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2020 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
of The United Methodist Church



**2020 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
Episcopal Nominee Information
for
Rev. Dr. Curtis Brown**



Name: Curtis Brown **Conference:** New England / Illinois Great Rivers

Street/PO Box Address: 1925 S. Bates Ave.

City/State/Zip: Springfield, IL 62704

Telephone: 774-279-1537 **Fax:** n/a **Email:** revcurtisbrown@gmail.com

Current Appointment: Director of Connectional Ministries, Illinois Great Rivers Conference

Family: I'm married to Rev. Meredith Manning Brown. I have two teenaged daughters, Joy and Charis, and a cat named Splat.

Background and Experience:

Formal Education and Significant Continuing Education:

- Doctor of Ministry, Community Organizing, Garrett Evangelical Seminary, 2018
- Master of Divinity, Boston University School of Theology, 1996
- Bachelor of Arts, University of Evansville, 1993
- Certified New Church Coach, Path 1 Discipleship Ministries

- Certified Leader, Disciple Bible Study
- Certified Trainer, Creating Congregational Cultures of Generosity, Lake Institute on Philanthropy
- Certified Coach Trainer, Natural Church Development

Ordination Dates and Conference of Which You Were a Member:

- Full Member in the Order of Elder, New England Conference, 2004
- Probationary Deacon, New England Conference, 1998
- Licensed Local Pastor, New England Conference, 1996
- Certified Candidate for Ministry, Southern Illinois Conference, 1996

Previous Work Experiences and Pastoral Appointments:

- Illinois Great Rivers Conference: Director of Connectional Ministries
- Discipleship Ministries: Path 1 New Church Strategist
- Pacific Northwest Conference: Director of Faith Community Development
- New England Conference: Director of Congregational Development
- First UMC, Framingham MA: Senior Pastor
- Wellspring UMC, Shrewsbury MA: Associate Pastor for Evangelism
- First UMC, Westborough MA: Associate Pastor, Planting Pastor
- Wakefield-Lynnfield UMC, Wakefield MA: Interim Pastor
- Wakefield-Lynnfield UMC, Wakefield MA: Youth Minister
- Scarritt-Bennett Center, Nashville TN: Interpretive Organic Gardener
- Parkway UMC, Milton MA: Student Intern Pastor
- Tomahawk UMC, Tomahawk WI: Campground Minister
- St. Paul's UCC, Evansville, IN: Youth Director
- First UMC: Metropolis IL: Interim Youth Minister
- First UMC, Carmi, IL: Youth Minister

Connectional and Ecumenical Church Experiences:

1. Current:

- North Central Jurisdiction Mission Council
- Extended Cabinet Illinois Great Rivers Conference
- Co-Chair, Illinois Great Rivers Connectional Table
- Chair, Illinois Great Rivers Sessions Committee
- "Our Conference, Our Kids" Fundraising Committee
- Association of Directors of Connectional Ministries
- Youth Sunday School Class Leader, Douglas Avenue UMC

2. Previous:

- United Methodist School of Congregational Development Planning Team
- Network of United Methodist Congregational Developers
- Western Jurisdiction Congregational Development Coordinator

- Path1 New Church Starts Discipleship Ministries Advisory Board
- Core Staff, Bishop Jack & Marjorie Tuell Center for Leadership Excellence
- Vice President, New England United Methodist Federal Credit Union
- Chair, New England Conference New Church Starts Committee
- New England Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women
- Core Launch Team & Marketing Coordinator, Evergreen UMC
- Founder & Consultant, www.WorshipMonkey.org (worship design consulting)
- Past President, Boston University Theological Students Association
- Jr. High & High School Church Camp Counselor and Mission Trip leader, various sites in Illinois, Massachusetts & Washington
- President, East St. Louis District United Methodist Youth Council

Community Service Activity:

1. Current:

- Member, Band Parents Association Springfield High School
- Volunteer, Springfield High School Theater Program
- Member, Washington Trails Association
- Member, Appalachian Mountain Club
- Member, Cahokia Mounds Society

