ❖ Instrumental in designing an innovative process to allocate the denomination's \$358.6 million budget by mobilizing people to engage a challenge that had no clear or simple solution. Helped shepherd process, building coalitions and brokering relationships that facilitated change.
- ❖ Designed four consecutive [State of the Church](#) reports, working with United Methodist Communications from concept to completion.
- ❖ Led projects on the future of The United Methodist Church, including [Imagining the Future](#), which addresses identity, mission, vision and connectionalism. Worked with agencies to conceptualize and develop *Tuesdays at the Table* webinars to provide grounding in theological identity.

Lansing District/Michigan Conference Cabinet – Okemos, MI 2013 – 2018

Superintendent: Provided leadership and supervision for 70+ churches and their pastors, serving as chief missional strategist and conference superintendent in the appointment-making process, working collaboratively with the resident bishop, superintendents and other conference leaders to help realize annual conference goals. Developed a process for assessing the viability of local churches, with more than 40 district churches participating, resulting in creation of a cooperative ministry, a new-church start, the discontinuance of several local churches, eight churches involved in the conference's "*Vital Church Initiative*," and development of an urban ministry strategy.

Milwood United Methodist Church – Kalamazoo, MI 2011 – 2013

Pastor: Provided pastoral leadership for a congregation in a diverse urban neighborhood, guiding parishioners in faithfulness to the ministries of evangelism, outreach and witness. Restructured the congregation for vitality, creating a vision leadership team that provided focus for ministry efforts and an operations team that streamlined administrative work. Helped equip the congregation to carry out its vision of bringing people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and greater connection to each other.

During tenure at Millwood, the church paid 100% of its ministry shares and had an average of 10 professions of faith each year.

University United Methodist Church – East Lansing, MI 2006 – 2011

Pastor: Provided leadership for a large university congregation. Functioned as sole pastor for the last six months of the appointment. Led the congregation to re-envision its relationship with a Wesley Foundation associated with the church, bringing reconciliation in the relationship and positioning both ministries for greater collaboration. Started a mid-week Christian education and fellowship program and helped lead the congregation in efforts at visioning and revitalization.

During tenure at University UMC, the church paid 100% of its ministry shares, saw an increase in Christian education attendance and had an average of 14 professions of faith each year.

District Peace with Justice Community – Grand Rapids, MI 2002 – 2006

Director: Planned and coordinated educational events; served as an invited speaker at district churches and community events. Served as a liaison with churches, church agencies, community groups and national and local media to provide advocacy around justice issues. Responsible for fundraising and budgeting.

Connectional and Ecumenical Church Experiences:

1. Current:

General and Jurisdictional Conferences – 2020 Co-Chair of the Michigan Delegation (1st Elected Clergy).

North Central Jurisdiction Committee on the Episcopacy—Secretary

2021 NCJ Special Session of Jurisdictional Conference—Visioning Planning Team. Helped plan the process used to develop the NCJ’s “[Covenant to Build Beloved Community](#).”

2. Previous:

Connectional Table Board Member (2012-2018)

Executive Committee, Chair Leadership Discernment and Community Life (LDCL), Vice-Chair Missional Administration Group on the General Conference, Human Sexuality Task Force, Legislative Writing Team.

❖ Led LDCL team to evaluate and support CT staff and shepherd processes for recruiting, deploying and supervising volunteers. Worked with CT members and staff to plan CT meetings and design worship and discernment experiences that were rooted in United Methodist theology and honored the global context of the CT’s work.

❖ Worked with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, the Commission on the General Conference, United Methodist Communications and other general church bodies to facilitate CT goals.

❖ Designed and facilitated a process that sought to unite highly divergent viewpoints to create a compromise on human sexuality and maintain the unity of The United Methodist Church. The process provided a system of reconciliation and broke down divisions by using worship as a vehicle for grace.

General and Jurisdictional Conferences

Delegate to the 2021 NCJ Special Session of Jurisdictional Conference

Delegate to the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference

2016 Jurisdictional Delegate/General Conference Alternate (2nd Elected).
Candidate for the Episcopacy endorsed by West Michigan Annual
Conference and the Detroit and West Michigan delegations.

2012 General and Jurisdictional Conference Delegate (2nd Elected):
Chair, General Conference Subcommittee of Church & Society II
Legislative Committee. Dealt with reproductive rights, brought
people from highly conflicting viewpoints together to listen deeply
to one another and develop legislation via consensus.

