

Northeastern Jurisdiction Episcopacy Committee  
 Episcopal Candidate Information Form 2016



**General Information**

Name	<b>Rebekah Beth Sweet</b>
E-Mail	rebekahsweet@unyumc.org
Conference Memb	Upper New York Annual Conference
Nominated by	Upper New York Annual Conference
Years able to serve	12 years

**Work Experience**

List all appointments	WYOMING CONF.: 1982-86 McClure/North Sanford (82-85 PL; 85-86 FT PM); 1986-87 Willow Glen UMC, San Jose, CA (on loan exchange program; pastor of leadership development); 1987-89 Rome/North Orwell; 1989-92 Sky Lake Program Director; 1992-93 Forest City/Union Dale/East Ararat (interim); 1993-96 Litchfield/Lockwood (50%); 1996-2000 Apalachin/Little Meadows; 2000-05 Norwich: Broad St.; 2005-2010 Honesdale: Central. UPPER NEW YORK: 2010-11 Lake Placid: Adirondack Community Church (interim); 2011-Present: Superintendent, Northern Flow District
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**Personal Development**

Influential Books	<i>Daring Greatly</i> by Brené Brown; <i>Watching Over One Another in Love</i> by Gwen Purushotham; <i>ReCreating the Church</i> by Richard L. Hamm; <i>Unbinding the Gospel</i> by Martha Grace Reese; <i>The Balancing Act</i> by Robert Schnase; <i>RELEASE: Healing from the Wounds of Family, Church, and Community</i> by Flora Slossen Wuellner.
Renewal Study	1992-Two-month renewal; 2013 - One-month renewal leave studying early feminist theology, music, and activism. 2017 Renewal Leave planned.
Racial Diversity Training	2008 Dismantling White Privilege Training; 2011 Cultural Sensitivity Training; 2014 UNY Cabinet Diversity/Cross-Cultural Appointment Training
Language Facility Special Interests	US English and very limited understanding of German and Spanish. Interests: Family life, quilting, music, prison ministry, promotion of inclusivity, worship design and writing liturgy, cooking/baking.
Self-Care	Weekly day-off; Sabbath retreats regularly; family time; quilting; walking; tubing and fishing on the St. Lawrence River; crocheting, enhancing a comfortable home.

**Personal Assessment**

Gifts & Evidence of God's Grace	Passionate & creative worship leadership; commitment to youth and young adult ministries; passion for mission and social justice ministries; Christian hospitality; ministry of order; builds relationships that engender trust and respect; encourages others to use gifts and follow passions in Christian ministry.
Indication of Effectiveness	Pastored growing congregations, refocusing energy toward spiritual nurture, witness, mission & outreach, discipleship development; Churches served paid 100% of Apportionments 25 of 26 years; emphasis on holy living with integrity and transparency; growth in social justice ministries; supervisory responsibilities handled with care, mutual accountability, truth-telling, and maintaining confidentiality.
Area for Further Development	Desire to gain conversational skills in languages other than US-English, continued exposure to other cultures, continued learning about system change/adaptations.
Style of Leadership	Faith-filled; collaborative and consensus -building; equipping and encouraging; engages coaching methods; employs humor, optimism, and vision; strategic thinking; learning leader; risk taker; social justice emphasis; creates safe spaces; prophetic;

**Questions**

**Describe in detail the process which lead you to discern the call to the office bishop.**

It has been such a privilege to serve Christ in pastoral leadership in local churches, camp & retreat ministries, and in the superintendency. Through the promptings of the Holy Spirit and through the voices of trusted and respected lay and clergy disciples, I have been encouraged to consider that God is calling me to the episcopal office of the UMC. This past fall, I spent several days in prayerful discernment considering how God is beckoning me to a new form of obedience and servant leadership in ministry. Not unlike called servants we read about in Scripture, I developed what I thought were viable lists of reasons for God to retract that calling. Each time I endeavored to submit such a list, the Holy Spirit reminded me that in our humanness, no one is ever completely ready and fully equipped to

assume the role of bishop. With willingness to follow this call, God offers continual growth and learning, so that one who appears quite ordinary may be utilized in extraordinary, prophetic, ministries of leadership and witness. I tried to remind God that I do not fit the mold of bishops past. The Spirit spoke clearly: "I am leading you and the church in a new direction. I need your adventuresome and courageous spirit to inspire the church to follow me and to lead in changing the world." I then put my lists aside. I am willing to be an instrument in God's plan for Christ's church and the United Methodist denomination in the office of bishop.

