



# Transcript

## *Means of Grace*

### Episode 86

**Speaker:** 00:04

Welcome to Means of Grace, a podcast produced by the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.

**Aimee Yeager** 00:19

Welcome to the Means Of Grace Podcast. I'm Aimee Yeager, Conference Director of Communications. As I record the intro for this episode, I'm sitting on the deck of a friend's cabin in Maggie Valley, listening to the sounds of a nearby creek and taking in the beauty of the Smoky Mountains after just wrapping up the 2022 Annual Conference. The conversation you will hear in today's episode is a conversation that took place during Annual Conference. On Thursday evening, Bishop Carter, along with a group of clergy from across the Conference of various races, ages, genders, and ministry roles, sat down for a panel discussion on the future of The UMC. Their goal was to answer a question, you may have asked yourself a time or two: Will there be a place for me in the continuing United Methodist Church?

**Speaker:** 01:18

So friends, perhaps you're asking yourself, "Why am I here in this coffee house at eight o'clock on a Thursday evening at Annual Conference?" There are so many great events and opportunities for connection and renewal this weekend. So what is this specific event all about? What is our goal for this evening? Our goal and our



hope is to have a conversation about why folks in the Western North Carolina Conference continue to discern and live into their callings to ministry in The United Methodist Church. This evening, you will have the privilege of hearing from all members of our panel who speak from varied backgrounds and serve in different contexts. We can all acknowledge that it is a challenging time to be the Church. And we hope that this evening you will leave this place with just a little bit more hope than you arrived with. So I now want to invite all of the members of our panel to take a moment and to introduce yourself and we'll just go down the line. Panelist if you would share your name, how long you've been in ministry, how you are currently serving the United Methodist Church, and anything else that you would like for us to know or to share with our audience tonight. So Sam, if you'll get us started.

**Sam Moore Jr** 02:44

Good evening. Samuel Sam Moore, Jr. This year will mark the 40th year that I will receive an appointment in the Western North Carolina Conference. Currently, I am serving as the Yadkin Valley District Superintendent. 40 years does not seem like 40 years. It seems like it was only a little while ago that I was here for the first time and in 1983 was my first Annual Conference. So enjoy and take advantage of the ministries and the opportunity God gives to you because you wake up one day and it may be 35-40 years later.

**Melissa Lowe** 03:36

I'm Melissa Lowe. I've been serving for nine years here in the Western North Carolina Conference. As an Elder I currently serve as an associate pastor at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church in High Point as an associate. And as of July 1,



I'll be receiving a new appointment as co-pastor along with my husband Justin at First Gastonia. And we will be serving along with our six year old son Andrew and our four year old daughter, Esther.

**Lanny Lancaster** 04:13

Good to see you all here tonight. I'm Lanny Lancaster and have been serving in this conference for 25 years. Not as long as Sam but had that same sense that time passes quickly. But then when I look in the mirror and see the gray in my beard and the hair that is leaving the upper regions, I can believe it. I serve Central in Monroe, and just thankful to be with you tonight as we focus on hope in the future for The United Methodist Church.

**Ken Carter** 04:47

Good evening, everybody. Ken Carter and similar to Sam, next year will be the 40th anniversary of when I was ordained a deacon and took my first appointment in this conference. So it's been about almost, it's been 39 years. And in that was a rural four-point charge. And being the associate pastor of a large church, the founding pastor of a new church, and a couple of large membership churches, and then a year here as the superintendent before Florida. And so that's kind of where I've been.

**Patrick Neitzey** 05:27

My name is Patrick Neitzey. I have been serving under appointment in the Western North Carolina Conference since 2018. My first two years where I was a quarter time with the Mission of Wisdom Foundation and Hawk Creek Commons in East Asheville and then the other part of that ministry was at Central UMC as an



associate and then the last two years have been full-time at Central UMC in downtown Asheville. As an associate, I transferred to this conference from the Texas Annual Conference in 2017, I believe.

**Spencer Cullom** 05:58

My name is Spencer Cullom, I am just finishing up my first year of ministry ever. Just about to start year two, I'm a Provisional Elder, I'm serving at Avery's Creek United Methodist Church in Arden, North Carolina. I absolutely love it there. And it's been a really great experience, even if it's been really a lot of being thrown into the deep end of ministry. So, you know, that's, but I'm really grateful to be here to talk about the future of the church.

