



David Mark Wilson  
Endorsed Episcopal Candidate  
Oklahoma Indian Missionary  
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**Family Overview:**

- Single

**Educational Overviews:**

- Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters (2009) Bacone College, Muskogee, Oklahoma
- Master of Divinity Degree (1995) Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Oklahoma
- Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications, (1990) Oklahoma City University, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

**Ordination**

- Elder (1995) Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference
- Deacon, (1993) Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference

**Pastoral Appointments:**

- 2002- Present- Conference Superintendent, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC). Responsibilities include new church development, training of clergy, licensing school and continuing education. Member of appointed Cabinet. Relate to general agencies for funding and training.

- 2007-2015- Lead Coordinator for the North Oklahoma City Native American Ministry, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This new fellowship began meeting in my home in 2007. We were later led to use the facility at Leland Clegg UMC. The fellowship meets once a month, attracting new persons and providing a place of worship and fellowship in an emerging area.
- 1996-2004- Pastor, Norman First American UMC. Served the church while serving under appointment in the conference office. My appointment began one month after the church was chartered as a UMC. The church met in three different locations before we built our current facility in Norman. Membership started with 25 and was up to 90 upon departure from the church.
- 1995-2002- Director of Promotions/Interpretations for OIMC. Responsible for relating to United Methodist Church as a whole to promote the conference for General Advance Specials for funding purposes. Worked with the General Board of Global Ministries and itinerated across the connection for many years. Also produced the conference news and promotion publications. The Conference Council on Ministries director position was later eliminated therefore as Director of Promotions/Interpretations I assumed the role of coordinating age-level programming for the annual conference as well as coordinated Volunteer in Mission teams in and out of OIMC.
- 1993-1995- Pastor of D.D. Etchieson UMC, Tahlequah, Oklahoma.
- 1991-1995- Served as the Campus Minister for the Native American Campus Ministry program at Northeastern State University. Was invited to begin a specific ministry for Native American students at the university that has the largest number of Native American students of any in the country. Also served the local church the last two years.

### **General Church Leadership**

- 2020 -General Conference Delegate
- 2020 Jurisdictional Conference Delegate
- 2016-2020-Member, General Board of Global Ministries
- 2016-Present, Member of GBHEM Loans and Scholarship Advisory Committee
- 2016- General Conference Delegate
- 2016- Jurisdictional Conference Delegate
- 2012-2016- Present: Member and Secretary, South Central Jurisdiction Episcopal Committee
- 2015- Organized and Presenter at the 2015 Acts of Repentance Service, Arkansas Annual Conference
- 2015- Organized and Presenter at the 2015 Acts of Repentance Service, North Texas Annual Conference
- 2015- Organized Acts of Repentance visits/services for the Oklahoma Annual Conference, 2015 Annual Conference
- 2012- present - Review of Scholarship Awards, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
- 2012 - General Conference Delegate
- 2012 - Jurisdictional Conference Delegate
- 2012 - Co-Chair, South Central Jurisdiction Host Committee
- 2011 – Delegate, World Methodist Conference, Durbin, South Africa
- 2011 -Advisory Member, Acts of Repentance, GCCUIC
- 2008-2012 – Member and Secretary, of SCJ Episcopal Committee
- 2008- 2012 - Member of UMC Connectional Table
- 2000-2012 - Chairperson, Native American Comprehensive Plan
- 2000-2008 - Member of General Commission on General Conference
- 2004-2008 - Served as Chair of Facilities for General Conference

- 2008 - General Conference Delegate. Served on Global Ministries Committee and was Vice Chair of the committee
- 2008 - Co-Chair, General Conference Committee on Agenda and Calendar
- 2000 - Alternate Delegate to General Conference
- 2000-2008 - Member, General Board of Global Ministries. Served on the Committee to Eliminate Institutional Racism and was Chair of Policy and Bylaws from 2004-2008
- 2008-2009 - Study Leader for UMW School of Christian Mission. Led the study "Giving our Hearts Away: Native American Survival" at UMW Regional School and also led the study at the Arkansas, and Memphis Conference School of Christian Missions.
- 1996, 1998, 2000; - Served as committee member of Exploration 2000
- 1996-2000 - Member of General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Member of the Loans and Scholarships Committee
- 1996 - Served as Secretarial Staff for General Conference
- 1992 - Served with the Inter-Ethnic Development Strategy Development Task Force as writer of their daily publications for General Conference
- 1992-1996- Presenter and Design Team Member, UMC Student Forum

