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2020 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
of The United Methodist Church



**2020 North Central Jurisdictional Conference
Episcopal Nominee Information
For
Rev. Sylvester Weatherall**



Name: Sylvester Weatherall

Conference: Illinois Great Rivers

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Current Appointment: Directing Pastor – Calvary UMC

Family: Wife – Reverend Aletha R. Weatherall
Sons – Reverend Monty Weatherall (47); Rico Weatherall, (45); Cartavas Weatherall, (43)
Daughters- Reverend Rhoda T. Warner (26) Blessen Pratt (17)

Background and Experience:

Formal Education and Significant Continuing Education:

- College: McKendree University, 1988, B.A.
- Seminary: Eden Theological Seminary, 1991, M. Div.
- Significant continuing education work completed. Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary – 2yr Clergy Coaching Program. A Certificate of Completion was awarded.
- Inter-cultural competency training through GCORR.
- Community Organizing training through the Gamaliel Foundation. Gamaliel Foundation works in the community organizing tradition of Saul Alinsky, who began his work in Chicago with the “Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council” in 1939.

Ordination Dates and Conference of Which You Were a Member:

- Year of ordination as deacon – 1990 Southern Illinois Conference
- Year of ordination as elder – 1993 Southern Illinois Conference

Previous Work Experiences and Pastoral Appointments:

- Southern Railway 1974-1985: I worked as a Switchman. I was still in High school when I was hired. Eighteen months later, I became one of the youngest Conductors for Southern railway. In that capacity, I supervised numerous Switchmen and engineers. The Conductor is responsible for the safety of the crew and the train.
- Lebanon First UMC 1986-1990: I preached about five times a year. Position: served as Student local Pastor.
- East Saint Louis Metropolitan Ministry, 1990 – 1992: Lead Organizer prior to starting the local church in Washington Park.
- Washington Park Grace UMC, 1990-2002: Washington Park Grace was chartered by Bishop White in 1992. At the Chartering service nearly one hundred youth and 60 adults joined the church that day. The Washington Park Grace Church was a new church start. That was in the days before the Congregational Development Team. There were no funds. In fact I was in seminary and I had to work a full-time job in addition to starting the church. When I left in 2002 they had over 150 people worshipping.
- Springfield East Side Mission Parish, 2002 – 2012: (Springfield Grace-Springfield Kumler: Sometime in 2005-2006 they dropped the parish name and just went by Springfield Grace-Springfield Kumler.) When I came, Grace was averaging 50 in worship while carrying 175 on the rolls. Kumler averaged 35 people while carrying 200 on the rolls. The worship attendance at Kumler UMC in 2002 was 25 to 35. When I left in 2012 it was 135-150. And, the church maintained two facilities. Both were completely remodeled with no debt incurred. Grace UMC averaged 50-70 in 2002. When I was

reassigned in 2012, they averaged 100-125. It also underwent major renovations. Again, with no debt incurred. The Bishop and the Cabinet called this appointment the great experiment. It was so named because this was the first time a Black pastor served a Caucasian and African American congregations.

- In 2012 I was appointed The District Superintendent for the Spoon River District. I followed a long history of successful DS's including my colleague on the Cabinet, Janice Griffith.
- In 2017 I was appointed as the District Superintendent of the Sangamon River District.
- In January of 2020 I was appointed as the Directing pastor of Normal Calvary UMC. Normal Calvary has a total membership 1308 with an Average worship of 540 in 2018. It is one of The IGRC's large churches. It has about 20 staff members.

Connectional and Ecumenical Church Experiences:

1. Current:

- Member of the Board of Trustees of McKendree University
- Elected in 2016 to the Board of Directors General Commission of Church and Society
- In-Coming Chair of the North Central Jurisdiction Commission on Race and Religion in July 2020
- North Central Jurisdiction of Black Methodist for Church Renewal
- Jurisdictional Conference alternate Delegate – 2020

2. Previous:

- Co-Chair of the 2019 General Conference Delegation
- General Conference Delegate – 2016 (First Clergy elected and head of the Delegation)
- General Finance Administration Task Force for Tithe Based Apportionments
- Conference Commission and Race Chair
- Member of the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry
- North Central Jurisdiction Structure Task Force
- General Conference Delegate 1996 (1st Reserve) 2000, 2008, (2nd Reserve) 2012 delegate, 2016 delegate and 2019 Delegate
- Jurisdictional Conference Delegate – 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016

Community Service Activity:

1. Current:

- Member of the Board of Trustees McKendree University

2. Previous:

- Member of the Springfield, IL Homeless United for Change Coalition
- Member of the Washington Park Improvement Association
- Member of the Enos Park neighborhood improvement association

- Member of the Wesley Village Board
- Member Macomb Wesley Foundation

Publications, Awards, Honors:

- Two time recipient of the Harry Denman Award from the Foundation for Evangelism (An Affiliate of the of the Board of Discipleship of the UMC)

Special Interests and/or Hobbies:

Fishing, Bike Riding, B.B. Cue competitions, cooking at home, shopping.