Other Connectional Church Experience:

Frequent preacher and teacher at area churches and at annual conference, jurisdictional,
and general church events including:

- ❖ 2020, Speaker on United Methodist Polity, Boston University
- ❖ 2019 Michigan-area School for Pastoral Ministry: Streams of Healing Waters
(preacher and presenter)
- ❖ 2019 Ethnic Young Adult's Gathering (preacher and presenter)
- ❖ 2019 NEXUS Convocation, "Love Resurrected" (preacher and workshop leader)
- ❖ 2019 Speaker Michigan MFSA, "Just, Compassionate, Inclusive: Future of
Michigan Methodism" event
- ❖ 2019 and 2016 Pre-General Conference Briefings (panelist and presenter)
- ❖ 2018 East Ohio Annual Conference RMN/MFSA Gathering (preacher and
workshop leader)
- ❖ 2018 School for Congregational Development (preacher and workshop leader)
- ❖ Presenter at GBCS and COSROW board meetings, Black Clergy Women's
annual meeting, and BMCR
- ❖ United Women of Faith (formerly UMW) Worldwide Assemblies, district and
annual conference meetings, including School for Christian Mission (presenter,
preacher)
- ❖ Annual Conference and jurisdictional Commission on Religion and Race
events/Beyond the Divide (presenter, preacher)

Ecumenical Church Experience:

- ❖ 2019 presenter for ELCA Church Council
- ❖ Presenter and preacher for 2019 British Methodist Church Council
- ❖ Served as a speaker for ecumenical and interfaith events in my community,
including as a presenter at the *Beyond Co-existence 8th Interfaith Dialogue
Series: Women of Faith, the Evolution of Women's Roles Within Religious
Communities*.

My background is ecumenical. I grew up Baptist, engaged in urban ministry in the AME
church where I worked with young girls as part of the *Ten Point Coalition*, an ecumenical
anti-violence ministry. I helped develop a ministry called "Do the Write Thing," in which
I used my love for poetry and writing to minister to teenage girls involved in gangs or at
risk for gang involvement.

Community Service Activity:

1. Current:

- ❖ Alumni Board of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
- ❖ For the past 28 years I have worked with people in recovery from addictions.

2. Previous:

- ❖ Speaker for the 2020 Sustainability Consortium Summit on Leadership
- ❖ Speaker at 2018 East Lansing High School interfaith baccalaureate service
- ❖ Regularly advocated for issues of justice in our community, including the Snyder administration's initiative on violence and policing in urban areas and efforts to address the water crisis in Flint, MI
- ❖ Volunteered at my children's schools

Publications, Awards, Honors:

Awards/Honors:

- ❖ 2019 keynote speaker for Anna Howard Shaw Lecture Series at Boston University
- ❖ 2018 Michigan Annual Conference Preacher
- ❖ West Michigan Annual Conference Peace Sermon of the Year Award

Publications:

- ❖ "Reflections on Leadership" with Eric Martin, five-part series on adaptive leadership, published by Connectional Table, Emerging Methodism website, 2019.
- ❖ "Women of Word Poetry and Power" blog, published by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, March 31, 2014.
- ❖ "Why I Choose to Be United Methodist Today," blog post for *About the Connection*, published by the Connectional Table, March, 11, 2013.
- ❖ "No Excuses," *Circuit Rider* (Call to Action Issue, 2012)

Special Interests and/or Hobbies:

I like working out and taking long walks. I garden (flowers). I enjoy reading and writing (poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction). I enjoy deep and engaging conversation. I love dance, music and theater and can spend hours in an art museum or botanical garden. I also love to travel and like to explore cities. I love dogs. We have a German Shephard named Kylo, and I enjoy making homemade dog treats for him. I enjoy attending my children's sporting events (soccer, basketball, track), and I love going to a pro-basketball game every now and then.

Faith and Leadership

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

The church is the body of Christ sent into the world to be the hands and heart of Christ. It is the sacramental representation of Christ present in the world through mission--seeking the

transformation of lives and of communities. In and through the church, Christ is in the world as one who serves.

In a sacramental and mystical sense, the church is the broken body of Christ. We remember and re-present this every time we commune together. In the same way that Christ's body was broken, we can be broken as individuals and as a community. Through the sacrament, we become whole.

The church, as Christ's sacramental body, has as its mission addressing the world's brokenness. The church is called to seek the healing of the world and to bring wholeness to individuals and communities. The church does this by bringing individuals into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and into loving community with each other, then teaching the love of God and of neighbor as self.

In this sense, the church is called to be *beloved community*. The church is its truest and best self when it reaches across boundaries and breaks down dividing walls to bring about beloved community. This means bringing about reconciliation and healing by bringing people to God in Christ, to the restoration of their best selves, and into community with others.

