



Q & A with Bishop Nominee Linda Adams

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's clear that our practice has not caught up with our stated beliefs regarding full equality for women. In the past four years, I've been dismayed to find pockets of overt rejection of this longstanding Free Methodist value, and other places without conscious resistance but where women are still a small minority of our pastors and leaders and would say they have not been given the opportunities they have wanted. Our history shows incremental progress in official policy, followed by decades of the church "catching up" before each next step. In 1974, the final barrier to full ordination was officially removed.

One contextual factor since then is the resurgence of Complementarian theology in the U.S. Christian church. Prominent Reformed and Fundamentalist authors and speakers flood the Internet, airwaves, and bookstores with condemnation of our position on women in ministry. Some of our people have bought into this ideology without even knowing how out of step it is with the ethos of the Wesleyan-Holiness movement of which we are a part. Our task of educating pastors-in-formation and current pastors and members is never finished!

Despite an increase in the number of women under appointment, we are still quite androcentric in our corporate culture. Usually unconsciously, we often assume the "best man for the job" is a man, without intentionally seeking out women who have been called and prepared. I'm thankful to say, this is changing in many places. And, because "God authenticates his servants" (see Joshua 1), many times an anointed woman exercising her spiritual gifts convinces the skeptics.

I've been immersed in helping the FMC to live into our heritage for over 30 years. For instance, in 1991, Light + Life Magazine published my article, "Stop Pushing the Sisters off the Scaffold!" That vivid image came from B. T.

Roberts himself, who appealed to the brothers to stop doing that and get busy building up the house of God together with the sisters. He saw opposition to women as sideways energy, pulling the church off the mission of Jesus and hampering kingdom advancement.

As bishop, I've been given the best possible platform to demonstrate God's calling on women's lives and to articulate it in the church. Serving another term as bishop will allow me to continue inspiring and encouraging younger women as they respond to God's voice, and writing and teaching our historic commitment to this value. It will be my honor to continue partnering with male and female colleagues at every level of leadership in the ongoing work of equipping and deploying both women and men to join the ranks and fulfill their calling in the church.

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

Many of our best examples of working for economic justice came early in our movement. Following the lead of John Wesley and the Methodists, our founder B. T. Roberts declared "preaching the gospel to the poor" as one of two central reasons for the existence of the Free Methodist Church. We were founded as a church of the poor, by the poor, and for the poor. Gospel imperatives compelled our forebears to create and sustain ministries for widows, orphans, homeless people, prisoners, and others listed in passages such as Matthew 25:31-46. As one of our two founding charisms (the other being entire sanctification), our commitment to economic justice played out in abolitionism, opposition to pew rental, simplicity in dress, sacrificial giving to domestic and international missions, and many practical actions. For instance, B. T. and Ellen Roberts welcomed women exiting prostitution to live with them in their home and learn other means of supporting themselves and their children.

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For a Christian to embrace economic justice is to recognize the dignity and worth of all persons and to herald and demonstrate the equality of the kingdom of God. As we see greater economic disparity in our society and as the Free Methodist Church in most of the U.S. has experienced a gradual climb up the socioeconomic ladder, our challenge to proclaim and live in just and equitable ways has increased. Our churches need to recover a passion to welcome “the least of these,” including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and families living on the margins. We need to be more intentional to center this biblical value and to partner with like-minded organizations and ministries. Those among us who have accumulated wealth are able to invest significantly in making an economic difference; for instance, through supporting sustainable development initiatives, funding anti-trafficking work, operating businesses that promote just policies, and providing education for those who lack access. In fact, I know many Free Methodist churches and members who are involved in all these efforts and more. We are recovering our heritage!

Solving these problems at a macro level will involve society and its institutions across the land. As followers of Jesus, we listen to His reply to John the Baptist’s inquiry in Matthew 11:4-5: “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor.” If Jesus lists signs of the kingdom of God in ascending order, physical miracles are topped by the dead being raised, and the crowning evidence is the good news being proclaimed to the poor. Jesus’ priority was to transform lives and societies from the inside out and the bottom up. Let’s follow Him.

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?

I believe the future of the *iglesia Latina* in the U.S. is bright! The large and growing Latino population in the U.S. represents a tremendous mission field that we have barely begun to reach. Missional outposts we have established encompass three generations, each needing a unique cultural approach. Among current leaders, we have gifted and committed pastors and church planters in each generation—we just need more of them! The harvest is ready; we need to pray for, empower, and deploy workers to bring it in.