### **Conference and Oklahoma Area leadership**

- 2002-Present - Member of Appointed Cabinet, OIMC. Also serve as Liaison on Board of Ordained Ministry, and Council on Finance and Administration
- 2002-present - Coordinate and organize the annual conference sessions
- 2002-present - Organize, structure and teach at the Local Pastor's Licensing Schools
- 2011- present -Chair, OIMC Endowment Gala
- 2001 - Chaplain, Ground Zero, New York City. Traveled with group of Native clergy and lay from OIMC to provide help for Native American construction workers
- 1997-2002 - Editor, Conference Newspaper
- 1996-2002 - Conference Secretary
- 1996-2002 - Coordinator of the Conference Council Youth Ministry
- 1997-2002 - Coordinator of the Young Adult programming

### **District**

- 1989-1995 - Northeast District Youth Coordinator 1989-1995
- 1996-1999- Secretary, District Committee on Board of Ordained Ministry

### **Additional areas of service**

- 1997-2015 - Adjunct Faculty, Wimberly School of Religion, Oklahoma City University
- 2002-Present - Member of Board of Trustees, Oklahoma City University; Chair, of University-Church Relations Committee
- 2006-Present- Adjunct faculty, Perkins School of Theology Course of Study School, Southern Methodist University
- 2010-2012- Adjunct faculty, St. Paul School of Theology, Oklahoma City Campus
- 2010-2019- Organizer, Native American Campus Ministries, OCU
- 2009-Present - Member, Oklahoma City Indian Clinic, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- 2009-Present - Member, Oklahoma Conference of Churches
- 2000-Present - Organizer of voter registrations for Native American Communities, "Rock the Native Vote"

### **Awards and Church Recognitions**

- 2015-John Edwards Leadership Award, AARP
- 2015-Outstanding Indian Male of the Year, Changing Winds Society, Oklahoma City
- 2012-Excellence in Teaching Award for Adjunct Faculty, Oklahoma City University
- 2009- Honorary Doctorates of Humane Letters, Bacone College
- 2009- Commencement Speaker, Okay High School, Alma Mater
- 2008- Outstanding Native American alumni, Oklahoma City University Native American Society
- 2008- Distinguished Alumni Award, Phillips Theological Seminary

### **Writings and Publications**

- 2002 - *Trail of Hope. Meditations for Advent*, published by the Higher Education Ministries
- 2006 - *Embracing the Culture of Native American Youth*, Circuit Rider, March/April 2006
- 2007 - *The Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference*, Disaster Response Team, New World Outlook, July/August 2007
- 2007 - *The Land Stole Their Hearts*, Response Magazine, September, 2007
- 2008 - *Rock the Native Vote*, Winter 2008 issue printed in American Indian Horizon
- 2008 – *A Mother and Daughter in Ministry*, Response Magazine, April 2008
- 2012- *Chapter contributor, On This Spirit Walk*, May 2012
- 2012- *Gifts to Offer*, Circuit Rider, Feb/March/April, 2012
- 2015-*Visions of Unity*, *Interpreter Magazine*, January/February 2015
- 2015- *Church and Culture; a Difficult Beginning*, “*Coming Full Circle, Constructing Native Christian Theology*, August 2015

**David M. Wilson**

**Episcopal Candidate Questions for 2020**

**South Central Jurisdiction**

**Why are you willing to be considered for the episcopacy?**

I have been in prayer and reflection over the past several months regarding my decision to be a candidate for the episcopacy. I have consulted with family members, friends, lay and clergy. I have listened to the voice and movement of the Holy Spirit regarding this decision as I believe I do in everything that I am called to do in ministry and life.

There are many who wonder why I would want to serve as a bishop in such a time as this in our denomination. Much has transpired since I made that decision a few months ago. I realize that there is no one who has experience in dealing with the major decisions that are in front of us in the life of our denomination. There are so many pieces to consider and it is almost overwhelming at times. However, I believe that my experience of serving in this denomination for almost thirty years has prepared me to explore the state of the church and to be able to approach it with understanding, grace and a desire to move ahead as an inclusive church.