**Speaker:** 06:33

Friends, before we begin with tonight's questions, I want to let you know what to expect. In just a moment, Bishop Carter is going to open us with a word of prayer. And then we are going to discuss some questions that were put together by the design team of this event. And then we will do our best to work through the questions that have been submitted from the floor. And we can't promise that we will make it through all of these questions, but we will do our very best. All right, so Bishop Carter, if you wouldn't mind if you would open us with a word of prayer.

**Ken Carter** 07:08

Thank you. And the prayer I'd like to offer is a prayer that was written by Tom Langford, who was one of my teachers in Divinity School. And when I was coming into this conference, he was an elder in this conference. Later he was Dean of the Divinity School, Provost of Duke University. And his wife actually gave me this



prayer. When he died, it was something he had written. And to me, it's a prayer about who God is. So let us pray. Oh God, your intention to give exceeds our readiness to receive. Your boundless love is restricted by our small vessels. Your generosity far exceeds our responding reception. Your richness is restrained by our poverty of expectation. Your expansiveness is channeled through our small hearts. Oh God, enlarge our capacity, increase our receptivity. Open us to your full life. Make us more able to receive your generous grace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Speaker:** 08:36

Amen. All right, panelists, our first question for the evening is an opportunity for you to share with us a little bit about your faith story. And if you would, please also tell us: What is one thing that you love about being a United Methodist? Lanny, would you get us started?

**Lanny Lancaster** 08:55

Thank you. So I have deep Methodist roots. In fact, I have some ancestors, four or five generations back who were all Methodist pastors, four brothers. So I feel like the Methodist roots go deep in my family. Just before I was born, my parents moved to a new town, and were invited to a church from another tradition. And they joined that church. And so that's the first church I remember. And certainly was blessed to hear the gospel there, to be invited to faith there. But when I was about in the third grade, my parents left that church to go back to The United Methodist Church. And even at that age, I was kind of a religious nerd, I guess. And I really noticed the content of the preaching, and it was very different. And what I noticed about the focus of the preaching in The United Methodist Church



was Grace. Grace. He really stood out to me, even as a third grader. And so I was formed in that faith, in the faith of grace. And along the way, he was given many opportunities to grow and learn more about what that was about. I think, for me, that's the singular thing that I love the most about The United Methodist Church. In fact, every pastor that I had growing up, would share this same phrase with us. And that was "err on the side of grace". When it comes to relating to other people in the world, no matter how different they may seem, err on the side of grace. And that has really stuck with me. And that's what I have experienced in my years in The United Methodist Church, answering the call, going to seminary, and serving in this conference that focuses on grace. And as our bishop said earlier today, it's by grace that we're saved, not, you know, something that we've earned. And so, for me, I can't imagine leaving that. I can't imagine departing from that path that I've been on. But The United Methodist Church for me, it's all about grace.

**Speaker:** 11:32

Thank you, Lanny. If you'll pass the microphone to Sam, and Sam, if you will also share with us about your faith story and share one thing that you love about being a United Methodist.

**Sam Moore Jr** 11:43

Okay, Lanny took my word, okay. Because the word is grace, okay, is grace. And with me, I am a fourth generation Methodist. My great, great grandfather left the Baptist Church that was down the road from our house. Let me also say that he donated the land that was next to the Baptist Church where the elementary school was located for African Americans to attend up to the eighth grade. And in 1884, he and some other leaders left the Baptist Church, went up the road, took a



left and went about a half a mile and they established the Methodist Church, Wesley Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church. Strange thing about it was that my great grandmother stayed at the Baptist Church. And so when I was a child, I can remember the first and third Sunday, we would go to the Baptist Church. Second and fourth Sunday, we would go to the Methodist Church. I'm grateful for the opportunity to attend Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska. My ancestors, their Annual Conference was held at Bennett College because of the Central Jurisdiction. My father was my hero in faith. The one who formed me, the one who poured into me and I remember as a child saying, "Daddy, when I grow up, I want to be just like you." And he looked at me and I thought I was giving them a compliment. And he looked at me and said, "No, you don't want to be like me, you want to be better than me." That has somewhat haunted me, okay. Because I've had to try to live into that, I think. But it's grace, it's grace that has been a part of my journey. That United Methodist Church was a church of farmers, a church of domestic workers, a church of machine operators, mill workers. However, on Sunday morning, they were children of God, who faithfully worship God and instill values into their children and their grandchildren. My father came to Annual Conference a few times with me. When I was ordained a Deacon, my father was there. When I was ordained an Elder, my father was there. I remember when I was elected a candidate, and I'm gonna wrap it up, that the District Superintendent the late DP Smotherman told the people of Wesley Chapel, "Vote for him in the manner that you would want him to be your pastor." He said, "but don't worry about it. He will never be your pastor." Well, in 1995, June 26, I loaded up the U haul. My sister, my nephew and my son. And we drove to Reidsville, North Carolina. And I officially became my father and my mother's pastor, and the pastor of my home church. Let me also say that out of my home church, there were four



