

Florida Annual Conference 2018 "Remembering Who We Are" – Questions 2 & 3 (Transcription)

Bishop Carter: We are moving to the questions, "How to Teach?" and "What to Do?" Last night I felt like we were really getting into these questions as well. And I don't want to create in your minds any kind of artificial distinction as I listen to you, several of you said, "Really you can't teach without also living it," and so forth. So we are going to open up this time. And thank you for the spirit of what you shared last night. Again this is modeled on the first Methodist conferences who focused entirely on these three questions. What I am going to do is to call on you near a number [numbered microphone] and ask you to go to that microphone. In time we may just have persons at every one of the queues.

Take a couple of minutes to reflect on this. Please say your name and your church. This is for the historical record and we will need to reconstruct who has spoken and it will be a document of what we are actually teaching, how we are teaching, and what we are doing at this moment in our history. So the questions this morning are "How do we teach our faith?" "How do you teach your faith right now? In what kinds of settings?" "What is our faith (your faith) calling us/you to do?" "Let me open it up. ... We do this in a spirit of Christian love with each other and to build up the church.

I am from Gulf Cove UMC. My name is Doreen Alvarez and I am lay delegate for the SW district. I am an elementary teacher and I am not allowed to use Jesus' name in my classroom. Someone said last night teach the gospel, when necessary use words. That has to be the way that we teach initially. That's the ground breaking; it's the fresh expression. Then when the door is open, that's when we need to teach people to dig deep into the Word. That teaching needs to come in so many ways. Traditional Bible studies work for me, but they don't work for people who are illiterate or even dyslexic. In the fast-paced world, we need a plethora of opportunities. If someone wants to become a lay servant, they shouldn't have to take a 50-minute drive to a sit-down face-to-face class with reading and writing activities. My students get chrome books in their hands and they can respond to a question through type written word, voice or video, multimedia presentations like we have been viewing here all week, and even through artistic expression. Why do we have to change? Because society has. It's a double edge sword in many ways because we need the old ways, but we also need new ones.

Jerry Carris, clergy, FUMC, Alachua. Paul gave a list of instructions at the end of Thessalonians. If you ever tried to diagram that, the word order isn't that important, it says *This is the will of God for you. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.* And then the one that I use, hopefully the most, is *Don't quench the Spirit.* The Holy Spirit really puts a lot of fire in people, but our attitudes (we won't stop the Holy Spirit), but we can sure put out the fire the Holy Spirit starts in others. Don't quench the Holy Spirit.

Heather Harper, Georgetown UMC, candidate for certified lay minister. How we have to teach is we have to go where the people are. Parents don't bring children to Sunday school. You have to go someplace where the kids can walk or get transportation and show them love, one-on-one relationships. They need attention; they need love. So go where the people are, go where the kids can walk to you. Show them love; build relationships. That is all we have to do in the name of Jesus Christ. I had a child say, "What is God?" So there are kids out there who have no idea of what our Lord wants and how much he loves them.

Ryan Hall, clergy, UMC of Sun City Center. I am struck by a story of Jesus walking with the disciples and they are arguing about who will be the greatest and his answer is to pull a child in and

put the child right in the middle and to basically say this is what the Kingdom looks like. You have to be like this. I am so pleased to hear us lifting up the youth. I loved seeing Paige. There is a reason we all loved seeing her up there. Kids really draw something out of us. We have been talking about school partnerships and other ways. My colleague from Georgetown was just talking about it. How do we get to where the kids are? I would recommend you look at the need for fostering in your area. In Hillsborough, where I serve, 20 children a day are placed into the foster care system. There are not enough families. My family just took in a little guy who is a year and a half and he has changed us, and he has changed how we teach God's love to my kids and how we teach God's love in the church. And so I would recommend if you really want to join Jesus' mission to save the world, you start with saving the children. Thank you.

Ashley Horan, lay delegate, Seminole Heights, GC district. I really think that we should teach people how to apply the Bible and how it should light our path. There are some things in the Bible that we really don't do anymore and some that we do. So how can we know what was for the time it was written and what is supposed to be obeyed forever?