One of the great contributions of United Methodism to evangelism has been to encourage native peoples to become clerical leaders in the church. We have largely seen the Council of Bishops mirror and represent all our people. The lone exception to this continues to be Native Americans. I believe my many years of experience serving on boards, agencies, committees and teams has strengthened my call to the episcopacy by honing my abilities, deepening my knowledge and gifting me with a variety of experiences in leadership. My presence as an indigenous person offers a perspective that the Church has never had before at that level.

There are over 560 tribal nations in this country. They are all diverse, each with their own language, history and culture. It is impossible to lump them all together. However, there are three cultural pieces that remain constant. This is true not just for this country, but in my experience, with indigenous peoples around the world.

For Indigenous peoples, the understanding of relationship is paramount in all that we do. All relationships are sacred to us. We have an experience and understanding that our relationship with Creator God and one another is the most important piece in our lives. This allows Native peoples to more readily synthesize the Greatest Commandment of Jesus to love our Creator with all our being and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Relationship for Native persons goes far beyond that of our human relationships and extends to all that is created and living among us on Mother Earth.

Second, the aspect of community is very important. Although it has changed a little due to the colonization of our people, when we make decisions, it is not just about me as an individual, but rather for the entire community. The efficacy of our decisions is judged more on their effect upon the group rather than on the individual. The dominant society often worries about taking care of self; Indigenous communities understand it is about taking care of all.

The last piece is our understanding of hospitality and how we live it out. We offer the best of what we have to others; we work to make people feel welcome and included; and we give because that is a part of our DNA.

As a bishop, relationship, community and hospitality would deeply influence my Christian leadership. While these are certainly present in other leaders, I hope that the church gets the opportunity to experience them from the Native American perspective. It is within our diversity that we begin to see the tapestry of God unfold more clearly.

**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?**

That, of course, is the question that all of us are wrestling with right now in the life of our church. The number of plans, along with the most recent "Protocol" offer many options and venues to consider. It most certainly will require ongoing prayer, collaboration and compromise from everyone in the Church to co-create the future that God desires for people called Methodists. It will also take trust, which seems to be lacking in many camps across the connection. This is most unfortunate but not something we must concede.

It is likely that no matter which decision is made by the General Conference, the denomination will be smaller, at least in the short term. This will require conferences to thrive with reduced resources. While this is much to consider, my experience with the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference has given me experience in making the most out of a bare-bones budget.

The church will also need leaders that can bring polarized perspectives together as, no matter the results of General Conference, there will still be diverse theological opinions. My experience in working with a multitude of tribes within my conference has necessitated the development of my expertise in diplomacy.

One of my best practices is to listen and observe. As a Bishop, I would not assume that I automatically know more than others about how to move forward through difficult situations,

but feel that I have the gifts to pull people together to listen, do our best at holy conferencing and creative thinking and work together to chart a path forward. Following General Conference action, there will still be uncertainty, grief, and challenges to navigate. My leadership as a bishop would be rooted in relationships, deep listening, resisting action or decisions based in fear, being open to change, rebuilding trust, and modeling grace.

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

I come from an annual conference that many would consider on the margins of the world. This includes how our small numbers of Native American people throughout The UMC are included and not included in the life of the Church. In this annual conference, I see faithful members of the Christian community who work hard to live the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. People often ask, "Given what the Church had done to Native people, how can you be Christian?" This understanding has more to do with cultural Christianity rather than true faith. It is because of that very piece that we remain Christians and work to make disciples of Jesus Christ for our communities. Our witness needs to be a witness of inclusivity, forgiveness and grace.

We are usually the ones left out of any plans, gatherings, task force groups, etc. Ironically, I often have to remind those who are working on being inclusive, to include Native American people. It has already happened several times since the special called General Conference. We know what it is like to be on the margins of the Church and this provides me with sensitivity toward the disinherited within our denomination.