others who were called into the ministry and accepted the call into ministry, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the Methodist Church, and in the United Methodist Church. August 26, my father died. And one of his and my mother, were two of the funerals that I had to perform as their pastor. Is grace. Is grace in that God has allowed me every time at every appointment when I needed to be near my family, to be near my family. And who would have ever imagined that I would be able to attend Greensboro College, Duke Divinity School, Drew University, and to be a District Superintendent in the Western North Carolina Conference. My parents never dreamed all of those things could occur for me. But it's by God's grace that it did.

**Speaker:** 16:42

Thank you, Sam. Spencer, if you'll tell us about your faith story, and why you love being a United Methodist.

**Spencer Cullom** 16:49

So I was born and raised United Methodist, my whole entire life. My parents, when we moved down to Georgia, searched for a good United Methodist Church with a great youth group in which to raise me and my two siblings. They were extremely involved. We balanced on the weekends, all three of us playing soccer, and also going to church. They made it really clear that going to church was important and that it was important to be a part of that community. So that sort of was very instilled very young, it's fascinating to kind of look back and think because in college, I kind of had that sort of, "I lost my faith" thing, except I didn't really I didn't ever lose faith that God existed. I figured God existed and was up there and doing whatever God was doing. But I didn't understand that God cared and loved



me specifically, the faith that I lost was that God actually cared about what was going on with any of us. And it wasn't until I was at a convention, and I showed up early for something and music started playing, and I went, and this was not a religious convention. So I was not expecting gospel music to suddenly start playing and hymns to be played through the music. And I was kind of going "hmm, okay. This is not what I was expecting." The person giving the message, basically just sat down and said, "Listen, God's grace and love is a gift. And all you have to do is reach out your hands and accept it. That it doesn't matter how broken you think you are, or how messed up you think your life is, or how completely disconnected you feel from God, that it is just a gift. And all you have to do is reach out your hands." And I went, "Oh." And I burst into tears. My friends came down and we're like, "what's going on?" And I couldn't tell them, "Oh, I was having this huge experience about my whole life had changed because of this revelation that God actually cares about me and it's really cool." But that sort of brought me back into the idea of, Okay, God does care. God loves me. Cool. How do I then connect that back into the church that I've been a part of? And that took a lot of sort of work of figuring out how do I then...One, How did I miss that? I grew up in the church. How did I miss that? And two, how to help future people not miss that. I didn't realize that meant getting a call to seminary and then pastoring that was not on my radar at all. I was perfectly happy and content where I was. And God said, "Actually, we have different plans." And I went, sure. And we argued for three years, and I ended up in seminary. And then I ended up interning, and I preached for the first time. And that was it. That was sort of the connecting sort of clicking piece that just said, this is what you're gonna do for the rest of your life. So figure out how to, how to do that. There was a lot of refiguring, sort of my faith after I graduated in 2019, a few months after the special



called conference. So I had a lot of deep, serious thinking to do after that, because it was, it was hard to sit and watch the church that I had grown up in, say some really harmful things toward people that I loved, and cared very, very deeply for. And I had to figure out how to be a pastor to people who are going to say very, very harmful things about people that I loved. And I took some time off to do that. And I spent a lot of time lying on the floor and talking to God, and going, "What am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to do? What am I supposed to do?" And I lay on the floor pretty much for a week solid. I think my grandparents were starting to get really concerned because they'd walked down the basement and there I was just going. "God tell me something." And I got Isaiah 41, or I've called you and I will not cast you off. And I went, okay. So a couple years later, it took a while we had a pandemic in there, so it took a bit. Here we are. What I love about being Methodist is one, it's the faith in which I was raised. And so I have a lot of really great memories of being a Methodist. But I also really love the connection. I'll say I don't think we use it as much as we should. But I love the idea and the bones of the idea of us all being connected in that way that you can go to a Methodist church anywhere and still feel welcome and at home.

**Speaker** 22:31

Melissa, if you'll wrap us up with this question.

