

Elvis Soto, Local Pastor Application

By Elvis C Soto Serrano

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District Committee on Ordained Ministry
North East District
Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church

Dear Members of the DCOM:

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

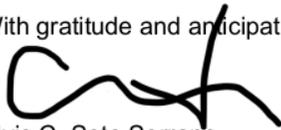
I am honored to present my responses and supporting material as part of my Local Pastor application.

This document reflects my heart for ministry, my personal journey with Christ, as well as my commitment to serve faithfully within the connectional life of The United Methodist Church.

Each answer was prayerfully written with the intention of expressing not only what I believe, but how I live out my calling, through proclamation, leadership, spiritual discipline, and service. I have done my best to share honestly and clearly where I am in this season of growth. It will also show how I am preparing for what lies ahead and how the grace of God continues to shape my life and calling.

I deeply appreciate the work of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry. Thank you for your prayerful discernment and guidance throughout this process. I am looking forward to our upcoming conversation, and I welcome any feedback that may help me continue growing in faithfulness and fruitfulness as a servant leader.

With gratitude and anticipation,



Elvis C. Soto Serrano
Certified Candidate UMC

Leadership Questions

Local Pastor Application

1. How has God called you as a pastor to the role of leader?

My first calling from the Lord happened at a Methodist church in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. I listened to the sermon from across the street, leaning against a lamppost. Although I had been invited inside for a church event, I chose to wait outside and listen from afar. The Word of God, proclaimed by Alga Nazario, a Methodist minister, really touched my heart. I crossed the street and went to the altar, where I offered my life to Christ and received forgiveness of my sins. The minister laid hands on me and spoke on behalf of the Holy Spirit, calling me to be a minister of the gospel: to preach the Word, to counsel, to comfort, and to pray for the sick. I was told that He would use my life in Puerto Rico and beyond, and that the Lord's presence would go with me, confirming His calling.

I heard that same word in many places. Again, at the Methodist church in Hatillo, Puerto Rico, under Pastor Héctor Rivera; and then at El Calvario Methodist Church with Pastor Luis F. Sotomayor. After traveling for years, preaching the Word, I noticed my heart was increasingly inclined toward pastoral ministry, the concern about their personal growth, the urgency for the follow up, the care for their well being drew me slowly to the pastoral ministry. I started assisting my pastors during those years while continuing to serve locally and on missions abroad. I have no doubt in my heart about my passion for souls and offering the gift of salvation, and I also receive great satisfaction in seeing people baptized and watching them grow in their knowledge of the Word.

a. What leadership qualities do you possess?

My ministry and professional experiences have shaped a number of my leadership traits. A key component of my leadership style is service. In my opinion, being a leader is a calling to faithfully serve a community's needs while also serving God and others. This has been demonstrated by my readiness to meet one-on-one with individuals, offer guidance through difficulties, and resolve conflicts in a straightforward yet caring manner. Leaders, in my opinion, should be approachable and ready to help others even when it is inconvenient.

My years of professional experience in the insurance and reinsurance sectors, where I frequently analyzed complex data and had to make quick, important decisions, helped me to develop my decision-making skills. Also, as a self-employer, managing my own firm for almost 14 years, translates into the capacity to weigh several options, confer with others, and take decisive action when necessary. Those also are applied in ministry, particularly when leading teams or making decisions regarding pastoral care.

In both ministry and communication, creativity has been crucial. I've learned how to share the gospel in new and interesting ways from my work as a preacher and TV and radio host to a variety of audiences. Additionally, my ability to be creative has aided me in creating fresh ministry plans, setting up productive meetings, and adjusting to a congregation's evolving needs.

My ability to solve problems is directly related to my interpersonal and administrative abilities. I usually start by listening intently, figuring out the underlying cause, and then working cooperatively to find a solution, whether I'm leading ministry teams, settling disputes among members, or figuring out the deeper problem beneath the surface tension.

These leadership traits—service, judgment, creativity, and problem-solving—have been developed via practical experience in both business and ministry settings, in addition to theological conviction.

b. What are two or three strengths and weaknesses of each of these leadership qualities?

Service:

- Strengths - As I committed to service. I strive to lead with empathy, which enables me to sense and respond to the needs of others, particularly those who are often overlooked. I consider myself reliable and dedicated. I always place the mission and the well-being of the team above personal convenience. My approach to service is grounded in action and follow-through until is complete.
- An example of this is when I was first introduced to Cuba by a mentor who spoke about the amazing things caused by a revival happening all over this country. However, I learned that the missionaries were facing significant challenges. Inspired by this, I decided to bring a new bike with me among other things. But the bike was such a blessing for two pastors who wrote a heartfelt letter of appreciation, expressing their gratitude for the bike that enable so much use on their daily work.. This led to the creation of Mission in Two Wheels, an initiative aimed at providing bicycles to the Cuban missionaries. I've been fortunate enough to provide numerous bikes to Cuban missionaries across the country, and I continue to receive numerous testimonies of the positive impact this effort has had on their lives.
- To me, serving means identifying needs and responding with tangible support, whether through encouragement, presence, or practical resources. It is not a side task of leadership—it is the very foundation of it. Service with empathy allow me to sense and respond to others' needs. Reliable to follow-through, Dedicated, placing team and mission on a priority level.

- Areas for growth - Remembering to schedule regular rest and reflection so I can serve sustainably, learning to set gentle boundaries when multiple needs compete for my time and delegating earlier, trusting others to step in without waiting until I'm overwhelmed with work.

Decision Making

- Strengths – I can be decisive and quick at rapid analysis of options. In order to keep momentum moving forward, I have confidence under pressure to avoid indecision. I am also open to new information to change the course if needed.
- Areas for growth - I recognize that strong decision-making requires more than just action. It will require discernment and collaboration. In fast-moving situations, I am learning to slow down when appropriate. I make room for other to express their voices. Great decisions emerge when dialogue and prayer are present. This area of growth helps me continue developing as a servant leader, balancing decisiveness with humility and inclusion.

Creativity

- Strengths - I love innovation and brainstorming into new and fresh ideas when the standard solutions fall short. Adapting existing concepts in order to open the way for novel concepts. I can inspire team members, sell the new plan, or motivate to think outside the box. A few years ago, a vision came to me after reading a testimony from an NBA player in a Christian magazine. I reached out to the NBA coordinator, and we organized an outreach event that resulted in over 700 people making decisions for Christ in just two nights. It was a tremendous blessing to witness all the young people at the altar receiving Christ into their lives.
- Areas for growth – Be realistic with options and team adaptability with clear milestones to ensure follow-through. I need to balance open brainstorming with scheduled wrap-up sessions to move

to action and avoid procrastination. Instead of long-term guidelines I need to set small deadlines to revisit achievable goals to avoid getting lost into forever planning and never achieving results.

2. Describe and evaluate your spiritual gifts. How are they revealed in your leadership? What do you do when you are called to lead in areas where you are not spiritually gifted?

I have been blessed with several spiritual gifts, including proclamation, teaching, compassion, faith, reconciliation, conflict mediation, administration, healing, miracles, and discernment. These gifts have been affirmed through my years in ministry, the guidance of mentors, and the spiritual fruit that emerges as I serve the Church.

My gifts of proclamation and teaching are regularly exercised in preaching and teaching settings, where I aim not only to communicate Scripture, but also to connect with the hearts of those listening. I have been preaching for more than 3 decades witnessing the power of the Holy Spirit saving people in churches, jails, stadiums or through fresh expression settings of different variations. The gift of compassion allows me to enter into the struggles of others with empathy especially during counseling and hospital visits. I have witnessed the gifts of healing and miracles at work in my life, my family and many more throughout the years where the Holy Spirit has brought restoration in ways that exceed explanation. These moments deepen my trust in God's power and my calling to live out my faith in ministry.

The gifts of reconciliation and conflict mediation are essential in leadership. Especially when guiding individuals or groups through tension and mutual understanding. I rely on discernment often in prayer or listening conversations to help identify the deeper spiritual realities behind the visible challenges. My gift of faith sustains me in uncertain or spiritually intense circumstances. and my gifts of administration are visible and emerge when leading teams through planning, organizing, and setting goals with clarity and follow-through.

When I am called to lead in areas where I am not spiritually gifted, I respond with humility and a spirit of collaboration. I have learned over time that honoring the gifts in others does not diminish my own calling it enhances it. I am stronger when I am capable of delegate and use those talented and gifted, so the ministry becomes more fruitful and stronger. As Scripture teaches, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others" (1 Peter 4:10, NIV), and "in Christ we, though many, form one body" (Romans 12:5, NIV). I see spiritual leadership as less about personal capability and more about stewarding grace in community.

3. Describe your understanding of the legal and ethical implications of confidentiality for a person in ministry.

Every person that comes in contact with a minister assumes that confidentiality is granted with the sacred trust we share with everyone who come for guidance. As the Bible says, "A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret", (Prov. 11:13, NIV), and Paul urges us to speak "everything in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:40, NIV). As a leader, I will promise to do ministry with discretion in every interaction, guarding counseling notes, private messages, and sensitive conversations so that people know they can bring their deepest struggles without fear of exposure. There's almost nothing worse, than finding out your most protected privacy hasn't been protected by those who intrinsically offered you the safeguard of confidentiality.

Sometimes we will encounter a situation that will require disclosure in those moments we need to remind ourselves of our spiritual role and our ethical obligations, Romans tells us to "submit to the governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1, NIV), which in practice means understanding requirements around physical or emotional abuse, threats of violence, or imminent harm. In a leadership role, I will make sure our team is trained on denominational policies and local regulations, protecting all records stored securely, and that any required disclosures are made promptly and only to the

appropriate channels, always with respect for the individual's dignity. I experienced a situation personally that required intervention when a person had decided to kill himself. I spoke with him, I saw the gun and I was afraid He would hurt himself and his family. The great news is that after I spoke to Him, He surrendered the weapon to me, and I was able to provide the help He urgently needed from local police and related agencies. Ethically and legally, we need to balance privacy with our responsibility to protect and heal those who need it. Jesus taught us to *"love your neighbor as yourself"* (Matt. 22:39, NIV), sometimes calling us to break confidence when someone's safety is at stake. In those moments, I will pray for wisdom and guidance, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God"* (James 1:5, NIV), then follow both Scripture and policy, sharing only the information necessary to safeguard lives. By holding confidence reverently and acting decisively we will show the compassion of Christ, if disclosure is mandated, we will proceed with both legal integrity and mercy.

