



# Fraser Venter

Bishop Nominee Interview

 [Watch the full interview](#)

In one of General Conference 2019's most memorable moments, retiring Bishop Matthew Thomas asked then-Pastor Kenny Martin to lead the gathering in prayer. Martin unexpectedly brought Fraser Venter forward and prayed over Venter as a representative of "the generation who will pick up the mantle."

At General Conference 2023, Martin became a bishop. Now Martin is approaching retirement, and Venter is the Free Methodist Church USA's strategic catalyst for love-driven justice and one of three nominees for the March 17 election determining Martin's successor.

"It's been my pleasure and privilege to serve with [Martin] and to be an armor-bearer with him in many ways," Venter said on "The Light + Life Podcast" in an interview with FMCUSA Communications Director Brett Heintzman, who asked Venter what excites him about the thought of being elected bishop.

Rather than excitement about the title of bishop, Venter said he is more excited about "Jesus and His church. Those two things really excite me about what God's doing in this next season. ... I may never be remembered, but if I can get people excited about making Jesus more famous, that will be a good day for me."

## Challenges

Venter said one of the denomination's top challenges is "how to lead incarnationally while holding our values in the communities we serve."

He said the Holy Spirit still has the ability to save, heal, restore and deliver, and Free Methodists "can engage with culture without compromising our values." He would lead in addressing this challenge by partnering with God to impact the world by working "with others,

and to strategically remove the things that are hindering us from doing that." He also would "help our people feel encouraged and more courageous" as we go "to the people we're called to serve and love."

He also would like to see Free Methodists be joyful people who celebrate and honor more.

"My hope is that we would give more space to the testimony of what God is doing and can do," Venter said. "We give a lot of airtime to what God is not doing and what's happening all around us rather than really testifying to the big and the small of what our God is doing, and can do, and will always do."

When asked about personal leadership challenges, Venter said, "One thing about leadership that I've learned is that it's both private and public in its endeavor, and God uses both to show you lovingly, in discipleship and in discipline, your limits." God has done that through "my share of personal challenges revealing my limits and leading me to people that I've led and let down, or where I've let myself down."

## Movement

Heintzman asked Venter how he could lead along with the other bishops to increase the denomination's fruitfulness in becoming "a Spirit-fueled movement that catalyzes the multiplication of disciples, leaders, and churches," and added, "What must our pastors and leaders do to move their churches forward as a holy movement?"

"Prayer has to be our guide. I've always said that I believe God only counts prayer attendance. I'm not sure He's so concerned whether there's a thousand people or five people in your congregation if they're not a people that

are prayerful,” Venter said. “We can’t be a Spirit-fueled movement without the Spirit of God.”

Venter also said Free Methodists should “work hard in partnership with God” so that our communities “would be distraught if our doors were not open.” He added that we must tell both lay member and pastors that we believe in them, and “not stop trying to multiply and be fruitful, even if it takes risks and we make mistakes.”

## A Season of Change

Heintzman noted that the denomination is in a season of conference realignment and structural changes, and he asked about Venter’s familiarity with the changes and how his leadership would help goals be met by 2029.

Venter said he has participated in many of the conversations and prayer times about realignment and change, and he would help with bridge building. While working with many conference leaders and pastors, he has recognized “the uniqueness of their culture and vision.” He noted that “there’s an honoring of the work that God has done before, and is doing now, and will do in the future, and bridge building helps that.”

To serve and reach people, Venter said, “this is a process worth doing, not just for us, but for the ‘now generation’ and for my grandsons, so that they too can experience a Spirit-fueled movement in the Free Methodist Church.”

## The Church’s Future

On the horizon for the FMCUSA, Venter said he sees “that we could be excited again about who we are collectively, and not just our individual missions and spaces. ... I’m excited to be part of our tribe and involved in what we do globally.”

He would like the FMCUSA to hear more from global Free Methodists, because “they have learned what it means to suffer through so many things. ... We need to be listening to their voice.”

While he expects an increase in the number of churches, he predicted “they’ll be more creative in practice. I really believe we’ll see more marketplace ministries” that “are reaching people where they are.”

Free Methodism’s next season will include a generation “emerging in our spaces, both to challenge and inspire us to be greater. In Christ, I say, let them loose. Let’s see what God will do with these young people,” Venter said.

“As a biracial person, I’m holding on to the hope and courage that we will see more of our BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] leaders in positions of voices and influence,” said Venter who also would like the denomination’s “incredible and courageous and tenacious” women in ministry “to have greater voice in our system.”

He acknowledged difficulties in the United States but noted, “This is not the first time the church has faced these kinds of things. ... As long as we keep our eyes on Jesus — the hope in Christ in front of us — we will recognize that this plan He has imagined for the bride will still be able to resist and resolve and reconcile despite what’s happening around us.”

## Prophetic Moments

When asked about God-given visions, dreams or words, Venter said that things God “said to me decades ago, I’m now starting to see come into fruition, and it’s the goodness of God that He didn’t give me all of that [earlier] because I wouldn’t have been able to steward it.”

He and his wife, Jo Anne, sensed a “really clear no” to him previously being considered as a nominee for past bishop elections, but he said they recently “felt a yes” to allow his “name in the hat and to go through the process. ... We knew that there was something God wanted to grow in both Jo Anne and I in this, and we felt like it was a call to obedience.”

He said he has experienced “a few prophetic moments in this journey that have been really powerful to me.” While traveling this year to several conferences, “it shifted from me coming to do a workshop to falling in

love with our family.” Despite a longtime love for the church and ministry colleagues, “there was something that God did in my heart” to feel “that mantle of love for our entire denomination.”

One day in prayer, Venter said, God showed him a chessboard with the bishop pieces on each side of the king and the queen. “The queen then kind of represents the bride of Christ, and the king, of course, represents Jesus, and I felt like the role of the bishop is to stand beside these two.” He heard the Lord telling him that whatever role he has, “I want you to always tell people to look to the King.”

### Prayer

Venter said he has been praying from John 15, “Let us learn how to love better and love one another.” From John 17, he has been praying for the “the unity of the people of God.” From Ephesians 3, “I just pray over the Free Methodist Church all the time: Let Him help us accomplish the more, but let us be quick to give Him the glory over and over again.”

The podcast concluded with Venter praying and asking, “Father, would you open up our minds to new ways to be unified in vision, mission, resource, and the joy of the kingdom?”+