**Melissa Lowe** 22:33

My faith journey begins with that I was raised in a Christian home. So my faith development started when I was very, very young. And along the way, my faith was really strengthened, and asking the hard questions along my journey of life. And some of those faith questions deepened when I experienced the suicide of a



dear friend after college, when I experienced the death of our firstborn son when he was five and a half months old, when I was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm, when I have experienced a multitude of different life circumstances. As I can look around the room and know that each and every one of us have. Our stories may be different, but that we all have these different things that we encounter in our life over the years. And as I experienced these different life situations, my faith journey grew as I began to ask the hard questions of my faith, and I began to discover that nothing was off limits with God, no question was off limits that God invited me to ask. And it was in that wrestling with God along the way that I've always drawn closer. For in the wrestling, there's a closeness, there's an intimacy and those times that draws us deeper. And that strengthens us just like wrestling physically with muscles and our physical body would do. And that's one of the things that I have found that I love about The United Methodist Church is that it's been a place throughout my life that has welcomed my questions. It's welcomed my journey. It's welcomed my hard places in life. And that has been what I have cherished. In those difficult places, The United Methodist Church has come alongside me. As Spencer mentioned in the connection. It's been the place that's held me in those times when I have not known where to go. It's been a place that has allowed me to hold the Scripture, the reason, the tradition, and the experience together with me, and has helped me to be able to articulate my faith along the journey. And so those relationships, that mentoring, that has been what I have loved about The United Methodist Church.

**Speaker:** 26:06



Thank you, Melissa. Our next question is as a church that includes both George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton, Richard Barbour and Elizabeth Warren, not to mention Beyonce and Superman. Our denomination has been a big tent where members agree to disagree on a range of issues. How have you experienced unity in the local church? In an increasingly polarized society, how can the church hold on to as much unity as possible? Bishop Carter, will you get us started with this question?

**Ken Carter** 26:46

First, I'll say it's been a while since I've been in a local church as the pastor, it's been 10 years. As I said, earlier today, I was a local church pastor for 28 years. And I would say it is if I'm just trying to be honest, it's gotten more difficult. I was a pastor of a church in Charlotte, that had in the church, a man who was a state senator and is now a congressman and brought the transgender bathroom bill to the North Carolina State Government. And then also a woman, Rachel Hunt, who was a four-term whose father was a four-term Democratic governor of our state. And she is a state senator. In North Carolina, opposite parties, they were in a Bible study I taught. And you know, we had a way of going about that. But I know, that's gotten harder. The last 10 years. I know that because people telling me stories of strained relationships. It's difficult because people are disciplined by several hours of cable news every night. And, and they come to church and they hear a 30-minute sermon, or they're in a one-hour conversation with other adults. And then they go in every night, they're disciplined for several hours by a cable news network. That makes it hard. You know, I would just say that, I'll share something I said with the extension ministers today, I'll just tell a story. That could happen in a local church. And so I grew up very close to a cousin who's a month older than me and the like



college baseball, he was head of Aflac for a part of the country. And we've just always been close. And through this political polarization, the last few years, things just got strained and then we would talk a little bit and then they just went completely quiet. And, and so his mother, my aunt died this spring, who was very close, she was very close to my mother, her sister. And he, so there's four cousins in that family, four siblings. And I thought, you know, things are not good between any of us. But this is my window of opportunity. I may never get another one. And so I decided one weekend, I was going to call all four of them. And they didn't have a memorial service because of the COVID. And so I called all four of them. And I said something like, "we're family", to my cousin, I said, you know, "we, we do disagree about some things that are important. They're important. And yet, you're my cousin, and I love you. And I don't want to spend the rest of my life not in a relationship with you. And so from my side, I wanted to say that, and how important your mother will, my aunt was, to me." I think it's going to take those kinds of, not that I'm the hero of the story, I'm not, but it's going to take those kinds of conversations from spiritual leaders. And you have to understand, no positive outcome may come from it. Does that make sense? It may not end in a Kodak moment that's dating more by generation than yours, I realized, but you know, it's not going to be kumbaya is the same thing. But, but it's, but it's what we do. And I think as a spiritual leader, you can model moving across the line towards someone. And, but knowing that you're swimming against the grain, you're swimming against the current. And yet, I think it's what we're called to do. You know, I would say that we, this is just a great thing that you can be a part of, this conference has an amazing Foundation, that just does things that a lot of Foundations don't do. And so they have made a lot of money available. And they said, you can choose a couple of things to focus on. And one of the things I really