I was able to travel to Brownsville, Texas last year for a prayer ceremony for children being held in detention camps. One of our esteemed elders asked what we could do as Native people to help these children. We arranged for three of us to travel to Brownsville, Texas for a dawn prayer ceremony. This was important for us to be there as we recalled the similarities to our ancestors who went through the same thing in the boarding school era. Native children were taken from their homes and sent to a place far away among a people who did not speak their language. The culture of the dominant society must have seemed very strange to them. Many of the children held in today's camps are indigenous children. I see God at work in those margins of a people being considered, "less than," and can certainly relate. People like Cindy Johnson in the Rio Texas Annual Conference have worked hard to raise awareness and support for the plight in her area.

Among the assets of our denomination is the diversity of our churches around the world. While we are different from place to place, we are also the same in so many ways. I would embrace the variety of expression that our churches show as they live out the Great Commission. There

is so much ministry to be done in so many places that need a United Methodist witness. I know that there is not one model that fits all. The General Church has a tendency to create models that are more suited to the white middle class. As the OIMC has often had to adapt these models for our unique settings, this has given me the experience to make adjustments as needed for a variety of ministerial settings. This skill will serve me well as the bishop of a conference where one size doesn't necessarily fit all. In fact, I think we will find that there is plenty of space in our denomination to embrace all!

**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.**

OIMC has been a mission field for many over the years. That includes the area of cultures, languages, finances and more. We have been the beneficiary of mission support for which we are grateful and we have also been a conference who has given back in mission to the world. In order for the church to truly be engaged in ministry in this mission field, it has to learn the dynamics of the multitude of racial ethnic cultures in this country and around the world. We have to constantly be on top of how to attract, include and embrace young people in the myriad of cultures in their lives. I believe all of us across the church are doing that, but the nuance for OIMC is how we do that in relationship to the various tribal cultures alongside the culture of young folks. The OIMC is a conference that relates to at least 45 federally recognized tribes. That means 45 tribes, each with a different language, unique culture and way of life. I enter cultures in OIMC on a daily basis and I have learned that I have to be prepared and educated regarding the differences of cultures to minister effectively with each of them.

It is estimated that 70 percent of millennials no longer identify with Christianity. One of our great challenges with youth and millennials in OIMC is our task to work harder to engage Native young persons due to the difficulties of many to adopt the ideals and thoughts of the Church. That includes the idea that one cannot include and incorporate Indigenous practices and ceremonies in the life of the Church. Throughout our lifetime, our ancestors have lived this practice after years of being taught that Native culture is not Christian. Young persons ask, "If God created us as unique tribal peoples why is it wrong?"

I have enjoyed working with young persons to claim and reclaim who it is that God has created us to be as unique peoples. We have been able to create events where we engage with ceremonial and tribal leaders inside and outside of the church to reclaim who we are as a people of God. It takes much work and it is very unique to Native culture in relation to the rest



of our denomination. I believe this is a part of the challenge for the church as we struggle to reach and retain millennials in the life of the church.

I have worked hard to make OIMC a much stronger conference in many ways. While we still have the lowest salaries in the denomination, we are stronger financially. We have grown our endowment in a conference that includes people on the lowest economic scale in many parts of our state. Many of our churches come from some of the most impoverished communities and yet the people remain so faithful to these financial obligations. Each year, our support from outside of OIMC shrinks and therefore our budget shrinks. We know how to fund ministry on a small budget, while anticipating a later reduction.

Many annual conferences have large endowments, supplied by folks with income to help make it grow. OIMC has worked on our endowment by sharing our story in such a way that our sisters and brothers from the dominant culture also see it as their story. This is helping to supplement our budget while also helping us to increase the low base pay of our pastors.

We have paid our apportionments in full for over 30 consecutive years. We were the only conference in the South Central Jurisdiction to do so last year. As a Missionary Conference, we operate on a small budget. Our local churches work hard to raise funds for ministry in the local church, property care and apportionments, and they do well at it. As a leader, I have helped tell the larger story that the apportionments represent. They have taken pride in paying these because they have seen that they are an important part of this story. This skill will be all the more necessary in the foreseeable future across the South Central Jurisdiction.

I believe my experience of working with people who successfully struggle with financial challenges could aid ministry in annual conferences, especially in light of what could happen at the 2020 General Conference. We anticipate working with decreased budgets. We have learned in OIMC how to make a dollar stretch.

In order to be any kind of church, we have to learn from each other and embrace our journey together. Everyone has to be engaged at every level. In order for the Church to truly reach out, we have to know that how we understand and operate in the Church can be much different as we reach into the mission field.