4. How do you discern God's vision for your ministry setting? How do you implement that vision?

The first thing a pastor should do when they are appointed to a congregation is to enter the church in humility and prayer. The Pastor also needs to acknowledge that the Spirit of God is already at work at the location. Spiritual discernment is the first step in the visioning process, not did the strategy. *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God... and it will be given to him,"* as (James 1:5, NIV), reminds us. The pastor must be dedicated to seeking God's will via Scripture, prayer, and holy attention to the church's members and environment. I would walk the surroundings and feel the place in prayer

Second, in order to lead, I must listen. The pastor is called to listen deeply and take notes to the congregation's history, hopes, and wounds. Just as Jesus walked among the people, heard their stories, and met them where they were. This is accomplished in the Wesleyan tradition through

Christian conferencing, in which clergy and laypeople jointly determine God's will (Book of Discipline ¶247). This is an active spiritual practice of trust-building and discovery rather than passive observation.

From this base, pray and listening, a vision can start to take shape. One that is co-discerned through prayer, discussion, and a common belief rather than one that is imposed by the pastor. The pastor has a partner to make this vision reality, the congregation with its leadership. Working together is a must, in order to align ministry structures, teams, and outreach initiatives with what God is calling the church to become, the pastor assists in gathering and defining this vision. According to (Proverbs 29:18, NIV), "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" However, rather than ambition or power, that vision must come from a place of humility, faith, and shared ownership.

Finally this is very important, the pastor must be patient, and trust in the grace of God and proceed with clarity in the process of implementation. Leadership, according to Wesley, is relational and missional; it keeps people together while advancing them. Regular communication of the vision, action to support it, and trust are all necessary. Helping the church live out God's mission with faith, unity, and purpose is the aim, nothing else.

5. Describe how you lead a person to make a commitment to Christ.

First, I will always need to remind myself that when the time comes to speak to someone, God's grace is already at work in a person's life, preparing and drawing them toward faith as Wesley teaching on prevenient grace. I am there as part of that beautiful purpose of awakening that person's heart to God or it may be already the golden moment of leading that person into a commitment to Christ. In any case, I will share the good news of the gospel clearly. "*For God so*

loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NIV). We are called to proclaim Christ's love and sacrifice, inviting the person to believe and receive that gift.

When the moment of decision comes, I will guide into confession of sin for forgiveness, affirmation of faith in Christ, and a prayer of commitment, as instructed in Wesleyan tradition, (Sermon: "The Scripture Way of Salvation", 1765). At the same time, Wesley's teaching stresses the need for a heartfelt repentance and a conscious decision to turn from sin and then commit to Christ: *"Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out"* (Acts 3:19, NIV). During our talk, I will use inclusive verses like *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:23, NIV) and the universal remedy to sin, *"the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 6:23, NIV). Then we will pray together, often using words like, *"Jesus, I admit my need for you; I believe you died for me, but you rose again and you are alive; I respond to your offer of grace by receiving you in my life as my Lord and Savior."* As the person speaks those words, we celebrate by faith the new birth, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV), and assure them of God's promise: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins"* (1 John 1:9, NIV). Glory to God for the amazing gift of salvation, through Christ our Lord!

6. Provide evidence of your willingness to relate yourself in ministry with all persons without regard to race, color, ethnicity, national origin, social status, gender, sexual orientation, age, economic condition, or disability. Give a specific example of how you are living out inclusivity.

As I mentioned previously on the proclamation questions, I was born in Stamford, Connecticut, but I'm from Puerto Rico. I have Spanish ancestry on my father's side and African ancestry on my mother's. I recall family stories of rejection and suffering shared within our household. I come from

a mixed family: my father was fair skinned, my mother dark-skinned and my grandma was disabled, whom I loved dearly, She raised me alongside my mother. Grandma was the sweetest of all. I love my mixed family; our diverse physical features are constant reminders of our heritage. I have a sister who lived in a committed relationship with another woman for seventeen years, and I have a daughter who shares that she struggles with issues of identity. My love for both my sister and my daughter is no different from my love for my other children or the rest of my family. I love them with all my heart, and I believe the Lord loves them even more than I could ever imagine.

In ministry, God has given me the opportunity to travel and preach salvation abroad in different countries, including various regions of Africa and areas where indigenous tribes still live with unique communal, ethnic, and cultural standards. I vividly recall the moment, after the immense efforts of volunteers and donors, when we successfully opened a well in Cameroon. The community and the Mayor of the town were present to witness the occasion. Their overwhelming reaction and tears of joy were the most gratifying reward for all the hard work and dedication that went into bringing this project to life.

The love of God is the same; the universal offer of grace is also the same. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16, NIV). Diversity, in conclusion, is a gift from God; I believe it is part of His essence and personality. God loves differences, and wisdom allows us to discern distinctions, among people, opportunities, values, and personalities. We must value differences as we value colors.

In his Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament (1755), commenting on Acts 10:35, Wesley affirms that God’s acceptance rests on the fear of God and obedience rather than on culture or

race. In his sermon “On Charity” (Sermon 77, The Works of John Wesley), he invites the church to live out this inclusive love, recognizing that divine grace flows equally to Jews, Gentiles, and pagans. As Peter declares, “*I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism...*” (Acts 10:34–35, NIV).

Every time I have the opportunity to worship in different cultural settings, one of the things I enjoy most is the richness of worship variations: the tropical music of the Caribbean, the salsa rhythms of Puerto Rico, the merengue of the Dominican Republic, the gospel reggae of Jamaica—each style evokes wonder in both mind and spirit. On the other side of the world, in Cameroon and Sierra Leone, the dancing and praise at church events feel like a heavenly celebration, a wave of euphoria that lifts every soul.

John Wesley places inclusion at the heart of God’s universal fatherhood when referring to racism and slavery, exclaimed: “*Slavery is the sum of all villainies.*” — Thoughts Upon Slavery (1774)
Peter the Apostle said: “*God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right*” (Acts 10:34–35, NIV).

7. Define and differentiate between mercy and justice ministries. How are you leading your church to be involved in each?

Mercy ministries and justice ministries both express the love of God, flowing from His presence to affect people’s lives in suffering, each from a different perspective. Mercy ministries respond to immediate needs, offering direct relief to those in crisis. In Belleview UMC, we show compassion and care through Open Table, a ministry that prepares hot meals every week, serving an average of 400 people. Families drive through and receive a full dinner, including bread and dessert, with some requesting just one meal and others receiving enough for the whole household. Our leaders

are always present, offering prayer and spiritual encouragement, creating a beautiful opportunity to connect with people and share Christ's love in a moment of need.

We also serve the community through our biweekly food pantry, where individuals experiencing hardship gather early in the morning to receive boxes or bags of groceries that will sustain them through the week. In these moments, we embody the compassion of Christ, who *"took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves" to feed the hungry crowd...* (Matthew 14:19, NIV). This ministry is more than food—it's a sign that God sees them. In our church, we practice mercy through these weekly community food programs and home-bound visits, ensuring that basic needs are met with Christ-like tenderness.

In our Belleview UMC congregation we participate with our giving and encourage others to participate as well. At this moment, one of the current campaigns is about the UMCOR Cleaning Kits, to collect valuables for the disaster zones in our country. Many are donating a full bucket, \$75 to assist victims on recent disaster. Mercy ministry involvement is vital in many ways like organizing meal-packing events, hospital chaplain teams, and crisis hotlines—inviting every member to serve *"the least of these"* (Matthew 25:40, NIV).

Justice ministries on the other hand, seek to remove systemic barriers, giving a voice that represents the weak, the minorities or the oppressed, addressing the causes that perpetuate suffering, advocating better wages or confronting racial or economic injustice, and partnering with civic leaders to shape policy. Scripture calls us to *"act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8, NIV). Showing the love of God, through mercy and justice are inseparable to God's way of showing His presence in the world through the Church. John Wesley insisted on *"social holiness,"* teaching that genuine faith must transform both hearts and structures. He worked to abolish slavery, championed education for the poor, and exposed the

injustices of his day, believing that “the gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness” (John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions*, 1774).

For justice engagement, we plan in our future church, to meet with the local Mayor and discuss ways of possible partnership to ensure the church members have access to participate in community programs and opportunities to advocate for the issues at hand, following Paul's example of standing “*against the rulers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil*” (Ephesians 6:12, NIV) by confronting unjust systems when necessary. By teaching that both mercy and justice flow from love (1 John 4:7–8, NIV), and by modeling Wesley's integrated approach, our church seeks to be “*wise as serpents and innocent as doves*” (Matthew 10:16, NIV), compassionate in relief and bold in reform, bringing the fullness of Christ's kingdom to our neighborhood.

8. *Discuss your understanding of the primary characteristics of United Methodist polity in the organization and decision-making process of a local church.*

According to Wesley, the United Methodist polity is rooted in the conviction that church order exists to advance God's mission, not as an end in itself. John Wesley asked, “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God?” (letter, June 25, 1746).

This conviction finds its shape in our “*connexion*,” binding every congregation into a covenant community so that local decisions reflect the wisdom and care of the wider Body of Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*Just as the body is one and has many members...so it is with Christ*” (1 Cor 12:12–14, NIV). This is a powerful reminder that we are never alone in ministry—“*Two are better than one...if either of them falls down, one can help the other up*” (Eccl 4:9–10, NIV).

Charge conference - At the heart of local governance stands the charge conference (sometimes called the Church Council). Composed of the pastor, lay leaders, and elected officers, it is our primary decision-making unit. Here we discern calls to ministry, set pastoral compensation package, and approve the local budget in covenant with our annual conference and the bishop's oversight (Book of Discipline #132). In these gatherings, clergy and laity share equal voice—mirroring Wesley's practice of "Christian conferencing," a spiritual discipline for uncovering God's will together.

Finance, Trustees, Staff-Parish Relations, Nominations, and others - Translating vision into action falls to our administrative board and ministry committees outlined in Book of Discipline #243–259). Each committee carries clear responsibilities—envisioning, planning, implementing, and evaluating specific ministries, so that transparency and accountability govern every step. Proverbs reminds us, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed" (Prov 15:22, NIV). This structured process prevents unilateral decisions and honors Wesley's insistence that polity be "a means of grace and compassion, not an instrument of domination" (Sermon 107, "On God's Vineyard," § III.1).

