



## Tennessee & Memphis Conferences

**The Order of Elders,  
The Order of Deacons,  
The Fellowship of  
Associate Members &  
Local Pastors**



*“Unite together, to encourage and help each other  
in thus working out your salvation,  
and for that end watch over one another in love.”  
John Wesley, 1745*

### **Tennessee and Memphis Conferences Clergy Covenant Living**

[To be perfected every year]

We have a sacred calling as United Methodist clergy. By virtue of our baptism and ordination or licensing, we have entered into a covenantal relationship in a community of clergy (active and retired Elders, Deacons, Associate Members, Provisional Members, Local Pastors). Our mutual covenant seeks to create a community marked by and lived into with respect, honesty, integrity, compassion, and encouragement. In all interactions with one another, we seek to offer mutual support and care as friends in ministry. *“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.”* ~ John 15:15

The kind of covenant community that we long for holds one another *“accountable in love”* (Ephesians 4:15) and seeks to uphold the highest ethics in our conduct, excellence in our work in pastoral ministry, and support our colleagues. (Refer to *2012 Book of Discipline*. ¶306 and ¶323)

As clergy in set-apart, representative, accountable leadership ministry, we must continually commit to grow in holiness, in faithfulness to our calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ, and in trusting relationships with each other. We rely upon the grace of God to maintain our covenant with each other.

## **Emerging Covenant Practices** **To Help Us Live Into Our Covenant**

- Make regular time for private prayer and reading scripture to nourish our own spiritual life.
- Care for ourselves and our families to promote good physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health.
- Make every effort to maintain a good balance of work, Sabbath rest, recreation, family time and spiritual reflection and renewal.
- Maintain healthy and ethical boundaries with everyone, especially with clergy colleagues and lay persons within our pastoral care.
- Make sure we speak well of colleagues or share information we know to be true and promotes the well being of others. If conflicts or concerns arise with a colleague, we will go directly to the person concerned and make every effort to resolve it lovingly (peaceably) and constructively. We will offer grace and forgiveness as it has been extended to us by God.
- Communicate honestly and appropriately, including via social media, in both our personal and professional lives.
- Share joys and concerns within our collegial circles, encouraging one another and praying for one another regularly.
- Seek out a small group of clergy colleagues as covenant partners with whom to meet regularly in order to build relationships that foster trust, confidentiality, transparency, authenticity, hospitality, and forgiveness.
- Maintain confidentiality in all situations: counseling, pastoral care, personnel matters within the ministry setting, appointments and committee work in the Annual Conference.
- Grow in knowledge and practice of Wesleyan and United Methodist theology, doctrine, and polity.
- Acknowledge that there are issues within our theology and polity with which we are not of the same mind. With God's help, we will remain engaged in holy conversation with one another to discern the way forward through these issues.
- Foster relationships with colleagues by attending district and conference clergy gatherings to the best of our ability, by communicating with respect and careful listening, and by honoring differences in perspective and experience.
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## **Tennessee and Memphis Conferences** **2015 Clergy Spiritual Life Retreat: "Creating Covenant Community"**

### ***Bishop McAlilly's Presentation*** ***on March 9 & 11, 2015 of*** **The 2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of the Clergy Covenant**

#### **Bishop McAlilly's remarks on the covenant at the retreat:**

##### **March 9, 2015 @ the opening of the Spiritual Life Retreat:**

So we come to this all important Conversation. A conversation that has been ongoing for over two years in one way or another, to lead us deeper into a holy place in our life together. And so I invite you to be here, nowhere else this week. Be here with as few distractions as you can manage.

I invite you to lay down your conspiracy theories about what this conversation is or is not about. To be here now is to fully engage in this conversation ... for in my way of thinking about covenant is to be not just in agreement, but also to be in relationship. And one of my deepest longings is for clergy to enjoy the fruit of our relationships formed in a covenant community. I have learned that confronting issues of relationship and life have convinced me that our work, indeed, our very lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly, one conversation at a time.

It should be no secret that over two years ago, I invited each of you to live more fully into our covenant of baptism, ordination, licensing, indeed our membership vows. Our thought when we started this process was that we would be able as a community to create a shared document that would represent the best in us; something that we all could buy into. Six months into this now it is clear that it is unlikely that we will be able to craft a document that is mutually agreeable to all. So we are going to lay that expectation down, based on the feedback we have received from you.