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

I think foremost, the biggest risk I have taken in ministry is to make myself a candidate for Bishop in 2020. I knew the life of the Church would change with the legislation we had months

ago but given the latest Protocol proposal, to lead the church in a time like this is a big risk. We don't have any idea what the Church will look like. Will there be a need for new bishops? What will the annual conferences look like? There are many uncertainties. However, it is also an exciting challenge to lead the church in something new. We must trust in the Holy Spirit to guide us into this great future as God has done throughout human history.

We have started doing joint conference appointments with The Oklahoma Annual Conference and OIMC. There are places where our ministries intersect geographically and both conferences are in need of clergy, and more so in certain areas. Many are doing well and some could not make the transition to work with the unique cultures of our local churches. We had churches that were anxious about receiving pastors from the dominant culture and we hoped they would be willing to listen and observe and adjust. It happened for some and not for others. It was a risk for local churches and for me as one of the superintendents who made the decisions.

I believe much of what I learn is by trial and error. That is not just true in the church but in life. I also leverage this by learning and consulting with colleagues and studying how others have progressed, made mistakes and moved forward. As a leader, I try to be transparent in sharing my trials and errors as I teach and lead clergy and lay persons in licensing schools, and other training events. We can only move on to perfection in love through acknowledging where we have failed to attend to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

**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?**

Again, there are so many uncertainties that it is difficult to answer this question. We have no idea what the annual conferences will look like in the future. The entire make up of any annual conference will be working on organization, identity, and how to best work towards our task of making disciples for Jesus Christ. Given that many conferences could be smaller, it is easier to regroup with smaller numbers for the sake of mission. The theological identity of the annual conferences will be helpful as we work towards common goals. It will be a time for us to define what "vital" congregations look like, which I think will be different from how the general church defines vitality.

Following GC 2020, annual conferences will need to evaluate how many clergy they have and how many they need to deploy. I would work with the Board of Ordained Ministry to develop a needed number for the incoming class and then select the top of their candidates. We would also need to determine how many local pastors and part-time local pastors would be needed.

Rather than combine charges to fulfill an elder, we might need to develop two bi-vocational pastors for those charges once that elder moves.

The other thing needed will be encouragement of clergy. This will be one of the most stressful times for clergy to serve as their churches may be divided on the topic of full inclusion of LGBTQ persons. There will be a great need to encourage and uplift the clergy during this time. I would hope to be a non-anxious presence to strengthen the annual conference.

Given that, the local church is the impetus and starting point. “Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple making occurs. (Paragraph 120) It is a critical time to lead by prayer, reflection, gathering and consensus building in any annual conference. These new configurations will need to give attention to the lack of ministry in many conferences around racial ethnic local churches. There are not enough persons engaged in this area as there are in areas where churches are currently being planted. I believe if we truly want to be a Church that includes all, we must also invest in and support our racial ethnic churches.

Vital congregations also know their identity – they are able to tell their story. As we take pride in our identities, others may come to faith in Christ through this confidence. This new identity for local churches is a time to help congregations understand who they are in and for the community and the mission field to express this strong witness.

**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?**

This, also, is likely to look much different for many annual conferences following General Conference. It appears there could now be far more clergy in need of appointments. The challenge will be which annual conference a person relates to based on their beliefs. There may be some who do not fit into the various places their congregations choose and vice versa. This is one of the serious questions that must be resolved as we wait for decisions that will be made in May of 2020. Fortunately, United Methodism is steeped in ecumenism, and I would work with the various new expressions and their leadership to help us move forward in ministry together. The new configurations of annual conferences will give more opportunities to address the shortage or excess of clergy needing appointments.

It will also provide opportunities to fine tune the process of ordination. When I taught polity or United Methodist Studies, I discovered that many young people found the process of ordination long and disorienting. They expressed the need to make this process more effective and

streamlined. I have met several who quit the process and move on to other areas of service because of how restrictive and time consuming the process is.

In my experience on the appointed cabinet, we have brought in those persons who are considered to be ineffective for conversation at the Cabinet level. We discuss what has been the continued signs of ineffectiveness, listened to the clergy member, and explored all potential solutions. When the Cabinet has exhausted that avenue, we have sent recommendations to the Board of Ordained Ministry for their action. In all cases, the BOM has helped to remedy the situation of ineffective pastors.