Share Your Vision for The United Methodist Church:

I envision a United Methodist Church that fully claims its identity as a church that centers grace. This is a church that is open and inclusive of all people. It is a church that addresses racism in the church and in society, and actively seeks reconciliation, healing and justice for its LGBTQIA+ children. Such a church approaches ministry with an outward-facing and invitational love.

I also envision a worldwide United Methodist Church that is autonomous in governance, contextual in ministry, and connected in mission. Such a church would expand regional governance as a way of moving away from relationship structures born of colonialism. Such a church would recognize and respect contextual realities while shaping equitable structures for decision making. This would mean increasing regional autonomy while remaining connected through ministry partnerships and through the continued sharing of resources in ways that are equitable and that recognize historic oppressions.

This also is a church that is thriving and innovating, while at the same time offering stability, grounded in community, human decency, and the maintenance of norms. This is a church that is on the cutting edge of innovation, especially at the annual conference and local church level, while at the same time honoring the value of its institutional witness. Indeed, the institutional witness of The United Methodist Church, grounded in our *Social Principles*, is vital at a time when societies are moving toward authoritarianism and the normalizing of division and violence.

I often think of our concerns about shrinking resources and the loss of churches and the narratives of scarcity and decline that we sometimes rehearse among ourselves. And what I come to time and again is that the needs of the world and the power of who and whose we are have never changed. The world is still in need of Christ's redeeming love. The world is still in need of the transformative and healing work of God's Spirit. And God still calls us to God's mission of redemption, healing, and transformation in the world, despite our size.

Therefore, we must claim a narrative of hope and agency, because Christ still redeems us and claims and calls us as his disciples. God still sends the Holy Spirit to equip and empower us for God's mission, no matter what our balance sheets may say. None of our supposed limitations

now or in the future can limit what God can and is doing, in and through The United Methodist Church. I envision a church that grabs hold of that vision and gets busy.

Describe Your Concept and Style of Leadership:

We are in a time of remarkable anxiety, uncertainty and flux. To thrive, we must build our capacity to adapt to a constantly changing environment and be willing to experiment our way to innovation. This requires leaders who are theologically reflective, spiritually open, creative, collaborative, and unafraid to try new things. They must be comfortable with ambiguity and tension and able to effectively invite others into the messiness of the creative process.

Such leaders must have a high degree of spiritual and emotional intelligence, and be able to self-regulate and connect with others in ways that keep the tension of change within tolerable limits. These leaders must communicate urgency and, at the same time, project a non-anxious presence.

I believe this kind of leadership begins with self. To lead in ways that are spiritually grounded and healthy, we must manage ourselves, care for ourselves and deal with our own issues. From healthy and spiritually grounded selves comes healthy relationships, the very foundation of effective leadership.

I am a relational, collaborative and innovative leader who makes my own physical, emotional and spiritual health a priority. I am a visionary who is mission-directed and willing to experiment. I believe in surrounding myself with strong leaders, then equipping and allowing them to lead. I enjoy leading with people who are open to the creative movement of the Spirit, and I enjoy mentoring and developing new leaders.

I believe one can lead from the center or from the margins, and that leadership does not require position or authority. Leadership is an action and a way of life that only needs the power of the Holy Spirit, a vision of the coming “*kingdom*” of God, and the willingness of the leader to risk.

Describe Your Gifts and Graces:

- ❖ I am disciplined in my spiritual practices, including study, fasting, worship, giving, fellowship, and sabbath. I have a consistent prayer life as my bedrock.
- ❖ I have been, and am, a consistent and passionate voice for justice and inclusion for all people. I take seriously the call of the Gospel to care for the “least of these” as we would for Christ himself.
- ❖ I am a strategic thinker and visionary with a passion for the health and vitality of the worldwide United Methodist Church. I bring creativity, passion, and an openness to the Spirit’s leading to my work. I enjoy experimenting on the way to innovation.
- ❖ I am a values-centered and effective administrator who can move projects to completion while working to surface values and center the mission. I take initiative and bring urgency to change.
- ❖ I am a reconciler. I hold strong convictions but am able to listen respectfully to others and bring people with divergent viewpoints together. I also am relational and collaborative. Other leaders want to join me in leadership.

- ❖ I know how to help people grieve, and I believe that one of the key challenges to helping facilitate change is knowing how to walk people through the grief involved with change.
- ❖ I communicate effectively through my speaking and writing. I am authentic, relatable, and can inspire with hope.
- ❖ I have experience with issues related to the world-wide United Methodist Church.
- ❖ I am teachable. Throughout my ministry, I have actively sought out mentors and have made theological reflection on my ministry and life a regular practice.
- ❖ I have disciplined and consistent practices of self-care. I am resilient but don't shy away from asking for help.
- ❖ I love deeply and am deeply loved by family and friends. I have a strong support network.