The newly formed *Conexión Latina* is on the forefront of gathering, equipping, encouraging, networking, and cooperating with annual conferences to raise up godly, competent leaders in the Free Methodist Church USA. In three of my four annual conferences this spring, we have ordained new pastors in Spanish. We have worshipped in Spanish. We have heard testimonies and Scripture readings in Spanish. Mentors have prayed over ordinands and church planters in Spanish. I am excited to see a culture shift toward gracious hospitality in these conferences and I believe the other regions of the country are making progress, too.

Do I have a vision for more cultural diversity and inclusion in print, communication, and leadership? YES! In my role as bishop, I’m often in dialogue with Light + Life Communications, making them aware of stories that need to be told and influencers who need a platform. We are open to many more of these being from all our immigrant populations and their children and grandchildren. I’m encouraged that Light + Life weekly and many other resources are translated into Spanish. Materials for Boards of Ministerial Education and Guidance and resources through the Center for Pastoral Formation are being offered in Spanish. Increasingly, we should see translation going into English, as writers whose preferred language is Spanish, or any other language, make their contribution.

My current work of partnering with FMWM Area Director Dr. Ricardo Gomez in 17 countries in Latin America provides a final reason for optimism. The FMC in Latin America is on the move! Almost 1,000 churches have been planted in the last three years. Hundreds of leaders, ordained and lay, are learning through the centralized curriculum, offered online in group settings for peer learning and fellowship. Mentorship and Wesleyan bands are part of the secret to their success. Our leaders in Latin America are outstanding! With communication and travel flowing back and forth between the Americas, I believe the good things God is doing will not be contained by borders. Join us for Zoom prayer meetings and multinational worship services to get a taste for yourself!

Now is the time to build on the foundation that has been laid by our existing Latino churches and to open our eyes to see the harvest fields, as Jesus challenged his disciples in John 4. The disciples were in Samaria, but were blind to the new thing God was doing in bringing this people group into the kingdom. We have our own blind spots in the U.S. regarding the people groups the Lord is bringing to himself and bringing to us. Lord, open our eyes!

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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?

We are blessed to have been founded by the courageous reformer and abolitionist, Benjamin Titus Roberts. His anti-slavery writings were one reason he was expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church, which led to the formation of the Free Methodist Church (and one reason for the word "Free" in our name). We are rightly proud of our heritage; our forebears followed their consciences, their interpretation of Scripture, and their leader. But the fact that we have only had minimal success in attracting significant numbers of African Americans to our denomination for over a century is indeed a problem.

One hindrance has been that our churches are rarely located in diverse communities; they are usually in rural areas, small towns, and monocultural suburbs. Thankfully, in the past few years we are seeing progress with urban church planting and new works in communities of color.

Early in 2020, a Free Methodist Diversity Task Force met to explore ways to move forward on achieving greater diversity in our churches and leadership. Several recommendations were made, and several have been implemented. Our national Board of Administration is more diverse than ever in our history. Our Vice Chair, soon to become Chair, is an African American man, as is our national Director of Men's Ministries. The BOA and Superintendents have begun Cultural Competency training from a kingdom of God perspective, which has been received with open arms and humble hearts. We now have an ongoing Diversity and Justice Committee of the BOA, which is collecting data so we can understand our situation accurately. Our Boards of Ministerial Education and Guidance are growing in awareness of opening leadership roles to people who may have been overlooked in the past. More African American leaders will be one key to opening doors for more African American members and ministries.

In mid-2020, when the topic of racism rose to the level of daily national attention, we began to listen more intently to our African American FM brothers and sisters, some of whom shared a personal history of frustration, a sense of exclusion or marginalization, and other painful stories. Every year as the African Heritage Network gathers, we experience the full range of our current reality—we meet new people whom the Lord has brought to us, we celebrate the growth that is happening in some places through our godly, competent leaders, and we lament together our failure to achieve as much progress as we long for. Our society is still broken, and we yearn to rise above its divisions and experience deep unity in Christ that overcomes all barriers.

Finally, I'm also grateful for our Strategic Catalyst for Love-Driven Justice, who comes alongside our conferences and networks to advocate for justice and bring a prophetic word with love and grace. We are determined to see our culture change "right down to the roots," where our movement began. I celebrate kingdom progress wherever the Beloved Community exists, where more African American people find a genuine welcome and make their contribution to the life, health, mission, and growth of the body of Christ through the Free Methodist Church.