2. Previous:

- Volunteer, Thurston County Food Bank
- Volunteer, South Sound Reading Foundation
- Volunteer, South Puget Sound Habitat for Humanity
- Girls Volleyball Coach, South Sound YMCA
- Girls Basketball Coach, South Sound YMCA
- Adult Scout Leader, Girl Scouts of Western Washington
- Adult Scout Leader, Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts
- Eagle Scout, Boy Scouts of America

Publications, Awards, Honors:

- Author, *Planters: A Leadership Approach to Starting New Faith Communities* (Upper Room: to be released February 2021)
- Author, “First Twelve” New Faith Community Planting Training
- Author, “What is a New Faith Community” Path 1 Resource
- Author, “Beta Church Vitality Process” Pacific Northwest Conference
- Keynote Speaker, Pacific Northwest Youth CONVO
- Keynote Speaker, Trailhead New Church Planter Training
- Keynote Speaker, Step One New Church Planter Training
- Presenter, United Methodist School of Congregational Development
- Presenter, United Methodist Church Planters Gathering
- Presenter, North Central Jurisdiction New Pathways Training
- Presenter, Southeastern Jurisdiction New Pathways Training
- Presenter, Route 122 Congregational Vitality Event

- Presenter, New England School of Congregational Development

Special Interests and/or Hobbies:

- Backpacking and Hiking
- Playing Guitar
- Honda Cub & Passport Motorbike Restoration
- Pre-Columbian Native American Archeology

Faith and Leadership

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

I became a Christian through the love and grace of Christ I experienced embodied in the people of Union United Methodist Church in Belleville, Illinois. They weren't perfect people, but they displayed to me the perfect love of God. When I began to feel a call into ministry, I started to look around and explore how I could help others find the grace that I had found. That search led me back to the local church itself. I believe that there is nothing more powerful in the lives of people or communities than a vital congregation doing God's work in meaningful ways. I believe in the power of local churches to do amazing works of power and love.

In broad terms, the Church is the body of Christ, the community of believers who are dedicated to becoming more like Christ and living for Christ's mission and purpose in the world. This identity is expressed in the mission of The United Methodist Church: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." The Church is to multiply new disciples through evangelism and witness, and it is to help those disciples grow in faith and maturity through spiritual practice and continuous encounters with God's grace. Disciples, however, don't exist just for their own discipleship. Instead, they exist to follow after Jesus in transforming this world through love, justice, holiness, compassion, mercy, and peace-making. The Church multiplies disciples who, in turn, multiply grace by seeking the realization of God's vision of a renewed creation. In the Wesleyan tradition, we have described this as the two-fold mission of personal piety and social holiness.

Share Your Vision for The United Methodist Church:

I see a wonderful and powerful future for The United Methodist Church. I know that there are loud voices decrying the future of our denomination and resigning it to the past's heap of failed religious organizations. However, I don't see it that way. We have our troubles, some of which will take a great effort to overcome, but if The United Methodist Church did not exist in this world, I believe we would desire to create something very much like it. Even with its obvious flaws, The United Methodist Church still does some amazing and Spirit-filled work for the mission of Christ, and it has the capacity for even more. I believe that our current conflict is the birth-pangs of something new being born. We don't fully know what denominational forms are being birthed, but I am hopeful for what God can work in our midst.

I see a future for The United Methodist Church that is inclusive of all peoples and deeply engaged in partnership with the communities it serves. When the global church sees all people as

worthy of full involvement in the Gospel, it must confront all of its internalized barriers to evangelism, especially its racism, sexism, nationalism, and heterosexism. In The United Methodist Church in the United States, our easy assimilation of white privilege, xenophobia, misogyny, and homophobia are scandalously self-imposed limits on our witness to a radically loving God. We must confront these limits and their intersections with all of the ways our society seeks to divide and isolate some peoples from the whole people of God. I believe this begins with personal and institutional commitments to intersectional justice and congregational commitments to engaged service and witness with the actual people God has placed within their communities.