Pastors are appointed by the bishop - Our itinerant appointment system underscores the connectional nature of United Methodism.—never hired directly by one congregation, reflecting our commitment to shared leadership and mobility for the sake of mission (Book of Discipline ¶ 425–435). Just as Barnabas and Saul were set apart by the whole church, "*Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them*" (Acts 13:2, NIV), so our clergy are sent in prayerful discernment rather than local preference, ensuring accountability to the larger body.

Elvis C Soto Serrano; Local Pastor; Leadership Questions 2025

Annual Conference - Each annual conference sends equal numbers of clergy and lay delegates to General Conference every four years—ensuring that scripture, tradition, reason, and experience unite in communal discernment of doctrine, discipline, and policy. My wife and I were sent as voting delegates for this 2025 Annual Conference. We experienced first hand the great responsibility of participate in new proposed changes voting. Also, witness the atmosphere of freedom, love and tolerance within the context of the conference.

This layered structure, charge conference, committees, itinerant appointments, and General Conference, wove teamwork, mutual accountability, and Wesleyan tradition into every level of church life, embodying our belief that the gospel of Christ knows “no holiness but social holiness” (Wesley, Sermons on Several Occasions, 1774). In all of this, we follow the example of the early Church, where “the apostles and elders met to consider this question” (Acts 15:6, NIV). United Methodist polity, built on connection, collaboration, and Christ-centered order, equips us to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world—together, in covenant, and always under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

My answer is yes. By God’s grace, I am willing to make this complete dedication—so help me, O Lord.

In committing “for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness of the gospel,” I pledge myself to “make a complete dedication of myself to the highest ideals of the Christian life as set forth in ¶ 102–104 and ¶ 160–166 of the United Methodist Book of Discipline.

To this end, I shall exercise responsible self-control by my personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social

responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God” (Book of Discipline 2024, ¶ 102–104; ¶ 160–166).

I understand that this vow calls me to steward my body as “*a temple of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Corinthians 6:19–20, NIV) by cultivating habits—sleep, exercise, rest, and moderation—that support physical health. In practical terms, I will continue my routine well-checks with my primary physician, and I will continue exercising 3–4 times a week to be at a healthy weight and shape. I will commit myself to 8 hours of sleep and time off with my wife and family. I will honor them and myself with vacations every year. I will continue growing my delegation skills.

Scripture affirms that “*bodily training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things*” (1 Timothy 4:8, NIV), and that discipline—“*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace*” (Hebrews 12:11, NIV)—must shape my daily rhythms and routines.

This commitment likewise embraces responsible intellectual development: “*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2, NIV). I will pursue God-honoring learning—Scripture study, theological reflection, continuing education—so that I “*rightly handle the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15, NIV) and focus on whatever is “*true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy*” (Philippians 4:8, NIV). In practical terms, I will continue my education until completion with Theology University of the Caribbean, and then I will pursue my master’s and doctoral degrees at Candler University; those are my personal goals. I will also work on my knowledge of the Methodist Book of Discipline, John Wesley’s theology, sermons, and writings so that I can adequately apply his teachings on grace, the church, and ministry for the sake of a ministry well established in love, tolerance, and inclusivity. In marriage, I will “*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*” (Ephesians 5:21, NIV), cultivating fidelity, mutual respect, and sacrificial love. In singleness, I will heed Paul’s instruction to “*live in such a*

way as to remain faithful to Christ” (1 Corinthians 7:7–8, NIV). Whether married or single, my relationships reflect Christ’s covenant with the Church, for He “*loved the church and gave himself up for her*” (Ephesians 5:25, NIV). Specifically, I commit myself to taking time off, alone with her, since it seems to work immensely in renewing our relationship and closeness.

Finally, I will pursue “*growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18, NIV) through spiritual disciplines like prayer, fasting, worship, small-group accountability, and works of mercy—and Wesleyan practices such as class meetings and quarterly covenant renewal. By “*working out my salvation with fear and trembling*” (Philippians 2:12, NIV) and trusting the Spirit to “*transform us into his image with ever-increasing glory*” (2 Corinthians 3:18, NIV), I commit to a lifetime of holy living undergirded by connective accountability and John Wesley’s conviction that “*there is no holiness but social holiness.*”

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Proclamation Questions

Full Elder, Provisional Elder, Associate Member, Local Pastor, Transfer Applications

Part I:

1. Briefly describe the context of the service (when, where, the life of the congregation, pertinent recent events, leadership consideration).

Our church is located in Belleview, Florida, right near The Villages — the largest retirement community in the country. Nevertheless, we have a vibrant and committed younger generation in our worship team, and the congregation truly appreciates their involvement. During this opportunity, my wife — who's also applying to be a Local Pastor — actively participated. Four of our children helped lead worship: While Graciela, Cruz, and Carolina sang, Deborah played the piano and sang as well. My wife led worship and led a congregational prayer moment. In some moments of the sermon, I mention their names to make the sermon even more personal for them and help them feel their relevance. On the other hand, the current context of our country and the world, where the laws and their application go against the freedom of individuals and the free expression of their faith, makes evident the need to teach about our firm determination to express our faith — one that cannot be silenced, a beacon that cannot be extinguished.

2. What is the sermon title and text?

Sermon Manuscript: An Indisputable Assignment from God

Text: Acts 5:27–32 (ESV)

3. Why did you choose to preach from this text?

Taken from the liturgical calendar for the second Sunday of Easter. The details and topics included in the sermon take into consideration a congregation with 80% elderly members, young marriages, and children. It is very important to highlight during the sermon the relevance of our life in Christ and the call to serve, regardless of our age. Our divine purpose is framed from the cradle to the grave. While we are here, we are the light, and we are needed by God and His kingdom.

4. Write a *one sentence* purpose statement for this sermon.

To highlight the determination of the apostles facing the opposition of authority figures, and like the apostles, Methodists are called to live out our faith, which may challenge cultural norms and unfair laws.

5. What did you want the hearers to do as a result of this message?

To be strong and determined. To have a clear understanding of our individual calling and assignment from God.

6. Give a brief outline of the service. This could be a bulletin, an order of worship, a flow sheet from the Planning Center, etc.

This program is for the same date of the sermon manuscript sermon from April 27th, 2025. If you notice the family participation during the service, it was intentional and recommended by senior Pastor, Rev. Shawn O'Trimble. We planned to use this opportunity to highlight our participation and contributions.

Welcome/Prayer - Pastor Elvis Soto

Opening Hymn - Soto Family (Daiane, Deborah, Graciela, Cruz and Carolina)

Greeting Announcements - Pastor Elvis Soto

Congregational Prayer/Lord's Prayer - Pastor Elvis Soto

Worship Music - Soto Family (Daiane, Deborah, Graciela, Cruz and Carolina)

Offering/Prayer - David Palmer

Doxology - Soto Family (Daiane, Deborah, Graciela, Cruz and Carolina)

Scripture Reading - Graciela Soto

Sermon Pastor – Pastor Elvis Soto

Altar Call/Prayer - Pastor Elvis Soto

Blessing and Benediction - Pastor Elvis Soto

7. After viewing the video, what is your personal evaluation of the service? How were the worshippers shaped and formed by the worship service? Why was the music selected? How did the music, announcements benediction, and/or other parts of the service enhance or detract from the flow and purpose?

The overall evaluation of the service was that it was an excellent service. We experienced a beautiful presence of the Holy Spirit throughout the duration of the service. We had a good flow of events, with nothing detracting from the main purpose of the service. Everyone was on point. The mix of contemporary music, hymns, instrumental piano selections during segments and during the sermon and altar call was well selected and truly enhanced the delivery of the sermon and the response during the prayer.

Note: The service is recorded and streamed live through Facebook. A recent new regulation on Facebook deletes all the video content after 30 days. The attached video link is a compilation of a few videos recorded separately and photos to provide a reconstruction of events during the service. The sermon is complete.

Part II: Limit answers to the following questions below to 6 or 7 pages.

8. What is the purpose of preaching?

The purpose of preaching is to share the grace of God in Christ that brings salvation to humanity, through Christ. When we preach, we speak on behalf of the highest authority and in His representation. There is no greater privilege. The message or sermon is a result of divine inspiration and revelation. It should be based on Scripture, organized and understandable. The purpose behind preaching is to create a bridge between people and God — to reconcile, provide

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connection, heal the relationship, offer hope and salvation, and enable a divine encounter that forever transforms the heart. From the prophets to the apostles, preaching is the Spirit-led proclamation of God's Word that calls for repentance and change.

The Bible says, "*How can they hear without someone preaching to them?*" (Romans 10:14–15), so preaching is essential for salvation. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul writes: "*Preach the word... correct, rebuke, and encourage with great patience and careful instruction.*" Although preaching can be an enjoyable experience, it is not always a pleasant speech to deliver. Paul also writes that the goal is to "*present everyone mature in Christ*" (Colossians 1:28–29), meaning preaching helps shape character, not just belief. Biblical preaching is pastoral, prophetic, and deeply personal. Wesley taught that we are justified. He recognized that justification by faith was the heart of the gospel. Wesley saw preaching as a means of grace. Dennis Johnson said: "*I design plain truth for plain people.*" For Wesley, preaching wasn't just about conversion; it was about holiness. He believed the purpose was "the complete conformity of every child of God to the perfect image of Christ." He preached to stir hearts, shape lives, and send people out as witnesses of grace. The following verses of the Bible encapsulate the purpose of preaching in brief compass:

"...*Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me...For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*" (Colossians 1:28-29; 2:2-3)

9. What is the role of proclamation at a wedding and a funeral?

During both a wedding and funeral proclamation, there is a sense not just of a speech, but of sacred acts of bearing witness. Through proclamation, we declare that God is present and faithful. Wedding Proclamation – In a Methodist wedding, we affirm that marriage is a covenant in God's love, not just a legal union. The readings, sermon, and hymns proclaim what this union reflects: the union of Christ in relationship with the Church (Ephesians 5:25–33), and “...*that love is patient, kind, and enduring...*” (1 Corinthians 13). Jesus blesses the wedding at Cana, turning water into wine — a sign of abundance and joy (John 2:1). This proclamation is a sending forth for the couple. They're called to live out grace, forgiveness, and witness to the world.

