

Stephanie Ahlschwede

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Gender: Female

Ethnicity: Caucasian

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Delegate # 2001

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

GPUMC Trustees, 2018-present

Bishop's Forward in Unity Team, 2018-present

GPUMC Candidacy mentor, 2014-present

Blue River Cluster leader, 2017-present

General Commission on Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) 2012-16

Nebraska Board of Ordained Ministry (Candidate registrar) 2007-13

Delegate to South Central Jurisdictional Conference 2000, 2004, 2008, 2016

Alternate to South Central Jurisdictional Conference 2012

Great Plains/Nebraska Delegation member 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2019

Wesley House Omaha Board member 2005-7, Interim Exec Director 2010-11

United Methodist Ministries Exec Director and Big Garden founder, 2005-2013

SCJ Women's Leadership Team, 1997-2017

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

I offer myself because I feel called to this work. I was a new deacon and then a new elder when Nebraska held two church trials around gay marriage and will forever remember the horror when I read the letter informing me I would be a member of the second trial's jury pool. In the succeeding years congregations and colleagues relearned how to trust one another; my wish for the Church is that we learn how to heal across divisions and I know my voice matters in a unique way because of that experience. In addition, I have a heart and passion for electing a more diverse SCJ College of Bishops, and am eager to contribute to making this a reality.

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

I'm in the unique position of being a member of my Conference delegation six times, but never elected as a voting member to General Conference. I've used my time on the delegation to study the South Central Jurisdiction's traditions and history around Episcopal elections, and have focused my General Conference energies on filling in whatever research gaps were needed. I've covered five different GC committees as an observer, served two quads as a volunteer Nebraska UMC news staffer, and I think I have interviewed over 60 candidates for Bishop. This gives me a fairly long, and I hope helpful, perspective on two decades of work by these two bodies.

Continued on next page

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?

As I have watched us struggle with how to value both a shared mission and varying understandings of how we get there, I've come to the conclusion that sometimes it is OK to find a new structure. It is time to free each other to do our best work, even if we are no longer in one denomination. Our key will be holding each other in as much love as possible, and committing to the Wesleyan notion of doing no harm. I want for each congregation and colleague the structure that works best for them to be truly missional. We need to give ourselves permission to focus on how we can love one another and create new structures where we stop doing each other harm.

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

I am concerned that the struggle to fully fund the ministries of most congregations is overtaking the joy of doing good work together. Population shifts, changes in the work life of adults, scheduling demands for all ages and an increasing demands without a matching source of funding are stressors on the local church. The opportunity before us is an invitation to continually rethink our assumptions about how church is "done" so we can reach the broadest audience in the best possible way. There has got to be a better way to empower local churches and leaders to use their knowledge of their community while working as a larger Church towards our shared goals.