This also includes discernment to help persons discover their calling. It may not be as a local pastor or elder but as a deacon, youth worker, etc. As the Cabinet member to BOM, I have been pleased that they have engaged in conversations with clergy members to help them ascertain their future in ministry and have worked through that process.

This process takes much time and effort, but it ensures fairness and we have worked hard to follow the administrative procedures outlined in the Discipline. As a Bishop, I would follow the same model and engage all entities who are charged with these duties to work together to ensure fairness

My first ministry in the local church was teaching youth in Sunday school and serving as the local church youth coordinator. I would serve many years later as a district and conference youth coordinator and then campus ministry. Those roles are so important for me because I know that the Church is a place for people of all ages to serve and we often overlook our youth. I have worked hard to maintain my work and ministry with young people through relationships. They teach me much about how youth culture has changed and what works and doesn't work. I also work to find places of service throughout the annual conference and in the global church, such as participation in Youth '19, Exploration '19 and more.

The great joy that comes from this is to see young persons from my years in ministry involved in the life of the local church through serving as lay servants, youth coordinators, leading worship, teaching in colleges and staying connected to the local church. This also has fed into the clergy pipeline as some have taken various roles in the national church.

### **What is your philosophy of appointment making?**

It is important to note my role as Conference Superintendent in OIMC. Before my appointment there was only one other who was Native American serving in this role, which is equivalent to a

General Superintendent in the past. Before that, the General Superintendents were always from the Oklahoma Annual Conference.

OIMC is different from Red Bird and Alaska in many ways. Both Red Bird and Alaska are composed of about 20 churches and their pastors are from other annual conferences. The Conference Superintendents in Alaska and Red Bird serve as district superintendents also. We have close to 80 churches and fellowships, with the majority served by Native Americans. We only have two other district superintendents who assist me in the supervisory role. My role includes working with appointments, recruitment of clergy and process, funding for the annual conference, leadership training and serving as the role of an assistant to the Bishop or the leader of the Missionary Conference to provide the cultural context.

I also serve on the appointed Cabinet to deploy clergy. My philosophy of making appointments is very collaborative. We discuss the needs of the local churches and work to find a clergy person who is a good fit. There are times when an appointment might not fit within their needs but it is a challenge to help the church reach beyond its boundaries in order to grow and fulfill its' mission. This process is not nearly as tedious in a smaller annual conference like OIMC. For us, this also includes tribal nuances as well as language, cultures and our histories.

What makes this easier for us is that since we have a base salary, we do not have to be concerned with the pay scale for a pastor when moving to a new appointment. There is no climbing of ladders to make more money or to have a larger church. This is very different from other annual conferences. While I will lean on my superintendents as a bishop for this cultural variance, I do believe that my perspective from OIMC can also help clergy to overcome these often destructive tendencies.

**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?**

Laity are a vital part of ministry In OIMC. Many fill the pulpits in the local church and serve important roles on all levels of the local church and annual conference. Lay Leaders and Lay Servants are probably used more in our conference than most. Our Board of Laity works well to create and implement the lay servant schools in each district. I have taught lay speaking in several regions, and appreciated that experience.

We have been using Lay Missioners for over 20 years. They are very effective and love what they do. They have energy and excitement for their ministry. The Lay Missioners have proven to be as effective as clergy members. It is likely that other annual conferences would be well-served through a greater implementation of Lay Missioners in their regions.

I am currently using several lay persons to help me with special projects in OIMC. Their experience with pieces like safe sanctuary policies, youth ministry, and approving special grants has been invaluable. This has been helpful in many ways, including with our limited budgets. It is rewarding to have this partnership with such talented lay persons and they appreciate helping the annual conference.

I work to ensure that the lay persons are involved in all aspects of ministry in the annual conference. Lay persons are proud of their ministry and presence and I so enjoy interacting with them on all levels of the church. I meet regularly with the Board of Laity. As with the clergy members, I am very accessible to laity.

I have enjoyed working with young adults in our ministries. While there are many who are not regular in attendance at local churches, they are always willing and wanting to help with our outreach ministries as time allows. In turn, they model for me on issues and values for their generation which helps me greatly. Recent studies show that intentional development of reaching millennials towards community engagement is important.