Funeral Proclamation – One of the greatest opportunities for every preacher of the gospel. The atmosphere is appropriate for proclaiming a message of hope and salvation through Christ. The proclamation here is a testimony: we declare that the deceased is entrusted to God, and we reaffirm our own faith in the resurrection of Jesus. I was invited by a friend to be present and do a funeral service during his father's passing. The word brought comfort to the family as the place was filled with a beautiful atmosphere of reflection. As I concluded my exhortation, I called upon everyone to recognize Christ as the Lord of their lives. Many people received the message of salvation that day and confessed Jesus as Savior. The proclamation speaks resurrection hope into the reality of death. It names grief honestly while declaring that death does not have the final word. The sermon and readings proclaim Christ's victory and the promise of eternal life. The Bible has plenty to say during difficult times.

Bible verses include:

- “*We do not grieve as those without hope.*” — 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14
- “*I am the resurrection and the life.*” — John 11:25–26

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- *“He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces...”* — Isaiah 25:8
- *“We have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven...”* — 2 Corinthians 5:1
- *“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His faithful.”* — Psalm 116:15

10. What is the role of the prophetic voice within preaching? In what ways does your preparation change vs. a typical Sunday’s sermon?

We live in a sense of change that pervades our time. But the prophetic voice within preaching is a sacred invitation to live out holiness not only personally, but socially, and that hasn’t changed. It rises when the Church forgets her mission, when we see systemic oppression gaining ground, and when the community settles into comfort that resists transformation.

Prophetic preaching dares to name what’s broken — not to shame, but to awaken. It confronts injustice with holy love. Like the prophets of Scripture, it names what is broken: systems, habits, spiritual apathy — and calls for transformation. When you hear the sermon video I included as part of this application, it relates to this answer. We call the people of God back to covenant. We remind the Church of its identity in Christ, chosen and called with an individual and collective purpose, and its mission to be salt and light in the world.

A voice full of grace, no anger, but the message still the same, *“Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed”* (Isaiah 1:16-17, NRSV) and Amos *“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”* (Amos 5:24, NRSV). Let’s remember Jesus when He declares His mission to preach good news to the poor and set the oppressed free, (Luke 4:18–19, NRSV). Our response to the current needs, like you hear in my sermon should be determined, clear, with clarity, compassion and conviction.

John Wesley’s own preaching was profoundly prophetic. When he stood in the fields and preached grace to coal miners and outcasts, he wasn’t just offering comfort—he was confronting

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religious exclusivity and calling people into God's radical love. In the preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems (1739), Wesley wrote, "*The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness*". We need to resist the conformity to our own Christian world and return into the spirit of evangelism, transformation should not be my personal pursuit, but a quest to be shared, like a funny video that goes everywhere online.

In the mind of a preacher, a great preparation should be the standard and the expected. Preparation includes daily meditation, prayer, and the flow of the presence of the Holy Spirit bringing clarity to the different areas of the sermon.

A nightmare that has repeated many times in my life is being introduced to bring the word and finding myself at the pulpit unprepared to deliver the message. I pray I would never find myself in such a predicament. Such a great responsibility cannot be taken lightly. When the time comes, the preacher should be ready to deliver — from the soul, with passion and integrity before men and out of respect towards God and the audience. Preaching from the soul to the souls of the audience.

In the words of Ellsworth Kalas from his book Soul Preaching: "*The speaker is communicating ideas, insights and convictions, but all of these are marked by the quality of the speaker's own soul. Soul preaching happens when the speaker seeks to deliver not only a message, but his or her own soul, and to deliver it in such a way that it reaches the soul of the hearer.*"

11. What is the role of proclamation in the work of anti-racism?

I was born in Stamford, Connecticut, but I'm from Puerto Rico. I have Spanish ancestry on my father's side and African ancestry on my mother's. I recall the stories of rejection and suffering

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that were told within the framework of the family. Therefore, since preaching is communication and a theological act that confronts sin — including racism — with the truth of the gospel, its relevance and role in the fight against racism are still very much needed today. Both the world and the Church are called to repentance and action through our work. Years ago, I had the privilege of serving as the Outreach Pastor for a diverse church. Remarkably, 70% of the church attendees were either African or African-Americans. Organizing multiple outdoor events that touched the lives of everyone in the community was an incredible experience. By representing everyone equally, we were able to connect with everyone, fostering empathy and unity in Christ. Today, we support the work of Shawn O'Trimble at Belleview Methodist, where 90% of the congregation is white from different ancestry backgrounds. My wife is from Brazil, and my children are a mix of Puerto Rico and Brazil. We are loved and embraced as we plan and pray together as one mission for the kingdom of God.

Preaching is not neutral; in the name of Christ, it either upends or maintains the status quo. The biblical truths that all people are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28, NIV) and made in God's image (Genesis 1:27, NIV) serve as the foundation for the role that anti-racism proclamations bring. Regardless of race, status, or background, Scripture repeatedly calls the Church to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31, NIV) and denounces favoritism (James 2:1–9, NIV).

Proclamation becomes more than just speech in this context; it is a theological act that challenges sin and exhorts the public to turn from its ways. William Willimon contends that sermons should speak with the authority of God's Word rather than being reduced to moral guidance or therapeutic consolation. He names racism as a spiritual force that needs to be eradicated, not just controlled. *"We don't preach about ourselves," he writes. "Rather, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord."* (Proclamation and Theology, ch. 2, p. 36).

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Proclamations against racism have their roots in the gospel itself, not in ideology. "*We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today,*" said Martin Luther King Jr. in his 1967 speech at Riverside Church. The stark urgency of the present moment serves as a reminder that inaction is complicity and that the Church must be prompted to take action by proclamation. Preaching in this tradition is pastoral and prophetic — not passive. It challenges preconceived notions, speaks truth, and dares to envision a Church where reconciliation is not only taught but also lived.

12. How is a sermon different from a speech (ex. TED Talk) or devotion?

A speech like a TED Talk is centered on the speaker's expertise in a certain area, technology, innovation, etc. TED Talks bring new ideas, suggest the use of new products or methodologies. A devotion, on the other hand, is usually personal, intimate, and centered on a subject with the purpose of providing guidance, nurturing faith, or supporting the prayer life. It is like when Mary pondered the angel's words in her heart (Luke 2:19, NIV): meditative and personal.

A sermon is like what Jesus gave in Matthew 5–7, (The Sermon of the Mount). It was structured, layered, full of teaching. A sermon is also a theological proclamation that speaks the Word of God. The preacher becomes the vessel of divine truth. A sermon invites transformation, they are the result of prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A sermon changes lives and transforms the community.

13. How do you generate ideas for sermon and/or series, and how do you contextualize those ideas or sources for your specific community?

14.

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Sermon ideas flow constantly in my mind. God reveals to us the invisible through the things we see (Revelation 1:20, NIV). God speaks to us constantly through the world around us. I find myself often repeating, Wow, that's a good idea for a sermon!

Sermon and series ideas are all about active listening — to God, His Word, the Church, and people in general. It's not just about understanding the Bible; it's also about understanding the congregation's needs. You can sense the joy of a child's worship, the silence of a prayer request, and the lingering questions after a Bible study. I pay attention to recent events, recurring wounds, and moments of victory, trials, and triumphs. They might hint at divine revelations.

Of course, studying the Bible is crucial. Sometimes, a powerful passage grabs my attention and leaves a lasting impression. From there, meditation and annotation inspired by God's divine revelation give birth to powerful sermons and sermon series. In the end, knowing the congregation, their needs, and what really resonates within their context is crucial to delivering the right sermon at the right moment.

14. Who are some impactful preachers and non-preacher communicators you listen to, read, or learn from?

Yiye Avila - Evangelist from Puerto Rico - passed away some time ago. Rev. Jimmy Swaggart - Evangelist - Rev. Billy Graham - Evangelist. Non-preaching – John Maxwell

- a. What have you learned from them about preaching and communication? I still listen to them. They keep me energized with passion for Christ and the urgency of sharing the message of hope and salvation with every person. In John Maxwell as a motivational speaker, I have learned organization skills, leadership skills, like the 3 Cs in leadership, Competence, Character and Connection. And the 4 pillars of leadership, relationships,

equipping, attitude and leadership. Stay focused and to have a plan before we try to implement ideas.

- b. What have you learned from them about the work of anti-racism? All of them have shown, throughout the years, their commitment to working equally for the salvation of humanity as a whole. Their love for souls was inclusive and full of grace and love.

On John Maxwell's position on racism, John Maxwell has consistently emphasized leadership grounded in ethical clarity and relational humility, urging Christian leaders to actively confront injustice, build bridges of reconciliation, and embody the value that all people are made in the image of God. From the Book "21 Irrefutable laws of Leadership," *"Don't ever underestimate the importance of building relational bridges between yourself and the people you lead. There's an old saying: to lead yourself, use your head; to lead others, use your heart. That's the nature of the Law of Connection. Always touch a person's heart before you ask him for a hand."*

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1. Describe your understanding of the nature and attributes of God you derive from Biblical and historical sources.

According to The Apostles' Creed, God is the Almighty Father, Creator of heaven and earth. This early Christian confession emphasizes divine sovereignty and relational intimacy. The phrase "I believe" signals not just agreement, but trust in a God who acts, speaks, and redeems.

The Nicene Creed expands this vision: God is eternal, almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible. He is Triune—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It identifies the Father as source, the Son as eternally begotten, and the Spirit as life-giver, showing God as glorified and relational.

Worship hymns from The United Methodist Hymnal speak to God's attributes in powerful ways:

- "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" sings of sanctifying grace.
- "Holy, Holy, Holy" declares God's holiness (Isaiah 6:3).
- "Immortal, Invisible" celebrates His eternal wisdom.
- "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" calls Him protector (Psalm 115:3).

Charles Wesley's hymns portray God as merciful and redeeming. The hymn "And Can It Be" speaks of chains broken by divine love, while "Love Divine" evokes pure joy and transformation. Lauren Winner's *Wearing God* invites us to encounter divine intimacy through metaphors. She describes God as clothing (Isa 61:10), as fragrance, and as bread—images that reveal His presence woven into everyday life.