So relax. Stay tuned but don't tune out. Be mindful this week that how we enter these conversations is how we emerge from them. Be mindful that there are people who take the heart out of you and there are people who put it back. May we be people who put the heart back into our lives by the quality of our conversations.

##### **March 11, 2015 @ before the closing worship:**

We started our time together thinking about how to have good conversation. You may recall that on Monday I said something like, "How we enter the conversation is how we emerge from the conversation". And so from my viewpoint you have entered the

conversation well and I sense that those of you who have been faithful to be a part of the conversation will leave in a better place than you were when you came on Monday.

I came on the first day trying to speak a word about the difference between Koinania and Ecclesia and that what my hope continues to be I strive for us to be together a body of community. It is much more difficult to create a community of any intimacy as Luther has helped us see in a body this large. And it is so easy for some of us to be lost in the sea of people.

I remember as a young person writing a poem about that very idea of being in a room full of people and not being seen or not feeling connected. And by the nature of our life, the nature our personality, styles, types, the way we are wired. Whether you want to take the strengths finder or the DISC or the Myers Briggs or KOLBE, at the end of the day, we are all wired differently. And when we enter a space we enter it out of who we are and who have been and how we are emerging in that moment. But in the Body we need each other. We need all of our voices; we need all of our whole Selves.

I talk to people when I speak about discipleship about playing the “Hokey Pokey”. And what we are inviting our life together to be is to put our whole self in, not just a toe or a leg or a foot or an arm. Let’s put our whole Self in.

Since Annual Conference we have spoken often about the 72 + U. You are probably really tired about hearing about “72 + U”. But that has become an image for me of Jesus sending the 72 out into the world and that really is all that you need to change the world is 72! And so we have had at various times as many as 240 people here so we are pushing 3 times 72. And so the question for me now is how might we now live together?

I would be bold enough to say that those who have entered into this conversation this week can shape our life together in a profoundly better and more purposeful and deeper way.

My son played on a soccer team when he was in high school. He had a South African coach. He was half psychologist, half coach. And he was marvelous with these young men. Anton McQuen was his name. Anton would say to the players if they made a really great play, “So what? Now what?” And if they made a bonehead play Anton would say, “So what? Now what?”

This question has been kind of a way for me to think about these kinds of times together and to say to ourselves: “So what? Now what?” We can all go home today ... some of you are already gone. Your bodies are just still here but you left a while ago! But how shall we live now in the “so what now what” world?

We have listened to your conversation in districts (some were not able to get those done but many did) in response to the first draft of the covenant that came out of the October meetings. We have some language that I simply want to share with you as a way of

thinking about the “Now what?”. [2<sup>nd</sup> Draft of the Clergy Covenant is in quotes below in blue print.]

**“We have a sacred calling as United Methodist clergy.”**

Bishop: I think we can agree. I started out my talk on Monday on “sacred leadership” and so we believe that all of us can have agreement, we can be in covenant that **“we have a sacred calling as United Methodist clergy”**. I bet nobody in the room will argue with that.

**“By virtue of our baptism and ordination or licensing, we have entered into a covenantal relationship in a community of clergy (active and retired Elders, Deacons, Associate Members, Provisional Members, Local Pastors).”**

Bishop: We do unintended harm sometimes. Anne pointed to this a moment ago when she spoke about the distinctions we make between Elders, Deacons, and Local Pastors and part-time Local Pastors and Associate members and all of the ways we divide ourselves. I am mindful that when we get to Annual Conference this year it will be more profound because it is an election year. And we will have the bar of the conference and so how do we live into that and through that and be mindful? Similar to the space that we have created at this retreat with the District Superintendents (so that everyone felt free to talk, they were assigned a small group to themselves, yet some saw this as divisive), there are distinctions among us. Nobody signed up for those distinctions other than we follow different paths, we got here in different ways. Our life experience either allowed us to do life in one way or another. And sometimes our labels do not help us, frankly.

I think most Deacons are very clear about their call to be a Deacon. And most Elders are clear about their call to be Elders. And may Local Pastors that I know understand that they are Local Pastors because that is how life unfolded for them in respect to their call. So we have to work, always work to break down those barriers.

**“Our mutual covenant seeks to create a community marked by and lived into with respect, honesty, integrity, compassion, and encouragement.”**

Bishop: If you can think about these five as circles, all intersect each other in one way or another all the time.