want to focus on is peacemaking in the local church, in a context of violence, sectarianism, and legacies of slavery. And all of that is before the mask thing became a big deal in churches. And I do realize it's where the pastor of a local church lives. And at the denominational level, it's, it's work I've been doing with anybody you can think of in The United Methodist Church the last few years. But I recognize that the last story I'll tell about this as I was preaching in a church, in this conference, in the Fall, and they were going to have a change in pastor. So they asked me to talk about it. And, and so they, they talked about what they needed in a pastor and what they hoped for in a pastor and all that, and what they thought were the problems with the current situation. And I listened kind of respectfully, and they were articulate people. And so at the end of it, I said, "I want to honor what you said. But I want to ask a question, what if what's going on here has nothing to do with who your pastor is? What could it be? Does anybody have an idea?" And there was just this little silence, you know. And then a man said, "I don't think it's the pastor." He says, "People are just so polarized." He said, "it's everything. It's family, it's my neighborhood. It's everything." And he said, "you can cut it with a knife." You know, so I would say, you know, I don't have a fix for that, other than to say in closing, that's not an interruption to discipleship right now. It's not that if we could get things together, we can make disciples right now, that is making disciples. That's what making disciples means right now. And so I just think we're all in it together and it's worthy work for us to do.

35:02

Patrick, would you like to tell us what you think about this question?

**Patrick Neitzey** 35:05



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Of course, always fun to follow the bishop. That's why I have my liturgical lubricant down here. Now, first, I want to add to your list Willie Nelson as a Texan, I feel like we need to put him there as well. When I begin to think about how I've seen unity in the local church, there are two men that come to mind. One will call Langdon and the other will call Bailey. They are kind of a case study for me and in grace, that word that keeps coming back. Langdon was an architect in Asheville, kind of a titan in that in his respective field but uh, he was an Asheville hippie through and through wore a fedora most places, self-proclaimed agnostic, he came to our church because he was raising a son by himself as a single parent. Langdon served there for at our church as a member for many years. His closest friend was a man, we'll call Bailey. Bailey was an executive for an oil company for many years, also a titan in his field, staunch conservative, and retired early because of how good he was at saving money throughout his life. The two men had absolutely nothing in common with one another except that every Thursday they got together with a group of guys and got a beer together and began to talk. As time went on, Bill began to look a little sick. Someone said, Bill, have you gone to the doctor, not something that he always did to take care of himself? Langdon came back and said he had stage four cancer. They were looking for someone to drive him to his treatments, and everyone was working or caught up with something except the man who had saved so well throughout his life, that he had retired early, they had nothing to talk about. And they had to drive from Asheville to Durham to these treatments, once a week. And they did that faithfully. Every day, or every week with smiles on their faces, they'd come back with so many stories to tell they expanded one another's mind. They never changed each other's mind. But they did expand each other's mind. And Bailey was there when Langdon passed away. He was there two days beforehand, when we sat on the porch with



Bill and asked him all these questions about his life and everything else, he got up and spoke at his funeral. And so when I think about unity, I think about two people, one that was who we think of in our churches day in and day out, someone who has always been there and was consistent, and then this wacky hippie in a fedora that was there week in and week out as well. And together they made this composite artistry, this movement of the Spirit on Earth, that was something to behold. And when there was a part of the question that really was grabbing me when it said, we were members of a church, a big tent church that agreed to disagree on a range of issues. But I think that the issue that we never disagreed on, at least when I was growing up, and what I saw in these churches, and what I saw between these two men, was we never disagreed on the image of God, the Imago Dei in someone else. We never disagreed that the person sitting across from me was a child of God created in the image of God. And I am worried that as we are discipled, by the nightly news, that we begin to look at others as the other, instead of looking at them as a Divine Child of God named and claimed by God just like the rest of us. And so as we go forward in this big tent, and try to keep as many poles up as we can, while others continue to tear them down, I think, if we can cling to that image, and then cling to the image of the cross and flame, there's if anyone had that on their Methodist bingo card, you can mark that down cross and flame. But if we can really be the church of Jesus Christ, that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, to go out and have hard conversations to do ministry that acknowledges all people and restores their dignity, then I really think that we can come back to being a unified church, but we have to get to that first.

**Speaker:** 39:06



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You may have heard the saying in essentials, unity in non-essentials, diversity, in all things, charity. What are the essentials that should unite us as United Methodists? Sam, would you get us started with this question?