Alex Christian, clergy, FUMC, Chiefland. The first thing that came to my mind was how to teach with humility. That is something I am still learning: not assume that I know it all just because I went to seminary. I am still learning it, whether it is someone who doesn't know Jesus, somebody who has known Jesus for a day, or for 80 years. I am reminded in Philippians 2 where Jesus sets the example of coming in the form of a servant. I think the most important thing is coming from a position of humility and learning together.

Carol Carrol, Memorial UMC in Fernandina Beach, NE district. There is an old saying I heard when I was growing up, It is *Your talk talks and your walk talks but your walk talks louder than your talk talks*. As Christians we are called to show God's love to all of those around us, to be kind to the clerk in Publix when it has taken longer than usual for her to get to you. People are astounded when you aren't mad when you have been held up for some reason in line. So I think as Christians we need to look different and we need to show our love to those around us.

LeeAnn Inman, clergy, one of the pastors at Peace UMC, Orlando. We learn when we listen. I began to listen really for the first time when I became a mother for the first time. My daughter Carrie, who is 34 yrs. old now, has Down Syndrome and I listened with great expectation for her first words. And she hasn't stopped talking. What I have learned from her is that people who live with "disability" from the beginning of their life have something very important to share with those of us who are "temporarily abled" and that what they have to share is something very deep, they don't just have to share it when they are cute little kids but they also have to share it when they are grown ups with gray hair. We teach by how we listen and learn from others who are different than we are.

Bishop: Thank you, LeeAnn. Amen. Just a word of affirmation about several of the reflections. Brothers and sisters, this is testimony. This is why the Methodists had Annual Conference. This is not an interruption from our work, it is not an irrelevance to any kind of real work. This is the work. Our minds need to be transformed to see that this is the work.

Ron McCreary, clergy, retired. I love what we are saying about drawing in children, teaching children and finding them where they are. I don't want us to forget about the adults. Something that I have run across occasionally is adults at churches who assume that Sunday School stops when you graduate from high school. I think Christian Education is lifetime. I have also run into people in churches who are afraid to go into the door of a Sunday School class for fear that their

ignorance will show. Perhaps that is a reflection of how well or ill we have taught our Scripture or our tradition. I think we need a renewed emphasis on teaching adults, starting from where they are, and bringing them into something that doesn't embarrass them when they try to talk to their friends about their faith.

Bishop: Ron, what is the best way that you have seen that happen?

Ron McCreary: I actually find it frustrating because I haven't seen it happen well all that often.

Bishop: Ok, that is our work to do. Thank you.

Matt Daily, lay delegate, NW district, Good Samaritan, Tallahassee; I would like to start with a portion of Psalm 100, *Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, worship the Lord with gladness, Come before him with joyful songs, know that the Lord is God, it is he who made us and we are his. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.* Our faith is a sung faith. Whenever we gather in communities as the sheep in his pasture, it is a powerful thing to sing in those communities as you have experienced this weekend. You are much more likely to remember Biblical truths, truths about life, truths about love when it comes in the form of a song. For the record I would like to reinforce 3 of John Wesley's rules for singing. Rule 3: *See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can.* Rule 4: *Sing lustily and with good courage.* Rule 7: which I will elaborate, *Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature... see that your heart is not carried away with the sound.* Amen

Raymond Pendley II, I am from FAMU Wesley and I am an Exploring Candidate for ministry.

My two points are – How to teach? I think it is very important for us to share our testimony because if someone realizes God can love you for who you were and where you were, because we're all 'jacked up,' (we can choose to admit it if we want to or not.) Also, I would say it is very important to see people for where they are, exactly where they are, because it is easy to tell someone what they are not doing and what they are doing wrong, but it takes more work, and we are lazy in general, but it takes more work to look into someone's life and reveal to them how they are already worshipping God and living God's ideals through their life already. So I think that is very, very important.

Bishop: Amen. Amen. This just prompts me to ask you to put on your prayer list the redevelopment, reestablishment of FAMU Wesley. We have been working on this for several years and this is already bearing fruit. So thank you.