**“In all interactions with one another, [‘striving for’ this is my word] we seek to offer mutual support and care as friends in ministry.”**

Bishop: I am third born in my family. My brother is 15 months older than me. My sister is 5 years older than me. And whatever my sister said, my brother and I tried to do. She was large and in charge. Still is. She is 60 something now and she is still trying to mother my brother and me.

But we were all different but we were all part of the same. My parents would tell you that they tried to treat us all the same but I know they didn’t. I was special. [laughter]

But one of the things that I know about myself is that if I am not intentional about community, if I am not intentional about relationships, I can disappear. And nobody will ever call me and invite me to lunch.

My two best friends from seminary and I have been getting together for some measure of days every year. But if you were to analyze our inner-activity between annual events and look at my phone records, you would see that most of the time I am the one that initiates the call to the other two. We live very different lives. So if I don't take responsibility and am not intentional for that community then I am without community. So if you are feeling it or feeling not included you may have to create the invitation. You might want to create gold-embossed invitations to send.

***“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” ~ John 15:15***

***“The kind of covenant community that we long for holds one another “accountable in love” (Ephesians 4:15) ...”***

Bishop: We are looking for what Ephesians 4 calls “accountable love”. So one of my favorite things to do these days is to take your finger. Take your pointer and put it on your nose. You're accountable for yourself. And I have said this in some settings and we have had so much conversation in the church these days about accountability, and it's all good that we have those words. We don't like them sometimes. But at the end of the day you are the only one who can hold yourself accountable. God knows. And you know when you have chosen not to or when you have chosen to live in covenant. We have a system that is very much like a mother or a father. We sign up believing we will always be taken care of. We will always be given food to eat. We will always have a bed to sleep in and we will always well nurtured.

If you want to think about our system as a family dynamic in a family systemic way, we come at this life with certain expectations that I am always going to be cared for and cared for well. The unfortunate part of our life together, our system is that we do not do that well sometimes. And when we don't do that well ... when the bishop doesn't do his job well or our district superintendents don't do their job well; you who are clergy have broken expectations. “That's not what I signed up for. You were supposed to take care of me. You were supposed to treat me well.” And so when the expectations are broken, when we don't hold one another in love, when we fail in our accountability then we feel broken and hurt. And then we don't have any really good ways to process that brokenness or hurt. Because we good Southerners' don't know how to do that well. We don't know how to talk about when I have been wounded or broken by the system.

The system is not fair. And when I say it is not fair, I mean the appointive system is not fair. There are not enough good churches. There are not enough good places for everybody to get one this year.

So one of the ways that I like to think about this is that we are hoping to serve in the “good enough” places. Some are more “good enough” than other places, right? [laughter] But when we think about our life together, we have to think about ourselves in this family where all the children don't get treated the same. It's not on purpose. It is not on purpose. It is part of the systemic dynamic. But when I am wounded by a brother or sister how do I now then have a conversation. And I say to you or you say to me, “You know, What you did was not helpful to me and could we talk about that or I thought I should have gotten this and I got that or ...”

Someone said when we were downsizing the districts in the Memphis Conference, “Well that's going to eliminate some top level jobs for people. I was hoping to get one of those one day.” Well you can ask the people down front, it's not all it's cracked up to be. [laughter]

But in our accountability we ***“... seeks to uphold the highest ethics in our conduct, excellence in our work in pastoral ministry, ...”***

Bishop: I have to hold myself in a more excellent way. I had a conversation a couple of years ago when we had a conversation about excellence in ministry and somebody said, “I have twit with the word ‘excellence’”. I said, “Really? I don't.” Paul didn't. 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is dealing with the church and the different gifts of the body and the body has many parts and then he says I'll show you a more excellent way. And then he goes into the whole “Love Chapter.” And so the more excellent way in my mind has to be rooted in love. Love of God and love of neighbor. Love of being able to lay down our pettiness, our gossip.

***“and support our colleagues. (Refer to 2012 Book of Discipline. ¶306 and ¶323)”***

***“As clergy in set-apart, representative, accountable leadership ministry, we must continually commit to grow in holiness, ...”***

Bishop: when was the last time you were asked if you were going onto perfection? Was it at your ordination? Do you expect to be made perfect in this life? Did you all say yes? I did. How's that going for you?

***“... in faithfulness to our calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ, and in trusting relationships with each other. We rely upon the grace of God to maintain our covenant with each other.”***