**Sam Moore Jr** 39:24

Thank you, the image of God being able to see each other as beloved children of God, and seeing the image of God in our neighbor. I think we need to stop looking for quick ways to get around loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. There have been some wonderful people in my life that came at the right time. Just when I needed them, and they were able to impart wisdom to me, my father was number one. But at Greensboro College, I had a professor and advisor, the late Dr. James Hall. And Dr. Hall told me about ecumenicalism, you know, that, in order for me to love someone, maybe it's not my job to convert people from other faiths. But to be the best Christian I could be, so that they could see the love of God in me. And maybe they could be the best, whether the faith they were living, I have come to the conclusion that what some people see as important is not as important to me. Because it's not as important to me, I will not tear them down. But I will also have an honest conversation with them when they approach me and say that that is something that we just have to learn how to lovingly disagree about. I think that's part of it, that it's about loving people. And to love our neighbor, as we love ourselves, that's essential and to be the best follower of Jesus that we can possibly be. I served the church and over 80% of the members and I had nothing in common, okay. I saw them as I served the multi-ethnic church. And the majority of the members were Anglo. And the majority of them they watched a certain news network, and I knew it because they talked about it, and



when I would visit them in our homes, and yes, I visited them in their homes where they were watching some of those shows, well, I knew I did not need to go home and look at the other stations, okay. But I needed to, to dig into the scriptures so that I could love them as best I could as a follower of Jesus, and to respect the humanity in them, but also, to share with them ways that they were being unjust, and also to model for them mutual love, and mutual respect. And not only did I try to model it, I told them every Sunday that we were all beloved children of God, and that even though we had worship for 50 minutes or an hour, the real work began when I pronounced the benediction. And then we were all called to go forth, and to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. And we celebrated ways that we had experienced God the following week, and we made it one of the hallmarks of our ministry, to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. So definitely central, that we have to love our neighbors, as we love ourselves and to mutually respect one another, and to not destroy the humanity of one another. And if we start doing it, and make sure that we do it, then just maybe God will touch some other people's hearts, and they will try to imitate us.

**Speaker:** 43:52

Melissa, will you tell us what is essential for you?

**Melissa Lowe** 43:57

I want to continue to build upon the foundation that Dr. Sam has already laid because can't get more eloquent than that. It's amazing. Our doctrinal standards and general rules, I believe is an essential element for us in, in unity. And if you notice, if you read in that Book of Discipline, it starts with the Trinity. And for us to



truly love God and love our neighbor best, we have to start with that relational aspect. And to truly understand, at its core, this relational element of how we are created in that Imago Dei in the image of God, we have to go into that deeper understanding of the Trinity, that mysterious divine reality of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And as we continue to dive deeper into our understanding of the character and the nature of God, we fall in love with God, deeper. And as we fall in love with God, there is no other way, but to fall in love with our neighbor, who is created in the image of God, and to do as Mother Teresa said, where we look into the eyes of our neighbor, and we see Jesus. And so as we begin to dive into that understanding, then we are able to then grow in our ability to love our neighbor more, because in and of ourselves, and our own humanity, and our own brokenness, it's an impossible task. It is only through the transformation of the work of God in our lives, transforming us, from the inside out that work of sanctification in our life, that we are then made new, made, right made whole, that we are able to then reach out in that place of wholeness by the work of God, to then love our neighbor as they are to be rightly loved.

**Speaker:** 46:35

Thank you, Melissa. So thinking about the continuing United Methodist Church, do you ever worry whether there will still be a place for you? And what concerns you the most? Patrick, will you tell us what you think about that?

**Patrick Neitzey** 46:54

Yeah, of course. The first part of that question, do you worry whether they'll still be a place for you? I think first you have to acknowledge the privilege that I have, as a white man, that this was set up for someone that looks like me. So whether or not there will be a place for me, or someone that looks like me, more than likely.



Whether or not I feel comfortable in that space, I think goes back to our call story at the beginning. For me, I felt called at a young age. But it wasn't until I saw someone that was my own age, seeing what I was going for I was chasing after that call from a young age. But I felt like everyone around me thought I was I was silly. And then young man came and said, I want to be ordained or ordained I want to be confirmed an older youth confirmation. He was 16 or 17. And he said, I want Patrick to be my faith friend, we were the same age. There's this big stir why? Well, I see Patrick as the person that's been leading me on my journey. His name was Taylor, he we've are still friends now, Taylor is gay. And he only felt comfortable at our church, and only really felt comfortable in our youth group. And he said, if I'm going to stand up in front of all these people, I want someone there with me that loves me. And so as we're moving forward, what concerns me the most is that people like Taylor, people that I went to seminary with that have been denied the ability to act out their call that at some point, there will not be enough space for them. And if there's not enough space for them, well, then our tent isn't really that big. And so I get really nervous about what concerns me the most is the people that are much more talented than me. Most of you in this room, the people that are extremely called and gifted, that don't feel comfortable and the place that they should feel the most comfortable in the world. And that is what makes me nervous. And that extends across the whole spectrum. But if you can't be broken in church, then where can you be whole in the world? And so I just hope that at some point, as we continue, what concerns me the most is, are we going to really act on the big tent and let everyone in.