I see a future for The United Methodist Church that is innovative and willing to take risks in adapting to the rapidly changing societies and cultures that it inhabits. The “one size fits all” standardized methods of previous generations have already failed. In their place, we have seen the emergence of contextually relevant, demographically specific, methodologically innovative, continuously adaptive congregations across the world. Our denominational systems and structures have too often seen these new forms of church as “weird” or unusual special cases, but they are the Holy Spirit’s testimony to the future of our church and, as such, provide us a glimpse of a vital future for our congregations and denomination. In order to follow the Spirit’s lead, we must turn our faces away from staring backwards at our past with its nostalgic stories of former glories and grief at what has been lost. Instead, we must look to our future as glimpsed in the eyes of emerging leaders who see the power and hope that our church can offer the world. More than just permission to break with traditions, these leaders need us to fundamentally transform our denomination so that The United Methodist Church systemically embraces innovation, adaptation, and risk as normative at every level.

I see a victorious future for The United Methodist Church. I have carried with me for many years a conversation with a young leader in our church. We were talking about their future, and they shared honestly about their fears and reservations about our denomination. The conversation concluded with this simple statement, “Curtis, I’m tired of being on a losing team.” In the United States, our denomination is obsessed with telling stories of our losses. These stories cloud our institutional atmosphere and keep us from clearly seeing the victories Christ is winning all around us. I see the amazing things that God is doing in individuals, communities, and nations through United Methodists around the world, even in the United States. I see a future filled with stories of God’s victories, but we have to do a better job celebrating these stories. I see a future filled with testimony to God’s daily triumphs in our churches instead of obituaries recording the losses of our institutional past.

Describe Your Concept and Style of Leadership:

I believe that leadership is a relationship between the leader and the led. As such, I seek to be engaged and involved collaboratively with those whom I am called to lead. Together, we form a leadership relationship that is mutually beneficial and serves our common mission. This requires adaptivity, as different individuals and cultures have different expectations and needs from their leaders. Some people and situations require leaders who are more positional and formal, while sometimes familiarity and casual leadership is more contextually appropriate. As a leader, I try to meet people where they are in order to foster progress in our mutual aims.

In practice, the word that comes up a lot from people I've worked with in describing my leadership has been "fun." I don't believe that this is a frivolous or incidental description. For me, this indicates that the teams I've led feel free and empowered in our work, even when it has been difficult or trying. We have seen each other as real and whole people, and we have joined together fully to support and serve one another in our tasks. I take this description as a great compliment.

I am a risk-taking leader, with a high threshold for experimentation and failure. I have a track record of trying new things, evaluating their effectiveness, improving on their successes, or moving past their failures without ascribing guilt or shame. I believe in exploring options and seeking multiple contingencies, even if they call into question current practices or long-held traditions. I am a thoughtful and strategic leader, who values daring goals and specific plans of action. I hold myself to a high standard of execution and excellence, and I ask the same of those on my teams. I am a curious leader, who wants to understand people and their goals. Using my experience as a trained leadership coach, I have learned to ask more questions than to offer directions. Often powerful questions will help people to discover for themselves a better way forward, and they are always more motivated to implement their own plans than a hierarchical directive.

Finally, I believe in bold and courageous leadership. As a leader, I have seen my teams take the greatest risks and achieve the biggest goals when I have been appropriately vulnerable, fully sharing in their risks and challenges. I believe in looking clearly at challenges, describing them plainly, and honestly assessing resources. Jesus warns about trying to build a tower without counting the available amount of construction materials or going to war without assessing your opponent. Courageous leadership is not Pollyannaish, especially when it comes to the potential costs or risks. When we see together the risks and opportunities, we can clearly and courageously step out in faith, knowing what is within our capacities and what we hope God will provide.

Describe Your Gifts and Graces:

As a leader, I most often rely on the gift of strategic vision. I know this isn't one of the spiritual gifts enumerated by Paul, but I understand it as a grace from God that has blessed my life. Strategic vision is the ability to see a different future and build a plan to move from a current situation into that future. This gift shows up in my top five Clifton Strengths: Strategic, Achiever, Ideation, Learner, and Analytical. It has been especially helpful in leading local church, annual conference, and general agency teams through significant transitions and into greater excellence, but I use it in every part of my life, from planning backpacking trips to growing in my practice of spiritual disciplines. I also use the gift of strategic vision to help me connect and inspire people. In times of personal or organizational transition, such as the reordering we are experiencing in The United Methodist Church, people long for a vision of a better future, and I believe they will rally around an achievable plan that will help to get them to that future.