Faith and Leadership

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

Amazon currently offers almost 2000 books on the nature and mission of the church. This vast offering includes a cacophony of opinions, perspectives, nuances...and even a few crackpot ideas. The diversity and chaos of these various books imitates the confusion and commotion we feel today in our churches.

And so, I try to keep my understanding of the nature and mission of the church basic and simple: we are the body of Christ and our mission is to relate to people as Jesus did in the gospel stories.

The Apostle Paul asserts that the church is a treasure in earthen vessels. We are indeed a treasure when we are glorifying God, edifying believers, and transforming the peoples and systems of our world toward compassion and justice. And we are an earthen vessel when it comes to our rules, buildings, organizations, clericalism, debates, finances, and internal politics. The nature of the church, then, is to be the Body of Christ...in earthen, fallible vessels.

The mission of the church is the same as the mission of Jesus: to proclaim hope to the world, to replace sectarian religion with humanitarian religion, to heal the sick, to free the prisoners and debtors, to touch and redeem the lepers and outcasts, to raise the dead and deadened, to expel the demons that accuse and divide us, and to maintain a community of hospitality and love.

Share Your Vision for The United Methodist Church:

My vision for the United Methodist Church is that we be three things: 1) effectively “United,” 2) organically “Methodist,” and 3) authentically a “Church.” I’ll elaborate in reverse order:

Church: Scripture is primary in our United Methodist covenant. Scripture says that the church is the Body of Christ. So, as scripture gives us a profile of Jesus, it is also giving us a profile of our Church’s future. I see the United Methodist Church collectively imitating Jesus: being full of grace and mercy, caring for the poor, offering hope, challenging systems, standing in solidarity with the oppressed, welcoming everyone to the table, and infusing gatherings with joy.

Methodist: Methodism is a tradition: a living, organic, regenerating tradition. Some traditions stifle change and eat their young. But Methodism is a tradition going on three centuries, in some times and places wildly regenerating and reproducing, a seedbed of new forms of worship, fellowship, justice making, and disciple-making. From time to time, like any tradition, Methodism has struggled to find its way in changing cultures. But our traditions of bringing together heart and mind, mercy and justice, prayer and action, social holiness and personal holiness...give me great hope for the future...and great resources from the past to nurture us.

United: In John 17, Jesus prays for his followers to all be one. In Philippians, Paul urges the church to be of one mind and one accord. In Ephesians, we have the beautiful image of two sides becoming one through Jesus Christ. To be “United” is a theological imperative from scripture.

The United Methodist Church is now facing three great alienations...simultaneously. Each one is hindering our unity. There is alienation with the left, alienation with the right, and alienation with LGBTQ+ persons.

Millions of people on the left have already exited the church...or refused to try us out, under the assumption that it is not safe to express liberal beliefs openly. Ironically, many people on the right believe that the church is becoming increasingly hostile to their conservative beliefs. And LGBTQ+ persons have accurately heard the General Conference say to them that the United Methodist Church will not offer them the full range of pastoral services that are offered to heterosexuals...nor will the United Methodist Church be open to commissioning or ordaining anyone whose intimate relationships are not strictly heterosexual.

Under our polity, a primary role of the bishops is to create and maintain unity in the church. As a denomination, we have encountered alienating quarrels before, but never three major alienating forces simultaneously. Any new bishop must be prepared to address all three of these realities.

It grieves me that both liberals and conservatives feel unwelcome in the United Methodist Church. My own life has been nurtured by numerous conservative heroes I have met along the way. And my ministry has been stretched by those who are my liberal heroes. I could not be a faithful Christian without both of those “parents.” True liberalism and true conservatism are not incompatible. Conservatives bring reflection, caution, responsibility, and love of tradition to the community. And liberals bring generosity, risk-taking, experimentation, and imagination to the community. The two have only become incompatible in recent years due to outside political agitation and polarization. Loving, thoughtful, assertive conservatives are needed in the United Methodist Church. And I will do everything I can as a bishop to keep conservatives connected. Loving, thoughtful, assertive liberals are also needed in the United Methodist Church. And I will do everything I can to assure that our hearts, minds, and doors are open to them. People who are truly mature even find traces of both the conservative and the liberal in their beliefs. Jesus was neither a Democrat nor Republican. But He was Liberal, and He was a Conservative. In Jesus we find our way to be united.

We can continue to study and debate and interpret Bible passages at leisure. But we cannot afford, for a single day, to continue “spiritually” castrating and sterilizing people whose God-

created sexuality offends us. To deny a person's sexuality is to deny their humanity. In an egregious overreach of social engineering, (ironically, something liberals are usually accused of doing) the General Conference has, in effect, relegated LGBTQ+ persons to only partial status in the church, just as the original constitution of the United States reckoned black slaves as being only 3/5 human. Then and now, such dehumanization is a violation against Jesus and everything he taught us.

Describe Your Concept and Style of Leadership:

My leadership can best be described as 1) thoughtfully strategic, 2) respectful of persons, but not indulgent, 3) laced with humor and creativity, 4) executed through teamwork and allies, and 5) focused on end results.