**The Role of the Bishop in The United Methodist Church is delineated in ¶ 403 of The Book of Discipline. Please share how you are called and equipped to fulfill the responsibilities. Please elaborate on ¶ 403.1 and a-f.**

While the delineation of the role of the bishop found in ¶403 is applicable through the ages, we are in a time that demands a new form of leadership from our bishops. I feel called to collaborating in the reshaping of the vision of the UMC in order to re-claim our Wesleyan heritage of offering faith which is relevant and gives hope to all persons. I continue to grow into that calling. It is imperative that our episcopal leaders show their passion for serving Christ in today's world and model and encourage the practice of spiritual disciplines. I believe bishops must engage in risk-taking and prophetic preaching, teaching, and living. Life-long learning, strategic development of conferences which equip local churches and leaders for ministry, and as often as is appropriate, granting permission for radical ministries of love, compassion, justice and mercy is essential. Our bishops must also live into grace-filled leadership which encourages every "saint-in-training" to develop their full created potential.

**How would you as a new bishop collaborate with your colleagues on the College of Bishops to be spiritual and missional leaders for the whole jurisdiction so that NEJ better fulfills the mission and ministry of Christ Jesus?**

I firmly believe that ministering together offers the most effective witness for Christ in the world.

Encouraging the College of Bishops to continue to develop strong bonds of care for one another, and for each episcopal area will build relationships that will equip the College for times of celebration and times of deep challenge. Commitment to ecumenical and inter-faith partnerships is also essential to enhance this witness.

Intentional collaboration may take the form of leaders from different conferences learning together about cultures, justice issues, socio-economic challenges, environmental concerns, etc... and how to be proactive in guiding the church to lead efforts to make positive changes. Uniting together in treating addictions, offering ministries of healing, reconciliation, restoration, and building bridges of care will glorify God. And I pray that we will continue to work together in the mission field locally and globally building strong bonds within and outside of the church as we offer Christ and nurture disciples.

**How would you as a new bishop share the good news of Christ Jesus inviting, engaging, connecting with persons in your assigned area who are not currently active in a faith community so that you might become a leader and model for making disciples?**

I have witnessed the powerful impact that healthy disciples of Jesus Christ can have in ever-expanding circles of Christian care. Every individual has the ability to affect an organization, community, and system for good or for ill. Too many of our relationships, inside and outside of the church, have been tainted by the need to control others, shame, protect turf, extend generational pain, etc. Giving individuals the tools to live as reconciled and free disciples of a saving Christ, can spread the warmth of the love of Christ to permeate families, churches, communities, and connectional systems and organizations. Engaging in meaningful and respectful conversations which endeavor to uplift purposeful action, builds relationships, commitment to a common course of action, passion for ministry, and that united witness that we long for.

**Describe how you would equip the United Methodists of your area for ministry and evangelism in our culture context?**

Relationships are at the heart of Christian witness and service. Powerful, positive relationships are often fostered when those involved see in one another an authentic faith, genuine care, the desire to grow together, and persistence in seeking the very best for each person and group. This is too often counter-cultural. In my experience trust is too often betrayed, broken relationships are not intentionally nurtured toward restoration, and too many become cynical and skeptical. It is all too common for folks to stand back and place blame on others for hardships, violence, lack of faith, and all forms of harm. The power of our faith in Christ gives us the courage and compassion with which we may stand for justice, and to take responsibility for creating an environment which brings the best out of each one. Therefore, I would hope to equip each local church to be a laboratory for learning how to put faith into our words and actions in relevant and life-enhancing ways.