I have a high capacity for execution and personal discipline. I tend to work quickly through tasks, accomplishing a lot in a relatively brief amount of time. I can keep multiple projects in my mind, and I understand complex systems of organization and relationships. I am deeply curious

about people, and I am always seeking to better understand the people with whom I am serving. This curiosity helps me to build richer relationships and helps our teams to better engage our shared mission. For me, this curiosity also leads into empathy, which helps me to be more pastoral and caring with those around me.

I have a deep knowledge of innovation and emerging forms of church. I have spent the last two decades working with ecclesiastical entrepreneurs in The United Methodist Church, and I have been personally involved in starting three new churches. I understand the methods and mindsets necessary to innovate new faith communities, and I have personal and direct experience with the necessary sacrifices and costs required in leading a new expression of church. The United Methodist Church must be remade by refocusing on Christ's risky and world-changing evangelistic mission if it hopes to effectively reach new generations. I believe that I have some of the necessary experience and knowledge to help lead in that task.

Finally, I think the greatest gift that I bring is that I know who I am. Leading in an anxious organization, like The United Methodist Church, is full of traps and pressures designed to sabotage a leader's self-understanding. I have seen how tempting it is to cave in to organizational and relational pressure that prefers the uncomfortable present to the risky but preferable future. It is tempting for leaders to forget their values in the face of complex and difficult situations. When I have faced similar situations, I have relied on my core convictions and knowledge of what I most value: I am a beloved child of God, graced with new life by Christ, and partnered with the Holy Spirit in welcoming all creation into this same self-conception. When I have not lived according to these values, I believe I have honestly owned up to my failings, and I have sought the courage to repent and renew my commitment to try again.

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

As I have prayed and sought to discern God's calling, I keep returning to the fact that I am an unlikely candidate for Bishop. Although I have worked with many Bishops, Superintendents, and Cabinets in helping to select and supervise pastors in special appointments, I have not been a District Superintendent myself. In the North Central Jurisdiction, the last person to be elected as a Bishop without being a Superintendent was Woodie White. Although I grew up in Illinois, served congregations in Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin, taught and consulted throughout the North Central Jurisdiction, and currently live and serve in The Illinois Great Rivers Conference, I am a clergy member of the New England Conference. The last person to be elected as a Bishop across jurisdictional boundaries was Leontine Kelly. I have personally known both Bishop White and Bishop Kelly, and they are giants of the church, whereas I am merely a very tall person. Reflecting on their ministries fills me with a deep sense of "imposter syndrome," and I wonder if I can live up to the standard of spiritual leadership I have seen in them.

However, as I have reached out to trusted friends and mentors, they have reminded me that this is a unique moment in the life of our church that calls for unlikely leaders. They have pointed out my experience and effectiveness in leading organizations through radical change in the face of chaotic pressures. They have reminded me of my invitation to them to take big risks to live into God's dreams. I have always taken to heart the words from Wesley's covenant prayer, especially

the phrase, “put me to what thou wilt.” In my prayers, I have envisioned my life as an offering, laid upon the celestial altar of God, for God to use however God sees helpful. Through my prayers and discernment partners, I have come to see that my own self-doubts should not keep me from offering myself and my leadership in any way that God, through the discernment of the church, should see fit.

I believe that our denomination is at a critical inflection point, where we can turn our journey toward a renewed future or be lost in the current storm of denominational division and discord. I believe that God has prepared me through gifts, experience, and relationships with a leadership perspective that is useful and necessary for this time of transition. I believe that I can effectively use these gifts through the office of a Bishop in The United Methodist Church to further Christ’s mission in the world. And so, with these beliefs, I offer myself to the discernment of the delegates for consideration as an episcopal candidate.

Episcopal Election Covenant has been signed and received by 2020 NCJ Secretary, Rev. Paul R. White.

Episcopal Candidate Forum:

The Rev. Dr. Brown 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 April 1, 2020.