

Kalaba Chali

Address: 11105 E. Funston St.

Gender: Male

Church: Mercy and Justice coordinator

Ethnicity: Black

District: Great Plains Conference

Age range: 40-45

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Delegate # **2007**

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

I have served as a youth leader in the South Congo Annual Conference, and as a young adult, I served as president of the United Methodist Students Movement (UMSM) at Africa University, Zimbabwe, and the steering committee for Africa Youth network for the southern African region. While a student at Africa University, I served as a student pastor at Vern Valley UMC, a new church in the Mutare district. My experiences in the United Methodist Churches in the United States began in 2005 when I first served as a summer pastoral intern at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Orlando, Florida. I then attended Perkins School of Theology in Dallas. Following completion of my theological education at Perkins, I was appointed as an associate pastor for outreach, prison ministry and African ministries at Lovers Lane United Methodist Church, Dallas. In the North Texas Conference, I served on the Africa University Task Force and was involved in raising young leaders for Christ's Foundry United Methodist, a Spanish Mission Church of the North Texas Conference.

Prior to joining the Great Plains Conference staff as Mercy and Justice coordinator, I served as pastor of Zion in Mapaville, Missouri, and associate pastor at First UMC, St. Charles, Missouri. I also served on the Greater St. Louis Mission and Outreach Board, an agency that evaluates new church plants and vital church efforts in order to offer grants that came from the proceeds of church properties sold in the St. Louis area.

At the general church level, I have served as a French interpreter for the General Conferences of 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2019. Additionally, I served as the French interpreter for the World Methodist Conferences and Council of 2011 and 2016. Through the Board of Church and Society, I was selected to provide leadership for the revision of the UMC Book of Social Principles. My role was to lead a group of seminary professors, lay persons and young adult to rewrite the Social Community chapter in the revised Social Principles.

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

I bring a wealth of local, national and international church and cultural experiences. I have been part of new church plants both in the U.S. and in some African countries, I have led a small rural congregation of 23, that grew to over 60 after seven months. In addition to my local, district, conference and General Conference experiences, I bring unique wisdom that transcends one particular cultural context through my cross-cultural/cross-racial ministry experiences in the U.S. and in the continent of Africa. My life and professional experiences help me to negotiate difficult conversations and changes in a church that is both local and global in its missional contexts. I have a mature faith in Christ, and I engage in ministry and relationships through a theology of common humanity that is grace-filled.

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

I am gifted with cross-cultural and cross-racial skills, which I have demonstrated in my ministry experiences in Dallas, St. Louis, and throughout the Great Plains Conference, both in the rural and urban contexts where I have worked with pastors and lay persons to support their ministry and mission. I bring a unique perspective of a church that is driven by a partnership between lay-clergy. I am able to thrive in both cultures that embrace uncertainty and those that avoid uncertainty. My theological backgrounds from several countries offer me a better understanding of discussions at the General Conference level where delegates come from many countries and cultures. While there is an amazing group of translators at General Conferences, my ability to understand and fluently speak three of the four official languages of General Conference (English, French, and Swahili) gives me an edge in picking up the depth of cultural blindness that is imbedded in language translations and conversations and negotiate difficult conversations with grace and appreciation of our diversity.

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?

The church is called to move forward in bringing together our diverse theological perspectives and deploy them to help reach out to all children of God, conservatives, progressives, centrists and all others who fall close to any of these theological world views and scopes. The most important thing for us is to understand our diversity in theological thinking as gifts not as problems. They are gifts to reach out to all people and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

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

I believe the challenges facing the United Methodist Church today is how to be biblically relevant in each particular missional context and culturally competent to engage a much diverse population that is more on the migration move than ever, being it internal migration or international migration. These movements of people give our church opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ in culturally appropriate containers to every mission field. While our diversity in theological thinking and in our ethnicities are perceived as problems and challenges, they actually are tools gifted to us by God to be able to reach as many people as possible.