**Speaker:** 49:08



Thank you, Patrick. Lanny, will you tell us? Do you ever worry whether there is a place for you in The United Methodist Church? And what concerns you the most?

**Lanny Lancaster** 49:17

No, I don't. I don't worry, because I really wrestled with this question. Because I thought surely I must but I really don't. When I was in the youth group growing up in The United Methodist Church, we sat in this big circle, there was about 25 of us. And that symbol is very much at the core of my belonging in this church. That circle was big enough that we had all kinds of folks in that circle. People who are very different, but all were included in love and so as Patrick said if we're gonna make room for all God's children, then I'm going to belong. But if we're not, then maybe one day will come when I will not belong. I think that's our call to make room at the table for all. In the United Methodist church I grew up in, I was given so many opportunities, I could, I could just sit here for hours telling you about all of them. But the main thing I remember is that people believed in me, and gave me an opportunity to serve, to follow Christ with them. When I arrived at the church I'm at now, we hadn't been there too long. It was before the pandemic. And we were serving at a, at a Dinner Church. And I'd already heard a lot about what was going on in the church in relation to things going on in our denomination, the questions, you know, that we've been wrestling with. And I'd heard about some of my members, who they were. And so we had served the meal and had that and walked back into the kitchen. And one of my members was there, who I knew from what people had told me that she was a lesbian, and she lived with her partner. And she got this moment I think she was waiting for. And she just looked at me and said, "Lanny, do you know about me?" And I said, "Yeah, I think I do." And she said, "Well, what do you think? What do you think



about me? And people like me?" And I just said, "I love you. Just like I do all my parishioners." And I started tearing up because I thought, what kind of world is this that she asked to ask her pastor that question? So yeah, my only concern is, are we going to welcome all our neighbors? You know, Jesus always got in trouble for including the wrong people. Not for excluding the wrong people. And when I say wrong, of course, we know. They were right, because they were made in the image of God. And so I think if we follow that model, there will be a place not just for me, but for all of us.

**Speaker:** 52:20

Thank you, Lanny. Spencer.

**Spencer Cullom** 52:23

I mean, simple answer, yes, then no. I grew up in Southern United Methodist, white church. I can speak that language, I can walk into a suburban southern church. And as long as I follow the proper steps as a proper young Southern woman, then fine, like, I'll fit into that space, I can make myself fit into that space. But of course, I worry, there will be a place for me because there hasn't been in the past. I've had to carve out my own space so many times, it's not even funny. So yeah, I do. I mean, I also and I'll be really honest, we just watched what happened in Florida. There's 16 people that aren't where they're supposed to be right now. Because the church said absolutely not. So yes, I worry about that. That's what concerns me the most is that we are apparently determined to shoot ourselves in the foot. My generation, the millennials, as we're known, they got rid of Gen Y. But the millennials, I mean, we're the largest group of nuns out there, right? They are religious but don't go to church. And I know this because as one of that group, I



get often asked, “How come your people aren't showing up?” And I was like, because we were told that we were right when we did show up. So we stopped. So my concern is we're gonna keep doing that with the next generation.

**Speaker:** 53:47

Thank you. Due to the beautiful diversity of The United Methodist Church, many of us have close relationships with people who we disagree with and who disagree with us. How has your faith been positively impacted by someone who disagrees with you? Sam, would you speak to this?

**Sam Moore Jr** 54:10

I wrestle with this question, okay. And I think I will begin to try to answer it by saying that my mentors gave me the tools so that I could stay in a relationship with people that I disagree with. Mentors helped me to see that they were human beings, created in the image of God and that God's calling on me was to love them, even though I disagreed with them. And they have taught me patience. I can be facetious and say it like that. They have taught me patience. They have taught me how to trust God. They have taught me how to pray. They have driven me to my knees, because it's been difficult to love some of them. But the, but to seriously ask for this and to say that they have also caused me to examine myself, and to know that I'm still on the journey, and that God's still working on me and my sanctification, and that I still have to grow. And that maybe one day that I will be able to do as Bishop Carter has done and be able to reach out to some of those people and, and take a first step. So that reconciliation, and also living in community can happen.



**Speaker:** 55:47

Bishop Carter, would you speak to this question? How has your faith been positively impacted by someone who disagrees with you?

