

The Center for Pastoral Formation

November 12, 2020

The Opportunity: A Faithful Partnership between The Free Methodist Denomination and Greenville University

A startling collaborative opportunity is possible due to a *kairos* moment of organizational renewal under a completely new Board of Bishops in the Free Methodist Church USA and the new leadership of Greenville University, with a generous donor family motivated to fund a high-impact initiative.

The Vision:

The Free Methodist Church USA's process for developing leaders uses the organizing concept of "Head, Heart and Hands," via Outcomes-Based Ordination. This comprehensive approach of teaching timeless, orthodox theology and church history, spiritual disciplines, and the practicalities of church governance and leadership builds on the legacy of John Wesley. *Head* denotes biblical and theological depth and substance. *Heart* stands for a vital spiritual life as the wellspring of godly character and emotional health. *Hands* stands for competence--that is, excellence in the skills necessary to lead the 21st Century Church in its mission of multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.

The Center for Pastoral Formation is designed to serve the Free Methodist denomination in perpetuity. Its location at one of our historic universities will facilitate a renewed connection with the Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions; greater collaboration with all of them is envisioned.

Housed in the University's new Smart Center on the Town Square, the Center will benefit from the Greenville campus and community as the home base for its global reach. Some courses, seminars and other learning experiences will be offered as live, in-person gatherings at the Smart Center, while most courses will be offered in an array of virtual formats, enabled by the Smart Center's world-class technology. John Wesley's words, "The world is my parish" may be fulfilled literally, as learners from across the globe log on to view video lectures and enroll in online courses taught by leading Free Methodist and other Wesleyan scholars and vetted, fruitful pastors and church leaders from across the US and around the world. The Center's community of learners will include persons who are pursuing ordination, seasoned pastors who hunger for continuing education, and others who intend to serve the Lord as laypersons and want to grow in knowledge and effectiveness.

The Director of the Center will constantly seek and evaluate the highest quality educators and educational resources from across the denomination and from among theologically likeminded groups, to offer the required and recommended courses specified in the Outcomes-Based Ordination process. A web-based library of denominationally approved courses generated by various Annual Conferences will serve as a strong beginning for the Center's educational offerings. As the "flexible baseline" required for Free Methodist ordination is communicated broadly, a new unity amid the current diversity of Annual Conference approaches will gradually take shape. Special attention will be paid to theological education anchored in Scripture, ancient understandings, the insights of our Wesleyan and Free Methodist forebears, and an ever-deepening understanding of Christian orthodoxy, coupled with Spirit-filled, sanctified hearts and missionally-focused practice in our diverse and constantly changing world.

The Director of the Center will cast vision across the US, collaborating closely with Annual Conferences as they partner with their local churches to identify, interview, mentor, guide, evaluate and recommend for ordination men and women who sense the call of God to serve the church as ordained elders. Closer to home, the Director will develop relationships among students, faculty, administrators, and the community of Greenville to strengthen denominational ties and to provide deeper Christian and Wesleyan “leavening” to Greenville University and other AFMEI members in an ecumenical spirit for non-FM students.

To protect the relationship between Greenville University and the Free Methodist Church worldwide in perpetuity, the denomination will always have primary direction and oversight. One of the ways to assure this is the portability of endowment funds, in case of need, to preserve Free Methodist interests.

Next Steps of Development:

The FMCUSA Board of Bishops is announcing a search for the position of Director of the Center for Pastoral Formation, with a proposed start date of January 1, 2021. The bishops have final decision-making authority in selecting and overseeing the Director, with assistance for the search from Greenville University. While being employed through Greenville University, this leader will serve in the role previously named “Director of Ministerial Development and Credentialing” of the Free Methodist Church USA. The new Director will be involved in hiring a full-time Administrative Assistant, who will be an employee of FMCUSA.

Partnership agreements have been drawn up to ensure that all parties understand and have entered the venture with a shared understanding of mutual benefits and responsibilities. The initial donors, the Bastian Family*, intend to work with the Board of Bishops and others to expand the circle of those who see the value of investing in this enterprise through the endowment.

After the Center is developed and functioning as designed, Phase 2 is intended to generate and host course offerings to earn higher education credit from Greenville University and/or to incorporate the courses as part of the on-campus Experience Institute curriculum, with each step being subject to the Board of Bishops. Annual evaluations that place founding documents alongside that year’s Center “product” in an audit process conducted by a mission fidelity committee will ensure high-quality implementation of the vision in perpetuity.

*Bishop Donald N. Bastian is Emeritus in the churches of both Canada and the USA. He and his wife have provided a substantial gift to the center, supplemented by additional Bastian family members and other interested parties.