2. Who is Jesus Christ? How is He Lord and Savior?

Philippians 2:5–11 describes Jesus' humility and exaltation. He emptied Himself of divine privilege, took on human form, and died for us. Then, God exalted Him above every name.

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Colossians 1:15–20 proclaims **Christ as the image of the invisible God**—Creator, sustainer, and reconciler of all things—while Colossians 2:9 affirms the fullness of God dwelling in Him.

John 1:1–14 describes Jesus as the eternal Word—Creator, life, light, incarnate, and revealer of the Father.

According to *The Apostles' Creed*, Jesus is God's only Son, incarnated by the Spirit, born of a virgin, crucified, buried, and resurrected. He ascended into heaven, now reigns, and will judge the living and the dead.

3. Describe your personal experience and understanding **of the Holy Spirit**.

The Holy Spirit embraced me **with** grace and conviction, leading to my salvation. During more than 30 years as a preacher, the Spirit has sustained me through loss, healing, and miracles—including my healing from cancer in 1996 and protection during a violent attack in 1999. My son, who spent years in hospitals, has now been restored. The Holy Spirit has saved my whole family, each serving in ministry. In the United Methodist Church, baptism is not only a sign of God's grace but a sacred act of incorporation into the body of Christ. According to *By Water and the Spirit*, **the Holy Spirit is present** and active **in the moment of** baptism itself. **The** UMC affirms that we receive the Spirit at baptism, and the ongoing work of the Spirit continue in our lives, whether through spiritual gifts, transformation, or personal revival, it does not stop. Grace continue to work, providing for sanctification and equipping our lives or the work of the ministry as well, (Eph 4:12-16, NIV). While we honor those in other traditions who speak of a second baptism, in our Wesleyan understanding, such powerful spiritual moments are expressions of sanctifying grace. There is one baptism, and the fullness of the Spirit begins its work in us from that sacred moment forward. We give glory to God for His non-stop extraordinary work of grace in our lives, as we

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continue to serve Him, “ ... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus, (Phil 1:6, NIV).

The Spirit is God—eternal, divine, Creator (Heb 9:14; Gen 1:1–2). He is personal and relational, the “Advocate” (John 14:16–17). He convicts (John 16:8), speaks (Rev 2:7), intercedes (Rom 8:26), leads (Acts 8:29), and can be grieved (Eph 4:30). The Holy Spirit is a person, the third person of the Holy Trinity. As we read on the Nicene Creed; “...I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.”

4. What is the meaning and significance of the sacraments in the UMC?

I still remember the day I waded into the confirmation waters. Born and raised catholic I was baptized as an infant, spending my childhood as an altar boy, I learn deep appreciation for tradition and the love for Christ and his sacrifice for humanity was present in my life for all those years. In the Wesleyan and United Methodist tradition, confirmation is not a sacrament, but it is a deeply meaningful rite of passage—a public affirmation of faith and commitment to discipleship, particularly after baptism. Now, I my life felt firmly on track, as I wept through the entire ceremony as the waves lapped around my ankles. It was in the open sea, and my pastor at the time—later Bishop Luis F. Sotomayor, guided me in every step. What a glorious experience! “*Confirmation is not a new beginning but a continuation of the baptismal journey into deeper discipleship.*”
— *By Water and the Spirit.*

In the United Methodist Church—rooted in the Wesleyan tradition—we recognize only two sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion, as outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace (cf. Article XIII of The Articles of Religion). Baptism inaugurates us into the covenant

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community. We baptize infants and adults alike because prevenient grace goes before any human response, drawing us into Christ's life even before we know to ask. During baptism, grace is already at work. As Paul declares, "All of us were baptized into Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:3–4, NIV), uniting every soul to Jesus' death and resurrection. Wesley called baptism "the door of the kingdom," and John 3:5 reminds us, "no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5, NIV). In our liturgy we invoke the Triune Name "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19, NIV) and profess the promises of regeneration, forgiveness of sin, and new birth. Whether I stand at a riverbank, on the shore of Lady Lake, or before the font in our sanctuary, we witness lives sealed by God's covenantal love.

Holy Communion is our foretaste of the heavenly banquet and a continuing means of grace. When Jesus took the loaf and the cup, he invited us into his body and blood: "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV). By sharing one loaf and one cup, we embody the unity of the Spirit: "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body" (1 Cor. 10:17, NIV). We remember Christ's atoning sacrifice "given for you" and "poured out for you" (Luke 22:19–20, NIV) and anticipate "the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9, NIV). Wesley described the Lord's Supper as an "instrument of grace," for in that simple meal hearts are fed, brokenness is healed, and our communion with Christ and one another is deepened. Whether at our monthly potluck in the church hall or distributing an open-table meal in the community, I've seen strangers become family around that table—bound by a grace we neither earn nor deserve.

Together, these sacraments shape the rhythm of our Christian journey. They root us in Scripture—baptism in the story of new creation (Ephesians 2:5; 1 Peter 3:21, NIV), communion in the narrative of redemption (John 6:53–56, NIV). They carry forward Wesley's vision of the means of grace—channels through which the Spirit works to bring growth in holiness. And they

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form us into the Body of Christ: "There is one body and one Spirit" (Ephesians 4:4–6, NIV), calling us to embody mercy, justice, and love in the world. In every baptism the church celebrates and every loaf that is lifted or received, We are reminded that sacraments aren't mere symbols but encounters with the living Christ—moments where heaven and earth collide and we discover ourselves held by a love that never lets go.

5. What is your understanding of the Kingdom of God? Use one of Jesus' parables to illustrate one aspect.

I will use the parable of the persistent widow and the unjust judge (Luke 18:1–8) to illustrate a crucial aspect of the Kingdom of God, prayer. Jesus frequently emphasizes the importance of prayer, in contrast, my daughter Graciela recently begged me to accompany her for an entire week until I was compelled to say yes. The widow's unwavering persistence moved a corrupt judge. In God's Kingdom, persistence in prayer demonstrates trust, not mere insistence or manipulation. "Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly" (Psalm 138:6). A poor widow continually petitions an unjust judge for justice. Though the judge neither fears God nor respects people, he finally grants her request just to stop her from bothering him. Jesus uses this contrast to teach that God, who is just and merciful, will surely answer the cries of His people, especially those seeking justice.

This parable reveals both the present activity through prayer that connects us to God and the needs of humanity and the future fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. In the present, the widow's persistency soliciting justice is a reflection of the Kingdom at work wherever people faithfully seek God's will and resist injustice. The contrast is introduced between an unjust human judge and God, who is just and compassionate and will surely respond to the cries and needs of His people. Jesus uses this story to urge His followers to pray without ceasing, (1 Tes 5:16-18, NIV), affirming that prayer is not passive rather an active partnership with God's present reign. Through

prayer, in Wesleyan terms, this persistence is a sign of grace at work, prevenient and justifying grace stirring the soul to long for righteousness, and sanctifying grace shaping that longing into holy action.

At the same time, the parable points toward the future consummation of God's Kingdom. Jesus ends the parable with the sobering question, "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" A powerful reminder of the need for faith when the answer feels delayed. The fullness of God's Kingdom and power will be revealed upon his return. Now, we live in a holy expectation, serving, praying, living, and growing in grace as we wait; we persist in our faith, knowing that one day, all tension and suffering will end and the glory of His Kingdom will reign forever.

6. What is the church called to be and to do?

The Church is summoned to be a visible sign of Christ's love, mercy, and holiness in the world. The Church is the Body of Christ and called to be the Body of Christ in practice, a divine reality and human responsibility. "Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it." (1 Cor 12:27, NIV). We do not create the Body of Christ, we are incorporated into it by grace. Yet, this gift also comes with a call: to live out what we already are. The Church is not a building but a living witness to God's Kingdom, living, active, and united in love (Eph. 4:15–16). We are God's family (Gal 6:10), called to mature spiritually and relationally. The Church is the Body of Christ — this is a theological reality rooted in Scripture.

The Church is also called to become the Body of Christ — this is a missional and moral responsibility empowered by grace. Jesus sent us: "Go and make disciples..." (Matt 28:19–20, NIV). We are called to preach, serve, reconcile, uphold justice, and show mercy, (Matt 25:35–

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40, NIV). Following Christ's example, the Church should pursue holiness and act with compassion, (Luke 4:18–19, NIV). The Church is a gift from the Holy Spirit, and made one body through baptism.

7. Discuss the authority of Scripture and how the Bible communicates truth.

The Scripture is the inspired, foundational word of God (2 Tim 3:16–17, NIV). Wesley called it “the book of God”, the source of transformation. In Sermon 106, he said, “Let me be a man of one book.”

The Bible communicates truth through:

- Narrative Revelation: Creation (Gen 1–2, NIV), covenant (Exod 19), Jesus' life (Luke 1–24, NIV)
- Moral Instruction: Ten Commandments (Exod 20), Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7, NIV), Paul's epistles
- Christ as Truth: “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14, NIV)
- Experiential Confirmation: “The Spirit testifies...” (Rom 8:16, NIV)

Wesley affirmed that truth is not mere doctrine, but a living encounter with Christ. When we read or listen to the Scripture, the Spirit helps us understand it, (John 14:26, NIV), not merely by explaining words on a page, but by opening our hearts to the living Word, Jesus Christ. I recall a moment in my life when I was alone, sitting near a window on the floor of the church. I was studying the Bible, trying with difficulty to understand it. I prayed to God until my tears wetted the pages of the Bible. “Open my eyes, Lord,” I prayed, “make me see your truth. I want to see.” As time went by, I was filled with emotion when I discovered that the Holy Spirit, my teacher, had made it possible for me to read and understand what I had been trying to comprehend before. Throughout my life, God has also added mentors and teachers who have been used for my growth and training. Thank God for his ministers, who light the way so that others can continue on the path towards God through his word.

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Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, would teach us all things and remind us of everything He had said. In the Wesleyan tradition, this means that truth is not merely the intellectual grasp of doctrine, but a transformative encounter with the risen Christ through the Spirit. For Wesley, Scripture is best understood in the context of prayer, community, and a life actively shaped by grace. It is the Spirit who awakens the mind and heart to the saving truth of God, leading us beyond information into spiritual formation. As we read the Word, it is the Spirit who assures, convicts, and sanctifies—making the Scriptures not just a record of truth, but a living channel through which we meet the Truth Himself.

