



Q & A with Bishop Nominee Amelia Cleveland-Traylor

These questions were asked by four networks within the FMC and the Bishop Nominees were asked to respond to each question.

1) How much sexism are you aware of in the FMCUSA and where do you see it hampering the work of God the most? What have you done in the past and what are your plans in the future for addressing this issue?

It is unfortunate that sexism is alive and well in the Free Methodist Church as it is in the universal church. The most obvious way that sexism is encountered in the local church is the absence of female leadership outside of the focused and gendered roles of children's ministry worker and hospitality. This is more prevalent in our African and Latino churches though it is not absent in Anglo churches. This arises when lead pastors fail to recognize the gifts and graces of women in their congregations and/or fail to encourage women to consider how God is calling them to serve the church. As a woman in ministry, I have encountered obstacles that are unique to women. As a superintendent, my husband and I developed very intentional processes to search for and appoint women to serve as lead pastors within the River Conference. We also made sure that we appointed or nominated women to serve as district leaders and members of the conference BOA, MEG board, finance team, and MAC boards. Our goal was to make sure that our leadership structure was representative of the diversity (race and gender) that exists within the conference. We have been successful in our endeavors. If elected bishop, I would continue to actively encourage superintendents, lead pastors, and area leaders to intentionally search for opportunities to promote women into roles of leadership at every level of service to the Free Methodist Church.

2) How do you define economic justice? In what ways can the FMC more effectively confront growing economic inequality in the U.S.?

Though I understand why the United States is a capitalistic country, I recognize the inherent limitations of capitalism particularly in the way that it easily divides people into the haves and have-nots. By every measure, the United States is a wealthy country. On the surface, this might be celebrated as a good thing. Nonetheless, a serious problem exists because the gap between the wealthy and the poor grows wider every year. There is something inherently wrong when mid-level and high-level executives earn thousands times more in bonuses than the average worker makes with their primary income. There are millions of Americans that make up the working poor. Too many hardworking people are unable to pay for their basic needs of food, housing, clothing, transportation, and health care. This is the prime example of economic injustice. Therefore, economic justice seeks to recognize the conditions of those working people that are unable to earn a livable wage. Economic justice seeks to offer job training, increase the minimum wage, and provide affordable housing and health care. Economic justice seeks to provide men and women with the dignity of being able to earn enough money to provide for their families. As agents of shalom, I believe that the church can become an effective advocate for economic justice if it begins to seek that which is right (according to Jesus) instead of what is legal. The FMC and the universal church need to recognize the biblical mandate for justice. Throughout the Scriptures, God calls His people to be mindful of the poor and marginalized and take steps to make provisions for them. Biblical stewardship helps us to recognize that we are called to share, not hoard, what we have been given. I believe that there may be individual churches and communities that are ready to engage in the work of economic justice though I don't think the whole FMC will get there soon. I would love for God to prove me wrong.

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3) How do you see the future of the Latino church in the U.S.? Do you have a vision for more cultural diversity and inclusion in print, communication, and leadership? How do you think the denomination can help mentor, raise up and empower Latino leaders into different leadership circles?

If we look at the changing demographics of the United States, we recognize that Latinos represent the largest minority in the country. This ought not be feared but celebrated. There are not many conferences in the FMCUSA that do not have Latino churches. I would like all of us in denominational leadership to strive to make the FMCUSA reflect the demographics of the local communities and the country. This requires intentionality. There are already accomplished Latino leaders within the FMCUSA. Pastors like Jose Reyes, Salomon Ruano, and Jose Garcia lead healthy and vibrant congregations in their respective communities. This is an example of a few pastoral leaders that could be appointed to visible roles in conference leadership today. While serving the conference, they could be prepared to serve the church at a denominational level and they could mentor younger Latino leaders. Their presence in conference leadership would immediately provide representation of their constituency and assure others that they are welcomed in the Free Methodist Church.

4) The FMC proclaims that we started due to our opposition of slavery, yet we have had minimal success in attracting significant numbers of African Americans to our denomination. Do you see this as a problem and what steps would you take to rectify this going forward?

I was drawn to the Free Methodist Church because of its classic freedoms. I was inspired by its blending of biblical holiness and social consciousness. Its commitment to the poor and marginalized people was exemplary. With the passage of time, the FMCUSA lost its way and its identity as it was swayed by social and political forces. There has been a historic absence of African American, Latino, women, and POC at the highest levels of leadership. This is very problematic. If I were elected bishop, I would seek a two-pronged process to address this issue. The first order of business is to identify African American, Latino, and other leaders of color that can serve the church at the conference level today. Appoint them today and use them immediately. The second order of business is to identify the next generation of leaders of color (AA, Latino, and POCs) and get them into the leadership of the local church. It is my opinion that more African Americans will show genuine interest in the FMC when the leadership at the highest level is inclusive of more African Americans and people of color.