Nancy Hicks, lay delegate, Dundee UMC. I feel like a character from "Out of Africa" when she says I have learned a thing. It took me 69 years to learn this particular thing. The word retirement is anathema to me, I have not been able to do it well. So recently, I became a school bus driver in Polk county and I drive exceptional students, exceptional children, and I tried to make them realize that every single day of their lives until the end of their lives they are going to learn something, so pay attention every single day. But the most blessed moment of my life came right before the end of the school year when one of my students turned to me and said, "Miss Nancy, you're a Christian." And it wasn't a question; it was a statement. And I said, "How did you learn that?" And he said, "I can see Jesus on your face." No matter who we are, no matter what we do, no matter where we are, we can teach the love of Christ to someone every single day.

Hi, my name is Hannah Demi and I go to Forest Hills. I am a PK of one of the women that is going to be licensed today. I actually go to a school that helps kids with disabilities, with dyslexia, to show people (all those kids) that there is a spot for them in the world and that they can realize that

everyone can see who they are without feeling bad about themselves. I want to tell you guys to teach them that they are part of the world and that they are not different. I have been grown up with so many people that have the Lord in their spirits, like all the preachers that I have been around. We just realized that my mom is going to be a preacher and it's really cool to see that I can go to her as a preacher, too.

Andrew Miller, clergy, EC district, Azalea Park UMC. We have to remember that people learn in different ways. Our sermons are predominantly auditory, our Bible studies are also predominantly auditory with some visualization mixed in. Recently at Azalea Park we started a service for autistic children. It has been amazing and has made me rethink a lot of things, and I am too dumb to lead it most days but the reality is I had to switch my teaching style to tactile and hands on and that is something you may want to think about when you work with people and how people learn. Second thing: if your Bible study has had no one new in it for a year it is time to re-evaluate who you are teaching. If your Koinonia class has not had a new member, what are you doing? That might be why 38% of our churches haven't had a profession of faith. Lastly, stop making the Bible boring!

My name is David Charlton. I am from FUMC of Port St. John. There is one word that can answer all three of the questions. That one word is GRACE. How to teach grace is by humbly, unconditionally loving every single person you run across. What to do to teach grace is good works. We are not saved by good works, but good works is a result of our salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10: *For it is by grace you have been saved through faith. This is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not by works so that no one can boast, for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Joreatha McCall Capers, retired clergy, Rogers Community UMC in Bradenton, FL. I am so proud to be Methodist and I feel that we have a wonderful theology. I enjoy the commercials, "Open doors, open hearts, open minds." I think we can teach that by doing. I feel that we can do a lot of intellectual masturbation about the Kingdom of God and our beautiful theology that Wesley has given us, but what is most important, I think, is letting the rubber hit the road and how we make that a reality and how we live it. Remembering here, during this conference, with a beautiful theme, it took me back to seminary and I can remember how proud I was to be Methodist, to know that we had a Discipline and that we had something called the Social Principles. And when I read about Wesley and all that he stood for, the more I read it, the prouder I became. If we can really live the Golden Rule and really do to others as we would have them do to us, I think Wesley would be proud and I would be even more proud to be Methodist. We must live what it is we believe because what we believe is good. It is good; it is good! And it makes me proud.

Gewanda Parker and I am currently pastor at Wesley Fellowship and in a couple of days I will be at Mandarin UMC in the NE district. As a classroom teacher for 25 years, I understand that we will have to adjust. Not all kids are going to learn the same. Some are auditory, some are kinesthetic learners, some are visual learners. When I look at the church, I think the same thing applies. We have to adjust. We have to adjust culturally, we have to adjust to the different ethnicities, we have to be sensitive to the times of the day of who we are teaching, how we are teaching. We cannot have a cookie-cutter method. I really think how we can do that is through the power and the discernment of the Holy Spirit so that we can get the message across, the message that God loves all people, the message of grace and that we can communicate this in a language that everyone can hear and receive and not just have the old but include the new, the fresh expressions, the different ways that we teach and embrace all people.

Bishop: Thank you brothers and sisters for your openness to have this conversation in this way and again we wanted to do this in an historical year simply to remember the practice of how Methodist stood together and confessed and professed their faith and built each other up in this way.