8. What is your understanding of resurrection and eternal life?

As I am writing, I traveled to Miami for the funeral of Clara—a mentor, mother, and strong believer. Her life overflowed with faith in Jesus, His resurrection, and return. At the service, I quoted Jesus: “I am the resurrection and the life...” (John 11:25–27). The room was filled with tears of joy and hope.

John Wesley called Jesus’ resurrection “the sure pledge of our resurrection” (Sermon 99). Paul affirms: Christ died, was buried, and was raised (1 Cor 15:3–4). This isn’t symbolic—it’s physical, flesh-and-bone resurrection (John 20:27; Rom 8:11). Eternal life begins the moment we believe (John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:17). At the funeral, even children at the funeral began praying for eternity with God. Sanctifying grace teaches us to live this life in love (1 John 5:11–12). Revelation says, “He will wipe every tear...” (Rev 21:4–5). Until then, we worship by candlelight, carry burdens, and live as Easter people—certain that even the grave cannot separate us from Christ.

9. What is your understanding of the Wesleyan concept of grace?

According to *The Way to Heaven* by Steve Harper, we respond to grace all along the way. There’s nothing man can do to save himself—like someone lost in the middle of the ocean. Hope comes

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only from outside. In Wesleyan thought, this is Prevenient Grace. Otherwise, we might believe we can save ourselves without divine help. But grace is grace—it's defined not by our efforts, but by how we experience it and how it meets us at every stage. In my case: Benjamin died—my best friend. I was crushed. Myrna, a woman at work, prayed for me without even knowing why. Then Felix, a new friend, invited me to a Methodist youth retreat—again and again, until I went. That's all grace. Grace is given, not awarded. Not earned, not deserved. It is a gift from God. Prevenient grace is what comes before, the first light in our darkness. While we are sinners, before conversion, before awareness, grace is already moving. It is impossible to come from death to life without God's initiative. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved... through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works..." (Eph. 2:5–10, NIV)

John Wesley insisted that grace is "free, undeserved favor," poured out by a God who loves first and deepest. This grace isn't irresistible—but it's persistent.

Then comes Justifying Grace—the moment the light breaks through. God enters, and we recognize our condition. Christ's blood swings open the door. I remember the night I responded—outside the Methodist Church in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. I crossed the street, walked the aisle, dropped to my knees, and felt His presence. I cried out for forgiveness. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1, NIV)

Wesley's Aldersgate experience reflects this absolution—it's the heartbeat of every baptism and new believer's story.

Sanctifying Grace is the journey beyond forgiveness toward maturity—what Wesley called "Christian perfection." The Spirit heals hatred, reshapes the carnal mind, and teaches us the language of the Kingdom. It's not limited by time—it's patient, enduring, and divine.

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“May the God of peace... sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless...” (1 Thess. 5:23, NIV) “...Training us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness...” (Titus 2:11–12, NIV). For Wesley, grace is experienced through the means of grace: prayer, Scripture, worship, communion, and acts of mercy and then along with the gift of grace we are equipped to give it into others. Our ability to offer grace (like forgiveness and kindness) comes or flows directly from the grace we have already received in Christ. “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32, NRSV). In my personal experience, only through prayer and fasting did the Holy Spirit grant me the strength to endure the teasing and rejections of my family. I persevered in my prayers for them until I witnessed the day of their salvation in Christ.

10. What is your understanding of suffering and evil in the world and God’s response to it?

Everyone faces evil. Life is beautiful—but it’s also painful. Yet suffering and evil were never part of God’s original design. John Wesley believed that God created the world “very good” without defect or corruption. Evil sneaks in when good beings misuse their freedom Gen 1:31, NIV. We see it first in Lucifer’s rebellion (Isa. 14:12–15, NIV), then in Adam and Eve’s fateful choice (Gen. 3:16–19, NIV). Since that moment, the world groans under the weight of sin (Rom. 8:19–22, NIV).

I’ll never forget my friend, Pastor Larry Lynn standing among the rubble of a to-mado-struck church here in Lady Lake. Two pieces of wood twisted by wind formed a cross amid the destruction. That’s natural suffering laid bare (Rom. 8:22, NIV).

Then there was a young man from our church, falsely accused. I visited him in jail for five years. His heart was crushed under injustice, moral suffering born of hatred and racism (James 4:1–2, NIV). I’ve also sat with parents watching their teen face painful consequences. That’s penal

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suffering—not meant to punish, but to restore (Heb. 12:6, NIV). These hurts aren't God's plan but they're the result of a world turned away from divine love.

But God doesn't stand on the shoreline watching us drown. In Jesus, the Almighty dove into our storm: "He was despised and rejected... a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3, NIV). He carried our wounds to the cross (Isa. 53:4–5, NIV), wept for Lazarus (John 11:35, NIV), and rose to silence death's roar (1 Cor. 15:54–57, NIV). In that moment, God showed up in our mess. No darkness can snuff out His light. And our hope isn't wishful thinking, it's a promise. "Behold, I am making all things new" (Rev. 21:5, NIV) "He will wipe every tear..." (Rev. 21:4, NIV).

Today, the Spirit continues to flow through pain when a young man finds his way out and is liberated from addiction. I was diagnosed with cancer, which was a long period of uncertainty. However, I experienced healing from lung cancer in 1996. My son, who underwent brain surgery five long years ago, is now completely recovered and whole. Until that new day comes, we carry one another's burdens, share stories by candlelight, and trust that no storm is beyond the reach of God's hand. Our sufferings are temporarily and hope is eternal; "...We will share in Christ's resurrection glory..." (1 Cor. 15:52–54, NIV). This hope empowers us to live with courage, compassion, and unwavering trust in God's restoration.

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Personal Growth Questions

Local Pastor Application

1. The Board understands personal growth to mean you are aware of your strengths and weaknesses, especially with regard to your emotional and spiritual growth and self-understanding.

a. What is your current understanding of your strengths and weaknesses?

I believe it is vital to understand not only my own strengths and weaknesses, this helps us be more effective in ministry, while also continuing to grow both personally and spiritually. In the Wesleyan tradition, spiritual leadership begins with a commitment to growth in grace and a willingness to be honest with ourselves and with those we serve. This reflective posture allows ministers to serve faithfully—not by relying solely on personal capacity, but by trusting in the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout my life in ministry and professional settings, I have discovered that God has gifted me strongly in the areas of leadership, service, and communication. I can communicate in two languages, English and Spanish and Portuguese is a work in progress. I am very comfortable leading meetings, organizing ministry teams, delegating tasks effectively, and following up to ensure goals are met with integrity and care. I thrive in collaborative environments and often serve as a bridge between voices of differing sides, helping people feel heard and valued while moving toward resolution. Whether it's in conflict mediation or issue-based conversations, I am committed to remain Spirit-led and compassionate while staying focused on the UMC mission.

My communication gifts have been shaped not only by my years of preaching and teaching—often to large audiences, in different countries, sometimes with simultaneous translation, but also through my experience as a television and radio host. I have conducted my own tv and radio show and also I been invited to life interview or participations. These platforms have taught me how to speak to the heart, adapt to different audiences, and stay clear and grounded in the message. In addition, my background as a certified insurance counselor (CIC) and reinsurance underwriter developed my negotiation skills, administrative discipline, and the ability to assess risk and strategy, skills I now carry into church leadership, strategic planning, and pastoral decision-making.

In my own life, ministry is a family effort. My wife, Daiane, is physically strong, highly organized, compassionate and gifted at farming, preaching, children's ministry, worship leadership, music, and pastoral visitation. We also homeschool our three children, who are already showing individual talents in music, worship, and self-directed learning. My own strengths lie in administration, preaching, teaching, and oversight of both the home and ministry. We delegate responsibilities regularly at home and in the church, always matching tasks to the person's unique gifts while offering supervision and encouragement where needed.

As for my weaknesses, I view them as areas of intentional growth. I have learned that I can sometimes lean heavily into doing things myself rather than inviting others into the process early on. According to John Maxwell and the Book, 21 Irrefutable laws of leadership, successful leaders lead mastering priorities. *"They recognize that activity is not necessarily accomplishment. This actually enables them to increase their focus while reducing their number of actions."* Over time, I've grown more comfortable delegating and trusting others with responsibility, reducing my number of tasks, consequently I now see team development as part of my call. Also, In high-conflict settings, my instinct is to bring peace quickly, which at times has meant avoiding deeper

confrontation. I've learned, however, that healthy conflict can be redemptive, and I continue to grow in my ability to hold space for difficult conversations with grace and clarity.

I believe God continually shapes our character as much as our competence. My goal is not perfection, but to remain teachable and Spirit-formed. I see my strengths as tools for service, and my areas of growth as invitations to depend more deeply on God and the community around me.

Understanding the strengths and growth areas of those working on the same team is essential to the effectiveness of our ministry. Those around me are part of the same call to serve. Their talents should be affirmed, and their growth areas addressed—not to point them out negatively, but to provide the support, guidance, and accountability they need.

Strengths are the God-given and developed gifts, competencies, experiences, and character traits that empower a minister for effective service. Some may possess spiritual gifts such as teaching, leadership, mercy, theological and pastoral proficiency. Others may show emotional intelligence, cultural fluency and multicultural hospitality, (ideal for a multicultural setting), and organizational skills. "...*We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us*" (Romans 12:6, NIV). The Apostle Paul emphasizes the proficiency of many individuals in various areas of expertise, highlighting their potential to contribute to the construction of God's kingdom through collaboration and teamwork. When these strengths are identified and effectively managed, ministers can effectively disciple others, foster healthy teams, and lead the church with clarity and purpose. For example, a strength in preaching may bear fruit in evangelism, while administrative skill ensures good order (1 Corinthians 14:40, NIV). A ministry requires so many talents, not only preachers and musicians but looking beyond the service setting, conflict resolution skills, the heart to mentor youth and the security or physical skills to handle safety at the sanctuary become valuable assets within the day to day ministry applications. In practical ministry, we need to celebrate those strengths and use them accordingly for the sake of a good ministry function and excellence.

Weaknesses when identified and put into correction are not areas of disqualifications. When we name them honestly, they become an invitation to God's grace, a goal set with room for improvement, a force that drives the minister or leader to growth, repentance, and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Weaknesses are opportunities, as Paul wrote: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness... for when I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Corinthians 12:9–10, NIV). Also, an area in need of growth brings the opportunity and need to bring someone onboard to complement the short comings. Weaknesses may also include ministry challenges like time-management, generational communication gaps. Similarly, Moses hesitated in his calling due to his speaking ability (Exodus 4:10–12), but God supplied what Moses lacked, his brother Aaron. And when the task at hand was too big for Moses to handle, the Holy Spirit brought another 70 men to enhance the extension of his effort.

