

Ashley Prescott Barlow-Thompson

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Delegate # 2031

What has been your involvement in The United Methodist Church (include district, conference, and general agency/board involvement)?

I am a deacon in full connection and have served on many committees for the district and annual conference including CCYM, DCYM, Sexual Ethics, Children's Ministry (CEF), and most recently, as a Jurisdictional delegate in 2016 and a reserve delegate in 2019. I've also written curriculum for Camp Horizon and small church Vacation Bible School. I am active in my network and am glad to be connected to deacons throughout the conference!

Since 2013, I have been our conference's residency coordinator for the program required for ordination. I have been a member of the Board of Ordained Ministry since 2014. In that time, I've worked with over 100 local pastors, deacons and elders in their path toward ordination and professional ministry, creating curriculum, finding speakers, training mentors, and managing their two or more year process.

At the global level, I've created curriculum for the Commission on the Status and Role of Women. I currently serve on a committee at the General Conference level on provisional membership and the residency process with the General Board of Higher Education in Ministry and attended a Young Adult Clergy Forum with the General Board of Church and Society in 2017.

Why would you like to be considered for election as a delegate?

After serving as the only Deacon on the delegation in 2016 and 2019, my passion was rekindled for the work of the global church. I am proud to be a part of a denomination that includes so many people and viewpoints and desires to advocate for the •big umbrella• of grace that I believe is inherent to who we are as United Methodists. I believe God is calling me to serve again, knowing that I will advocate for the inclusion of all people in the church so we might better reflect the Kingdom of God. I believe that God uses conflict to create positive change in the world, and I understand this moment in our denomination's life as an opportunity to make something new. I have developed skills to move the church forward in compassionate conflict while maintaining relationship with those who differ from me, theologically or otherwise.

What unique skills, knowledge, and /or gifts would you bring to the delegation?

My work with the delegation over the last four years helped me live out my calling as a deacon in new ways, connecting what we do globally with the world and my local setting. I feel my gifts for relational justice and healthy conflict were essential to the work of our delegation as a whole. Because I've served before, I am invested in the conversations we are having around human sexuality in a unique way. I also believe that my perspective as a young adult matters as we make decisions that effect our church's future.

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In light of the 2019 special session of General Conference, how do you believe the church is called to move forward in fulfilling its mission?

LBGTQ inclusion matters to me. I am sad and angry at our church for perpetrating and isolating people I love because of who they love or how they identify. I am also worried that those I disagree with will not be a part of the church I am a part of.

I want to maintain relationships with people on both sides of this important issue and create a church that lives out God's justice and inclusion for all. I believe both these things can happen at the same time.

If I am elected to General Conference 2020, I will use my compassionate conflict skills because I believe deeply that justice happens in safe relationships and that the kingdom of God includes all people.

I believe the church is called to move forward as one, creating space for traditionalists and progressives, young and old, of every race, gender, identity and sexuality. I want to be a part of this work.

What do you believe are the challenges and opportunities facing The United Methodist Church today?

I believe the conversation about human sexuality is far from over and includes much more than this issue alone. We need to consider together what it means to be a global church. We need to own the ways racism, sexism, ageism and xenophobia inhibit healthy decision making.

We have incredible opportunity to "make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" because of our diversity, our global nature and the resources that come from being together. I want to leverage these powerful gifts and see how better to be a witness of God's grace and love to the world.