**Describe your understanding of the inclusive nature of the church. In what ways have you lived up to and fallen short of that understanding?**

Galatians, 3:28 reads, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This is my understanding of the inclusive nature of the church. Unfortunately, over time, humanity has created a false understanding of what it means to be inclusive. Our imperfect Church needs so much to work towards this inclusive nature.

As a tribal member, we have always had to remind the world and the Church about what it means to be inclusive. We are thought of as mascots, figures of the past and as "less than." Many might be surprised to learn that when some folks talk about the Oklahoma Annual Conference and OIMC, the Oklahoma Conference is often referred to as the "regular conference." We have dealt with racism and lack of inclusion all of our lives, especially in the Church.

We have hosted an immersion event for several years in OIMC. We visit places and sites that have a direct impact on policy and inclusion in our lives. One of those sites is in Ponca City, The Standing Bear Park. It is named after Ponca Chief Standing Bear who is famous for the case where he had to prove that he and Native folks were "human beings." Chief Standing Bear and the Ponca people were removed from Nebraska and forced to Oklahoma in 1878. Shortly after

his son died and he had promised his son he would bury him in their homelands. They left and were arrested later for leaving the reservation.

A sympathetic general took Standing Bear's case to the courts and two lawyers took up his cause and asked the judge to release Standing Bear. In the federal court case, "Standing Bear vs. Crook," the U.S. Attorney argued that Standing Bear was neither a citizen nor a person. Standing Bear was called to testify the next day, and through an interpreter he said, *"My hand is not the color of yours. but if I pierce it, I shall feel pain. If you pierce your hand, you also feel pain; the blood that flows from mine will be the same color as yours. The same God made us both. I am a man."*

The judge agreed and ruled for the first time in U.S. history that the Indian is a person and has all rights and freedoms promised in the Constitution.

Standing Bear's case is similar to what we are dealing with in the church today. There are those who are advocating that all are not worthy to be a part of God's kingdom through the Church. The LGBTQ community is fighting for affirmation and full inclusion just as Indigenous people have done in the past and in the present in all realms of life, including the Church. The same God made us all.

Although there has always been room for everyone at the table of United Methodism, there are many that are not represented at the table. I have spent the better part of my life and ministry making sure that native people as well as all people have an opportunity to sit at the table to be affirmed and accepted as children of God regardless of race, creed, ethnicity, etc. This is not just true for the church, but in many places of my life.

One of my personal expectations is to be a voice for those that are not being heard in various parts of the Church. That includes my presence on boards and agencies, in the church, classroom, disaster response and more. As a racial ethnic person, it becomes a part of our lives to see how much further the church has to accomplish to become more inclusive.

I certainly recognize that I have fallen short of God's glory and that there is always room for improvement. One of the beautiful things about The UMC is that it has allowed me to experience, recognize and participate with so many cultures and peoples around the world. Those experiences have enabled me to see, appreciate and recognize that it takes all to make this Church what it was intended to be. My life is a continual learning process and I am grateful for these experiences which help me to grow.

**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?**

One of the greatest joys as a pastor is to help make disciples of Jesus Christ. I have enjoyed and appreciated helping individuals find their calling in the church and community and to affirm the gifts that God has given to them. That includes people of all age and places, inside and outside of OIMC. In my work today, I see evidence of the seeds that I helped to plant as God took it from there to help these persons make a difference in their communities and local church. I see it at my home church where young persons who were once in my Sunday school class and youth group are now serving as valuable leaders. I see it in former churches where laity are leading worship, teaching Bible study and leading youth groups.

The second for me includes helping to affirm people of their place in the church and our importance as created people of God. Our Church is a diverse church and we are never complete until all voices are heard in all arenas. I feel I have helped persons understand and learn more about the historic presence of Native Americans and other ethnic persons in our denomination. My connections made through teaching at the Course of Study and in the local University continue to be very affirming. My connection with many pastors and students has been rewarding when I am sought out to talk about calling and life issues. Relationships are very important to me and I am intentional about maintaining those relationships to help others on their spiritual journey.