In the Wesleyan view, sanctification involves both the refinement of our strengths for holy service and the transformation of our weaknesses into means of grace. Meaning that our flaws, limitations, or even sufferings can become places where God's grace meets us and works through us. "*Sanctification is the process of being made holy, of becoming more like Christ in love and in deed.*"— (John Wesley, Sermon 85: On Working Out Our Own Salvation). For example: I know a pastor who grapples with anxiety. He understands the profound importance of relying on prayer to sustain his work with compassion and understanding. By embracing prayer as the means of grace, he has found the strength and emotional stability to remain productive in his ministry.

A SWOT Analysis tool

Recently, during a workshop on Church Management at a United Methodist Annual Conference, led by Dr. Luis Gutiérrez, I was introduced to the SWOT analysis tool that stretches the need to consider the status of the church ministry in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and

threats. This experience significantly deepened my understanding of how a minister's awareness of the level on these indicators directly impacts the ministry decision-making.

Notes and Insights from the Workshop

Dr. Gutiérrez taught us that effective ministry leaders must incline toward strengths, because when a church leans into what it does well, the whole congregation grows stronger. Our church at this moment is very strong on mercy ministries, feeding an average 400 every week, but we must also confront and assess external challenges, economic shifts, tax law changes, cultural transitions, as potential threats that feel out of our control but must still be addressed.

The advice to take proactive rather than reactive action was one that really stood out to me. I'm determined to think and plan ahead in order to lead with this mindset. We must be proactive in the ministry and foresee and strategically identify trends that will impact our mission. In order to demonstrate this, Dr. Gutiérrez told the tale of a church that, rather than opposing change, relocated into a former country club in response to changing demographics. Paul's teaching to "*become all things to all people*" in order to win some people over to Christ is reminiscent of this (1 Corinthians 9:22).

He emphasized meeting with church administrative teams and during the meeting, ask strategic questions, assess internal and external realities, and consult #213 of the 2024 Book of Discipline, which guides congregational planning and revitalization. It urges churches to review the membership, the finances, building conditions, and missional alignment, highlighting the importance of honest evaluation and discernment.

Practical Application:

Using the SWOT framework, I now approach ministry strategy with greater clarity: **Strengths** are gifts, resources, and spiritual assets we must leverage—e.g., a strong worship ministry, financial reserves, dedicated lay leadership.

- **Weaknesses** include internal vulnerabilities—e.g., outdated facilities, declining membership, low morale—which we must face honestly.
- **Opportunities** are openings for mission—e.g., new neighbors, partnerships, growing communities—that signal growth potential.
- **Threats** are external challenges—e.g., demographic shifts, economic downturns, legal changes—that require adaptation.

One powerful takeaway was learning to **assign a weight or score** to each element. For example, having \$2 million in reserves is a "10" strength, while an outdated kitchen might be a "3" weakness. This helped me prioritize what is both urgent and achievable.

At a recent board meeting I was able to identify a threat, one that could be turned into an opportunity. We have 4 acres of undeveloped land and it has turned into a camping site for homeless individuals with criminal tendencies. A letter was shared by a neighbor requesting action from the church. This is rated a "10" in terms of how bad it could reflect on the church reputation and also a safety issue for the congregation and the community with a remedy cost of nearly \$30,000. I took some time and created a document called: Church Land Cleanup & Homelessness Response Guide. This document compiles the options available to explore a solution to the problem that will translate in a better relationship with the community. To support the church in safely addressing property cleanup, debris removal, and compassionate response to individuals experiencing homelessness. Options like: Contact Local Government Code enforcement agencies to inspect the property for illegal camping or public safety risks, also contact Sheriff's Community Services Office, to issue clean-up orders or coordinate with other departments,

contact the Florida Conference Disaster Response Coordinator and Church & Grant Resources for Florida Faith-Based & Community-Based Advisory Council among many other options. We are following this situation acting on the options starting on a visit to the Mayor office to turn them, into viable solutions to remove debris and cleanup, address crime, help the homeless and find the volunteers. As a leader, I see a situation that requires action, I feel compelled to act on it, work within the channel and with the available asset to find a solution. This threat can be turn into a golden opportunity for outreach and church involvement. After all, as a ministry we need to be strong on safety, but act with compassion and dignity with the mission always in mind.

As Wesleyans, we believe grace is not passive but rather it compels us to action. Through this opportunity, I learned the importance of naming reality, prioritizing what is achievable, and implementing strategies that match our ministry goals. Whether that means **growth, maintenance, investment or sale of a property**, each path must be chosen prayerfully and strategically.

- b. Explain your understanding of Emotional Intelligence and the importance of it in ministry. Share a specific story where you have been aware of personal strong emotions and tell us how you've managed them?

Emotional intelligence, (EI) is defined as capacity to perceive, understand, manage, and use emotions, both our own and others' in a healthy and constructive ways. In ministry, high EI, enables a leader to embody Christ-like compassion, discern underlying needs, and nurture spiritual growth in the congregation. Here's how I understand its key components and why each is vital for pastoral effectiveness: Emotional intelligence enables ministers to read unspoken hurts and speak life-giving truth, embodying the Good Shepherd's heart. The key components are:

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Self-Awareness - Know yourself, your emotional patterns, your strengths and triggers, allow yourself to remain humble and authentic before God, the church and the community. Psalm 139 reminds us, God searches our hearts (Psalm 139:23–24, NIV).

Self-Regulation- The ability to manage impulses and respond rather than react reflects the fruit of the Spirit: *“love, joy, peace... self-control”* (Galatians 5:22–23, NIV). When there is conflict, like staff disagreement, a pastor should listen and pray, hold back any impulse and speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15, NIV).

3. Empathy- The skill of entering another’s emotional world. Jesus *“had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”* (Matthew 9:36, NIV). A minister who practices empathy can offer comfort that resonates, guide grieving individuals and families with sensitivity, and bridge cultural divides in diverse congregations.

4. Social Skills - Building and maintaining healthy relationships—conflict resolution, team-building, public speaking—are essential. Wesley’s class meetings exemplified this: small-group accountability fostered honest sharing, mutual prayer, and encouragement. Today’s clergy need similar relational savvy to lead committees, mentor leaders, and cultivate community.

5. Motivation - Inner strength that takes you beyond duty. It sustains perseverance through slow seasons of growth or personal trials. *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest”* (Galatians 6:9, NIV), Paul speaks to keep hope and endure the difficult times, knowing a reward will be coming.

Personal experience on self-regulation – During an interdenominational gathering of pastor friends, where I had been invited to preach, a moment of conflict arose when one of the pastors

indirectly expressed disagreement with another who was present. The second pastor, visibly upset, stood up and responded publicly, leading to a tense altercation between the two. The atmosphere quickly became emotionally charged, and tension grew between the two represented congregations. At that moment, the Spirit led me to exercise self-control, since I was about to preach and chose not to react harshly or take sides but instead to become a calming presence. I was reminded of Proverbs 15:1 (NIV): *"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger,"* and Philippians 2:3 (NIV): *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves."*

The sermon that followed took on a reconciliatory tone, highlighting the unity of the body of Christ above our human disagreements. I invited everyone to remember that *"God is not a God of disorder but of peace"* (1 Corinthians 14:33), and that when our own interest takes the pulpit, the gospel is overshadowed. I closed the message encouraging all to pursue what is best in our pursuit of a Christ-like Christian character through love and living out our faith: *"Perfect love, which casts out fear, is also the love that heals divisions."* I reminded them that, according to John Wesley, holiness is not merely about avoiding sin but about reflecting Christ's character—especially when we are called to be peacemakers. In the end, there was an altar call. Both pastors came first to the altar, exchanged a hug, and then the members of the congregations followed, turning that place into a reconciliatory event that touched deeply all of those present that night.

Personal experience on empathy – As I was writing this, a long-time fellow minister and best friend for more than 25 years, lost his Mom. Her name was Clara, She was a personal mentor and mother figure for me. I loved her and her whole family deeply. I got there, He offered a Hotel, to pick me up at the train station. I told him, "I will take care of everything, I don't go there to put more on you, just to be there for you. I spent the weekend, next to him, grieving with him and his family. In the end, He asked me to speak at the funeral service. I had so many great things to say.

It was a special time. This echoes Jesus 'compassion: "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*" (Matthew 5:4, NIV). By truly feeling another's sorrow, the minister brings Christ's presence into their pain, just as Wesley's class-meeting leaders bore one another's burdens in prayer (Galatians 6:2, NIV).

- c. What personal challenges are you currently facing in your personal life and in your ministry and how are you dealing with them? How do the two interact, if at all?

One of my ongoing personal challenges, and I am certain, I am not alone on this one is maintaining a healthy rhythm between ministry demands and personal renewal. In a season where ministry continues to grow in both scope and responsibility, I've found myself needing to be more intentional about boundaries, rest, and spiritual practices. I wouldn't characterize this as overwhelming "busyness," but rather as a sacred tension: the calling to serve fully while also attending to soul care and family life. It is a blessing to feel needed and capable, I need to continue been intentional on my practice of keeping track of rest, renewal and family life.

I've respond to this by deepening my practices of Sabbath, prayerful planning, and delegation. When a new appointment comes I will continue building up ministry teams and empowering lay leadership in ways that are sustainable and aligned with our shared mission. As Moses learned through Jethro's wisdom (Exodus 18:17–23, NIV), effective ministry often means not doing everything yourself, like I wrote before, but sharing the load with others. Likewise, Jesus modeled times of withdrawal for prayer and renewal (Mark 1:35, NIV), a reminder that rest is not a luxury but a necessity for fruitful ministry.

The interaction between personal and pastoral life is real: when I am spiritually centered and emotionally grounded, I am more discerning, more patient, and more joyful in my leadership. I

have not “arrived,” but I am committed to growing in self-awareness, accountability, and grace—knowing that in my weakness, Christ’s strength is made perfect (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV).

d. What means do you use to maintain Sabbath, spiritual disciplines, and care of mind-body-spirit?