There are many things the church still needs to learn about strategy. But one thing I will mention here: good strategy does not start with dreams and then jump toward building castles in the sky. It begins with reality and then gathers people to go along on the journey toward the dream. All strategy has to be grounded in reality, plausibility, contingency plans, leadership development, and goals that matter.

It is my understanding that a bishop has three main leadership powers: the power of appointment, the power of ordination and commissioning, and the power of presiding. The bishop decides where to deploy the workers. The bishop not only ordains and commissions people, but also has a big role in setting up programs to train and equip those who are serving the church. And the bishop decides who gets to approach the microphone and speak. Those who are voting to elect a bishop should ask lots of questions about how these powers will be wielded. All episcopal powers exist in the context of our denomination's Book of Discipline which gives conferences, congregations, clergy, and laity powers as well. We lead *together* in the United Methodist Church.

Describe Your Gifts and Graces:

I bring a broad range of gifts and experiences, from urban, suburban and small-town settings. I have been gifted with the ability to bring people together through listening, advocating, and finding common ground. Most importantly, I love people and have the ability to see Christ in everyone. I love preaching. God has blessed with me oratorical gifts. I love to teach. I have the heart of a teacher. Some of my other gifts are: service, encouragement, generosity, church growth, music, and hospitality. According to Strength Finders I am Positive, Strategic, WOO (*Winning Others Over*) Communicative, and Relational.

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

I ran for bishop in 2016...and lost: got lots of votes, but not enough. And that loss knocked me down more than I thought it would. Hard. I wasn't ready for that defeat...and some of the humiliation and bitterness and depression that followed...the restlessness...and even aimlessness. I couldn't figure out how *my* loss could possibly fit into God's plan.

No one ever runs for a lofty position without some excess of pride. And there's nothing like a loss to wound one's pride, especially if that loss is by vote of one's friends and colleagues...and fellow members in the body of Christ.

In 2016, I had run on my accomplishments, but they weren't enough. And I determined I was never going to go through the humiliation of an episcopal election again.

But then, it is like a thorn in your flesh. It disturbs your sleep. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about the growing divisions in the United Methodist Church, and all the people who feel hurt or excluded by our decisions and ongoing debates. I think about churches struggling, comparing themselves to their happier pasts...or to other churches in town that are flourishing. I think about loved ones in my own family who have left the church because they have felt judged by it. I wake up thinking about all the pastors I know who are struggling with depression, and all the laity I know who are weighed by anxieties. I am hounded by the quarrels and the angst and the superficial voices trying to tell us that everything will magically work itself out...when it's not...saying peace, peace, when there is no peace.

And a holy spirit haunts me into offering myself again. I wrestle with personal questions: how can someone who struggles with false pride, fear (to let people know what I really think), anger, humiliation, and bitterness possibly make an effective bishop. But then I know it is only through my weaknesses that I have come to know the Lord who leads me through these valleys. It is only through my want that I have come to know the blessings of the shepherd who restores my soul. And while I'm not at all a better person than my fellow candidates, perhaps my personal story: of pride and woundedness, of grace and growth, of wrestling and hope...is the right match at this time for where the United Methodist Church is in its own story.

It seemed that there was no pathway for me in this episcopal election, because we are replacing a white male bishop and a white female bishop. It has been the honorable custom of our jurisdiction to elect qualified persons in such a manner that we try to maintain demographic representation. We want our jurisdictional college of bishops to reflect the demographics of our churches. But this election is unique. We are replacing two bishops with only one. And while I have nothing new to add demographically, I do offer my story to the church. It is my journey, my ups and downs that might well connect with people and cause folks of any gender or race or ethnicity to know that I identify with them.

One of the ways God has prepared me for the episcopacy is through showing me various qualities in the six bishops who have been my shepherd since I became a pastor. Bishop Woodie White ordained me as a deacon. I have never seen anyone combine such power with such grace and gentleness. I'm still growing in the paradox he demonstrated. Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher bore the brunt of a vicious sexism when she came to our conference and felt the heavy burden of uniting two unruly conferences into one. And yet she stayed spiritually centered and shared with us her enormous curiosity and love of various writers and original thinkers. Bishop David Lawson was a master at navigating between the roles of being lofty and inspiring one moment and painfully honest and effective the next.

And finally, I was privileged to serve on the cabinet for three other bishops: Bishop Gregory V. Palmer, Bishop Jonathan D. Keaton, and Bishop Frank J. Beard. I watched Bishop Palmer: he never met a stranger, genuinely loved people and relished their company, and built bridges to help people understand and love each other. I watched Bishop Keaton: a black man who grew up in the Jim Crow south, but whose life became a testimonial to the spiritual, “We Shall Overcome.” He was a stable bishop who grounded himself in Scripture and the Book of Discipline and led with utter fairness...and a predictability that empowered others. Bishop Frank Beard: knows personally the power of Christ and the church to rescue and transform a person’s life. He is a person of enormous generosity and inclusiveness, who embodies his motto of making “space and grace” for everyone, liberal or conservative in the church. Each of the six bishops I have witnessed planted seeds in my heart and mind that are still growing.

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

Episcopal Candidate Forum:

Rev. Weatherall 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.