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

A call to the episcopacy is a call to the spiritual leadership of the worldwide church and contextual leadership within an annual conference. Given where we are currently in The United Methodist Church, that means a clear vision for the church that is emerging and of the mission to which God is calling us anew.

I respond to God's call with a visionary spirit and a pastor's heart. I bring a commitment to pour myself out for Christ, to surrender my life and gifts to the movement and guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to orient my ministry toward bringing about God's "*kindom*." My commitment is grounded in Wesley's covenant prayer: "*I am no longer my own, but thine...I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.*"

This has been my stance before God throughout my ministry and as I have experienced a call to the episcopacy. That sense of call recently has been affirmed by the Michigan Annual Conference, through its endorsement. God has prepared me for the role in a variety of ways:

God has given me an understanding of the worldwide church.

Ten years in leadership at the Connectional Table (CT), first as a board member and now as its chief executive, has helped me understand the complexities of our worldwide church and nurture relationships across our global connection. I have provided leadership for the Connectional Table in finding innovative ways to live into our worldwide nature more effectively. For instance, I have provided leadership in developing proposals for regionalization and led the CT in affirming the Christmas Covenant.

God has given me a clear vision for the church and the ability to inspire with hope.

I have a vision of an inclusive, vital, relevant, and innovative worldwide church living out its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. To realize that vision, an episcopal leader must inspire other leaders to lead with hope. Throughout my ministry, I have actively nurtured the leadership of both laity and clergy. As a former lay leader of one of my churches said,

“...leaders ask [Kennetha] to lead...She motivates and inspires people, and she articulates Christian values as a reconciler. For these and other reasons people like to work with her on difficult tasks.”-- Don Jost, East Lansing University UMC

God has prepared me to lead change.

Our worldwide church is in the midst of massive change. As we envision a different kind of future, there will be more change to come. As a local church pastor, superintendent, and in my CT role, I have had many opportunities to lead innovation and build capacity to adapt. I have learned how to help people grapple with the grief and loss associated with change.

In addition, I am an effective and values-centered administrator, with a deep understanding of United Methodist polity. I can project calm and provide clear direction in the midst of uncertainty and have a track record of moving organizational systems forward. This has been most evident in my leadership in developing new approaches to allocating our quadrennial denominational budget.

God has given me a clear sense of identity and of the importance of articulating identity.

I understand, from family and organizational systems work, the importance of clear self-definition. I have developed the ability to communicate clearly who I am and where I stand on issues, while reaching across divides and staying connected with those whose opinions differ from my own--for instance, in my leadership of a legislative subcommittee of the 2012 General Conference that reached consensus on reproductive rights.

I also have led The United Methodist Church in articulating its identity through the design and development of the [2021 State of the Church Report](#) and the Connectional Table’s project on [Imagining the Future](#), which explores identity, mission, vision and connectionalism. In addition, my work with United Methodist Communications to promote the [#BeUMC](#) campaign has highlighted the importance of clear identity as a precursor to shaping vision.

God has called me to place justice, equity and inclusion at the center.

I envision a United Methodist Church in which all people are fully included in its life and ministry, including our LGBTQIA+ siblings. I am committed to dismantling racism and all “isms” that stand in the way of the realization of God’s “*kingdom*.” I believe that justice, equity and inclusion must be our prophetic witness to the world. As such, I have a long track record of leadership in justice-related ministries at the local church, annual conference and general church levels and am a Michigan Annual Conference Peace Sermon of the Year awardee.

God has prepared me to address trauma.

I believe that we are experiencing complex trauma on both the individual and institutional levels. Consider just the past two years: a global pandemic that has killed millions; racial violence; the tragedies in Uvalde and Buffalo and other incidences of gun violence; natural disasters; division and strife within nations, especially the United States; significant and disruptive divisions within our own church; and a war in Europe. God has equipped me to deal with trauma by giving me a listening ear, a reconciling spirit, and solid spiritual grounding through a disciplined spiritual life. God has also blessed me with consistent practices of self-care. As well, I have done continuing education in trauma-informed ministry and understand the dynamics of trauma.

I believe that I have been called to this role for this time in the life of The United Methodist Church. I look forward to the opportunity to offer myself fully to the discernment of my lay and clergy colleagues in the North Central Jurisdiction. My prayer is that we would allow the full reign of God's Spirit in that process.

Endorsements:

- [The 2022 Michigan Annual Conference](#)
- [Michigan Conference Delegation to General and Jurisdictional Conference](#)

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

Episcopal Candidate Forum:

The Rev. Kennetha Bigham-Tsai 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.