The Sabbath is understood as both a gift of grace and a means of holiness, grounded in Scripture, shaped by John Wesley’s teachings, and practiced in the rhythm of the Christian life. It is more than just a day off—it is a sacred time for rest, worship, renewal, and justice, reflecting the character of God and the call to holy living. So, to maintain Sabbath, we have a family routine, Sunday after church service, our Sabbath commences. We enjoy lunch as a family in a local restaurant, sometimes we share that sacred time with someone, providing for a time of showing love to that person or instead, we go and do a visitation to someone sick at the hospital, echoing (Isaiah 58:6–13, NIV), where true Sabbath means releasing the oppressed and caring for the poor. The afternoon and evening is family time and we are planning to continue this tradition. We celebrate our good time with a family gathering, an evening coffee and a family movie or board game. On Monday Sabbath continues! Time to rest, pray, recover and renewal, we take Monday on slow motion, no hurry! In the Wesleyan tradition, the Sabbath is a gift of grace—time to rest, worship, and remember God, a means of sanctification—where holiness is formed through rest and love. A day for doing good—not rigid rules, but freedom to love and serve. Also a resistance to burnout—especially in ministry settings. It reminds us that we are not defined by our productivity, but by our belonging to God. In modern United Methodism, Sabbath is understood as a means of grace—a spiritual discipline through which we grow in holiness. Sabbath is part of the Methodist commitment to “*personal holiness and social holiness*”, which are never separate. Wesley from (Sermon 25, “Upon the Lord’s Day”): “*A true Christian is such all week long; but especially on the Lord’s day... set apart for public and private exercises of devotion.*”

- a. The Florida Conference is committed to creating a culture of respectful and healthy personal, interpersonal, and sexual boundaries. What systems do you have in place to avoid violating those boundaries? Give specific examples.

I affirm the Florida Conference's commitment to cultivate a culture of healthy personal and interpersonal boundaries. In the Wesleyan tradition, the integrity of a minister is not only a matter of personal holiness but also of public witness and reputation. John Wesley taught that grace is expressed through "*practical divinity*"—living out the gospel in all relationships with accountability and integrity. As a servant leader, I recognize that safeguarding boundaries are essential for building trust, modeling Christ-like love, and protecting the dignity of all people.

My Personal Systems for Accountability and Integrity

I have developed several intentional disciplines and others will be in place when new appointment come into effect:

Pastoral Counseling Ethics: When meeting with individuals for pastoral care, I ensure transparency by using public church spaces with visible windows or by scheduling meetings with my wife and/or other staff is present. I am planning upon appointment to refer people to licensed counselors when concerns move beyond my pastoral scope or expertise.

Spiritual Accountability: I have mentors I can call for spiritual direction or where I can honestly share any possible need or struggle, receive feedback, and remain grounded in my call. This follows Wesley's model of the class meeting, where mutual confession and grace flourished in community (James 5:16, NIV).

Safe Digital Practices: I will maintain and review periodically, clear professional communication boundaries using technology available for church-monitored email and official messaging platforms, avoiding private or late-night conversations via personal accounts. My wife and I share the same Apple ID, in our phones and iPads with complete access to each others accounts. We also share the same accounts on facebook, so we post and receive message to and from the common source.

We also plan to set or review the current church policies upon appointment to make sure the church follows the Safe Sanctuaries policy, ensuring two adults are always present during children's and youth activities (Matthew 18:6, NIV). We will support and help train volunteers and staff in mandatory reporting, child protection, and appropriate conduct, as outlined in The Book of Discipline, ¶341.5 and ¶2702.1. We believe boundaries are not barriers to ministry, they are bridges to trust. By setting and honoring clear personal and communal standards, I hope to lead with integrity, safeguard the people God has entrusted to my care, and reflect Christ's own example of holy love and relational safety. In Wesley's words, *'Do all the good you can... by all the means you can... as long as ever you can.'* Healthy boundaries ensure that our good is truly good for others. In order to fulfill my ministry and be effective in the community, we need to share a common faith and live up to the highest ideals of christian and moral standards. That I will do with the Lord's help and strength and everything in my power, to live a consecrated life, a life that keeps my marriage healthy, nurtures my family in their spiritual and inspire others to follow Christ. *"Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it"* (Proverbs 4:23, NIV).

- b.** The Florida Conference is committed to anti-racism as a work of discipleship. How do you understand your responsibility as a clergy person in this work? How do you plan to further the work of anti-racism in your life and your ministry?

As I mentioned previously, on the leadership questions, I was born in Stamford, Connecticut, but I'm from Puerto Rico. I come from a mixed family, my father had Spanish ancestry and fair skin, while my mother was of African descent. Within our home, I grew up hearing stories of rejection and suffering—experiences tied to race, disability, and difference. My grandmother, who was disabled, helped raise me alongside my mother. She embodied gentleness and strength, and I carry her legacy in my ministry.

This background formed in me a deep sensitivity to issues of marginalization and a strong belief that diversity is not a problem to be solved but a gift from God. The distinct features of my family members—our skin tones, our identities, and even our personal journeys are sacred reminders that God delights in variety. In ministry, I have had the privilege of preaching across cultural and national lines, in Africa, among indigenous tribes, and across the Caribbean. These experiences confirmed for me what Scripture and Wesleyan theology teach: that grace is not culturally bound. “*For God so loved the world...*” (John 3:16). Wesley emphasized this when he commented on Acts 10:35 in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, affirming that God’s acceptance is not based on race or ethnicity, but on reverence and righteousness.

As a United Methodist clergy, (if given the opportunity), I will consider anti-racism as core to my calling. I align this work with the Wesleyan commitment to *social holiness*, faith expressed through just and loving relationships in community. In his sermon *On Charity* (Sermon 77), Wesley insists that divine grace flows equally across all boundaries—Jew, Gentile, pagan. This demands from us an inclusive love, grounded in both truth and compassion.

In practice, this means I am committed to listen to the voices of those marginalized within the church and community and teaching the biblical truth and the Wesleyan foundations for racial justice and dignity. I am envisioning creating worship and ministry with the multicultural scope represented at the altar. At Belleview UMC we already sing most Sundays, where multi-racial

and multi-languages are represented in worshipping together as one voice, reflecting God's full, beautiful spectrum of humanity. We challenge discriminatory systems where they exist, both inside and outside the church with our voices and with our example.

I will continue to grow in this work—through personal reading, conversations, cultural immersion, and also being accountable with peers. As Wesleyans, we are shaped by both *personal piety* and *social responsibility*. To love God is to love our neighbor in ways that are practical, embodied, and just.

- c. What is your theological view of stewardship and how is it reflected in your personal finances?

In my view of stewardship, "...*Everything belongs to the Lord*" (Psalm 24:1, NIV); We are the caretakers of God's resources, we are called to manage them with a sense of responsibility and for His glory and the good of others. The Apostle Paul tell us that a "*good steward must be found faithful*" (1 Corinthians 4:2, NIV). John Wesley integrated stewardship into his vision of social holiness. In his sermon "The Use of Money" (Sermon 50, 1742), he urged believers to "*Earn all you can, save all you can, give all you can,*" treating income, frugality, and generosity as interlocking disciplines of grace. For Wesley, prudent financial management was a "*work of piety*", a means through which God forms our character, deepens our dependence on Christ, and extends mercy to the poor.

Each cycle of our family budget begin with gratefulness to God. We are so blessed in so many ways. Money is just one aspect of how we see the favor of God in our lives, loving God we put at his disposal our time, our talents and our treasures. "*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it...*" (Psalm 24:1, NIV).

Our income goes straight to the bank accounts, and from there, automatic payments are set according to the bills to pay contractors or charge account payments.

We practice systematic giving: tithing 10 percent of my gross income to support the local church and designated ministries (1 Corinthians 16:2, NIV) and making above-and-beyond offerings as the Spirit leads (2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV). We support ministries in Brazil, Cuba, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico, with either constant weekly giving or periodically special offerings to support the work of missions. We also give constantly to people in need during visitation, or taking to a lunch on Sunday, as someone the Lord put in our hearts to bless.

We maintain an emergency fund, saving regularly to provide stability for my family and readiness to respond to crises, remembering the Proverb's model of the ant's foresight (Prov 30:24–25, NIV).

Avoiding debt is a firm commitment we have at home; We live within our means and avoid or steward any necessary borrowing with plans to repay while we keep in mind, that "*the borrower is slave to the lender*" (Prov 22:7, NIV). So when we use the credit cards, we pay them off promptly usually within 30-60 days to avoid interest. Our exceptional rated (819) FICO scores, show the way we handle our credit with hard work and dedication.

Integrating these practices has brought peace of mind to our family and marriage. We strive to embody Wesley's conviction that financial discipline is not an end in itself but a means of grace—shaping my character, enabling joyful generosity, and advancing **the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.**

b. Our experience has shown that to live a healthy lifestyle in a ministry starting at or near minimum salary, unsecured debt (including, but not limited to, credit card debt, personal loans, signature loans, 90 days same as cash, etc.) should not exceed \$5000, regardless of whether you are single or married, and educational debt should not exceed \$30,000 (if single) or \$60,000 (if married to a spouse who also has educational debt). Please complete the chart below.

Time Frame	Credit Card Debt	Education Debt
Current Debt	\$770	-0-
One Year Ago	\$1082	-0-
Two Years Ago	\$2360	-0-

c. If you have debt, what is your debt reduction plan and how long have you been working on it?

Note: This answer below, will be exactly the same answer given by my wife at her personal growth, since the data is the same.

- We have a very low personal credit card debt, its almost -0- and the balance its pay every month to avoid interest. The debt we have are mostly related to business or for investment purposes.
- The credit card debt as stated on the financial disclosure is used for business purposes and paid off in a short period of time. We buy or pay for the services or products at wholesale price and the money from reselling pays off for the credit cards usually within 30-60 days period.
- The Heloc on my credit report has been used for property improvement that will produce income from two 2 bedrooms apartments for rent, another, 1 bedroom studio for rent and a storage unit.

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- There are a couple of credit card (Home Depot cards and Amex), in use now due to a construction project for business. Once is completed, the cards are going to be paid off in a short period of time, as planned.
- d. Elaborate on any extenuating circumstances or changes regarding your financial situation of which the Board should be aware.
- No extenuating circumstances to report.

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