**Ken Carter** 55:56

If I could, I'd like to answer that previous question. Because I'd like to say something that I probably have not said, in quite this way. But then why did I ever think there was not a place for me? And what concerned me the most? That's a question that no one's ever asked me. But there was a time and it was really leading up to the 2019 General Conference. And Alex Shanks is here from Florida. He's the assistant to the bishop and the role that Amy Coles has. And I was one of the moderators of the Commission on the way forward and all the plans, were coming to our office for the church, including the Traditional Plan, and a form of the traditional plan came to us. And I looked at it and called one of the architects of it and said this, this is not lawful, you cannot do this. Please work with us some more. And if you must, and send it back, and they did, but the tradition argued before the Judicial Council about the traditional plan, and what I thought was unconstitutional, it passed in St. Louis. It did not pass among United States delegates. There were people who voted in St. Louis, who never entered the United States, in terms of their visas, but they voted in St. Louis. And then it went to the Judicial Council again, and I spoke, again, against parts of it. And I really did have the sense that I wondered if this was a church, I could spend these years. And you know, I have a pretty great role in this church. But I just could not see that. And that was, by nature, a person who wants to color between the lines and expand them, because between the lines, and it was the protocol and the obey that's that several of us simply thought we cannot leave here without abeyance



without holding all this in abeyance is not perfect. But it keeps us from singling out one group of persons for harm. And so that was my experience of wondering about that myself. I would say the second question, and I'll be very brief, is, I said something last week about Florida, that Florida is a nonbinary conference. It's not one group and another group. And the people I've learned from are Haitians, and Koreans and Puerto Ricans and Cubans, there's not just one story and another story, there are many stories. At my best, I try to not fit everyone into a binary of you're for me, or you're against me, you see it like me or you don't. But my faith has been enriched by simply coming to know people who've had a narrative in their life that is one I could never have imagined. And they share this faith and they have dreams for their children and dreams for a better life. And you know, we, Pam and I have had a person live with us who was Haitian for a few years and that's really helped us at our best not to lapse into an "us against them" thing but to learn from people with very different, just very different narratives.

**Speaker:** 1:00:05

Thank you, Bishop Carter, we have to wrap up in about five minutes. So panelists, y'all think about this answer. I'm going to say a housekeeping thing. And then we're going to come back to you. So panelists, I want to hear from each of you. What gives you hope for the future of The United Methodist Church. And maybe if you can answer this in one sentence or one phrase, I'm not trying to cut you off. I just think that would be exceptionally powerful. So panelists, what gives you hope for the future of The United Methodist Church, Sam?

**Sam Moore Jr** 1:00:39



God continues to call people into ordained ministry in The United Methodist Church. And people continue to say yes to God, and yes to The United Methodist Church.

**Speaker:** 1:00:49

Amen. Melissa.

**Melissa Lowe** 1:00:53

Openness and dialogue, this ongoing conversation that we are having one with another gives me hope.

**Speaker** 1:01:02

Lanny?

**Lanny Lancaster** 1:01:03

The genius of John Wesley's vision of personal and social holiness, which he would say, I think, really came from Jesus. That's what gives me hope.

**Ken Carter** 1:01:18

I would say, Jesus, and right now, right now we are unstuck. We are unstuck and it's messy. But we are unstuck.

**Patrick Neitzey** 1:01:37

I would say God's perseverance is stronger than my cynicism.

**Spencer Cullom** 1:01:45



I'm gonna follow up from telling you about the Florida group. So I have a friend who is part of that group. And the message that he sent was that while I thought that maybe some of those 16 would splinter off and go to different places that would accept them, they decided that they were going to stay together as a group, and that they were going to come back year after year after year after year, as many times as it took for all of them to get through. And that gives me hope for the future.

**Speaker:** 1:02:22

I want to thank all of you for coming out this evening for faithfully listening. I want to thank all of our panelists for sharing of their life, their wisdom, their grace, and their callings. And church, I'll leave you with this blessing for the evening from Romans 15, verse 13. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing so that you may abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Drive safe and we'll see you soon.

**Aimee Yeager** 1:03:10

In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things love. Grace is essential. We remain united on that fact. The image of God is in the eyes of our neighbors, that is essential, and we remain united on that. And God's love is more expansive than we can ever comprehend. In all things, love. While there is much that divides us friends, there is so much more that unites us. There is a place for you in the continuing United Methodist Church. And we can't wait to see how grace will shine through you. We will be taking a break on the podcast for the month of July as we take in all of the many things that we learned and experienced during Annual Conference. We hope you'll join us back here in August as we continue to



share the stories of God's good works in the Western North Carolina conference.

Thanks for listening.

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