Recent surveys have indicated that the number of younger elders have decreased over the last few years, despite the great funding the Church has allocated to this effort on many levels. Many factors contribute to that and I have mentioned one or two already. It is even more difficult to do so in OIMC when we ask persons to get a bachelor's degree and 72 hours of a Master's degree and then make \$32,000 when you graduate.

Regardless, it has been a joy and great privilege for me to help young persons who have heard the call and to figure out how it can be managed financially. I have worked to get young persons to the last two Exploration events and created one at home as well. While this is not a part of my usual duties, I am thankful I get to help young persons navigate that process through discernment, scholarships, and more.

I have been fortunate to serve on many levels at the general church since the late 1980's. I feel that I have made an impact through my service by reminding all about the importance of inclusion and affirming the church to work on its inclusivity. I also believe that I bring a perspective that educates and helps us to be the Church. Because Jesus brought people on the



margins to the table, I am passionate about speaking out for justice issues, especially related to persons who are perceived as living outside of the margins of the dominant society.

My work on the general boards and agencies is not just geared towards Indigenous peoples. My work as chair of the Policy and Bylaws committee at GBGM has helped to set policy for the world wide work of missions and also for legislation affecting all for 2020. I have read hundreds of scholarships for GBHEM for the last several years and it is always an important role for me to approve students for scholarship that will aid them in their goals and dreams.

**John Wesley is often quoted as having said, “In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, diversity, in all things, charity.” What constitutes the essentials for you?**

There are several that constitute the essentials for me. If there was any passage that I hold most close, it would be from Micah 6:8; *what does the Lord require you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God.* Micah reminds me to be centered on my relationship with God as I seek to be kind to all and to simply do what is right. In my ministry, I have strived to do that and to be one that not only speaks out for justice, but one that works for justice as well.

I can only rely upon the grace of God which is an undeserved blessing that calls me to see it in all of humanity and to live and share grace in my daily life.

**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 possible affect your ability to serve as a bishop?**

I come from a large family, with six siblings. My mother turned 86 this year. They are all so supportive of my work and ministry across the Church. Although they live 150 miles away, they are always willing to help with any effort I am working on. They are excited about my candidacy and are very supportive. This includes my extended tribal families across the state. I work hard to exercise and have been a part of group exercise classes for many years. These classes are not only important for my physical health, but my mental and spiritual health as well. I am fortunate that I am still able to run competitively as I do the OKC Half Marathon each spring along with others throughout the year. I work hard to make my workout routines an integral part of my life. I don't believe there are any other issues that could affect my ability to serve as a Bishop.

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

I believe I would have three quadrennia.

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

Bishops are called to guard the faith, order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline of the Church. Just as an Elder is responsible for the interpretation of the Discipline for the local church and the Superintendent is responsible for its interpretation for the district, the Bishop is responsible for its interpretation for the conference. I would take this responsibility seriously and guard it with prayer and faithfulness.”

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

It would be the removal of language that harms LGBTQ members of our church. I also would like to change the length of the ordination/credentialing process to make it shorter.

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

It has been sixteen years since I have had the opportunity to physically lead a person to a profession of faith through a process. I have served in the conference office since 1995, but also served a local church at the same time for eight of those years. I have been able to assist lay pastors with their ministry in taking in a profession of faith as an elder many times as well as the Sacrament of Baptism.

The last two I recall was a young couple at Norman First American UMC. They had been invited by another church member to attend the church and they attended faithfully. As we were able to share in local church ministries for some time, I began to ask about interests and found places for them to serve. One led the women’s ministries through UMW and her husband worked with the food bank and United Methodist Men. Time and jobs kept them from being as involved as they would like, but they stuck with it and I encouraged them along. We would talk about their faith and other issues and after some time, we began to talk about their church experience. I found out they had been a part of other churches but never professed their faith in Christ. We would visit about that and I could see they were very interested in knowing more. After we held an adult inquiry event in the church for new members, they asked to join.

I would find out that neither had been baptized and it was a joy to baptize two adult members and receive two professions of faith. This journey reminds me of two things: one, it is often lay

persons who get people to church through personal invitation. The second is that there are many adults who have not been baptized and have a desire for a relationship with Christ. The two members are involved in one of our fellowships in Oklahoma City and we still work together on many other projects in the Oklahoma City area.

