



# Mike Chong Perkinson

Bishop Nominee Interview

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When Mike Chong Perkinson joined the Free Methodist Church USA a dozen years ago after decades of ministry outside the denomination, something seemed different. In other church settings, he would meet highly gifted leaders but then become disappointed as he got to know them better.

“One of the things as an outsider coming in that I’ve noticed in Free Methodists is there really is a genuine heart of humility. You just meet some really good, down-to-earth people,” said Perkinson, the superintendent of the Pacific Coast Japanese Conference, on “The Light + Life Podcast” in an interview with FMCUSA Communications Director Brett Heintzman. “My experience has largely been the more I get to know people, Jesus is pretty rich in their lives, and so with that, I just think God has placed on us a unique mantle.”

Perkinson is one of three nominees for the March 17 election to succeed retiring Bishop Kenny Martin.

When asked what excites him about the thought of being elected bishop, Perkinson noted “the possibilities that lie before us and the opportunity to serve God in the Free Methodist family. It’s a privilege to be nominated and to work alongside our current bishops and leaders to help lead us into our God-given destiny. I think we’re primed for this beautiful season” of living “into the fullness that the Father has for us. I’m thrilled for the potential that we have currently as a Free Methodist family.”

## Challenges

When asked about the denomination’s greatest challenge, Perkinson said the Free Methodist Church “began with such active faith” demonstrated by the planting of “seven conferences in our first 22 years ... on horseback, and

then we built up to about 1,100-plus churches in our first 60 years,” but now that number in the United States is “850, and so something’s going backward for us.”

The denomination is “in need of getting our birth rate back up” with “people coming to Christ, being discipled, people being baptized, church plants, new ministries, new possibilities, new expressions of our values, new conferences, and anything the Father would call us to as His people,” Perkinson said. “I’m excited for all of those things, and I think we’re primed and ready.”

While Free Methodists live in challenging times, Perkinson quoted the saying “stars shine the brightest when it’s dark” and added, “In many ways, our current reality is incredibly similar to the time that Jesus came.”

Ultimately, “our greatest challenge is finding and returning to our identity as Free Methodist people that live out the values of the Free Methodist Way and follow the mission that was declared by Jesus: to love God with all that we are, to love others as we love ourselves and as we live life, to be fruitful, to make disciples, to spread His love everywhere, and to bring His healing grace.”

When asked about leading through a personal leadership challenge, Perkinson shared about planting a church in Newport Beach, California, at age 27. The church plant launched 11 house churches in its first year, but 10 of them closed in the second year because church leaders “didn’t think through the development process.”

“We sat down, went back to the drawing board, consulted the Bible,” said Perkinson who added that they then “came up with a three-year process that had three phases,” which brought new believers. The church had “a two-year process of engaging people into bands and classes” along with “roundtable discussion and

then a school.” Other house churches and church plants ultimately resulted.

“What do you do when you fail?” Perkinson asked. “Because you will, and there’s no such thing as true failure in the kingdom unless you stop. We all learn from it.”

## Movement

Heintzman asked Perkinson 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?”

“I think to become a movement, we’ve got to be a moved people,” Perkinson replied. “There’s got to be something in our own hearts that begin to be moved.”

He would also invest in leaders as Jesus Christ did as a rabbi, and he said leaders need to see a person’s God-given identity and potential.

“Paul poignantly says in Galatians 4:19, ‘I’m in birth pangs till Christ is formed in you,’” he said. “We all have the same Jesus, but we have unique incarnations of Jesus, unique anointings, sovereign wiring, ways that He has gifted us. ... Disciples aren’t mass-produced. They’re handcrafted.”

Perkinson said that people reproduce who they are, and healthy leaders are self-aware rather than self-absorbed. “The question is: Are you making disciples of Jesus and the kingdom, or are they just picking up maybe some unhealthy tendencies that come from you?”

## Change and Gifting

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

Perkinson said he’s “very familiar with the process” and “oddly gifted” as a “catalytic-apostolic-with-the-prophetic-bent leader” with “the capacity to come in and bring understanding and awareness, wholeness, unity, bringing communities together, helping leaders come together.”

He added that he would come alongside other bishops and leaders to help bring clarity as fears and concerns are spoken together.

## The Church’s Future

Perkinson said he believes God has called the FMCUSA “back to who we were as a disciple-making, community-building, community-healing family of saints that brings His healing and saving love to the world.” He added that the denomination’s “unique bent is precisely the prophetic word and the heart that our world is listening for.”

He is encouraged about the denomination’s future “not because we’re extra special, but because we’re on our knees. We’re desperate for the Father. We’re longing to just be a people that are faithful, to live into our value set of the Free Methodist Way and follow the mission of Jesus, so I think the sky is the limit.”

He described the FMCUSA as being given “a first right of refusal. God’s going to get this done.” If Free Methodists don’t do our part, “God will raise up another, but I’d rather be the people that if You’re calling us, let’s step into this, and see what God might do.”

## A Dream for Disciples

Heintzman asked Perkinson, “Has God given you any visions, dreams, or words regarding both your call to say yes to being considered as a nominee and/or for the church in general, and if so, what are they, and how are you interpreting them?”

While starting another ministry in 2003, Perkinson and a colleague were given a dream, which they wrote down. Perkinson said the FMCUSA is positioned to live out that dream at the invitation of the Holy Spirit.

The dream included seeing “moms and dads shepherd their homes; where sons and daughters are developed as disciples through the lives of their moms and dads; where leaders, pastors, and missionaries are raised up and sent out from the homes.”

The dream also had each local church becoming “a fruitful, committed community of disciples who love God, love others, and [make] more disciples everywhere they went — where every pastoral leader knew who they were in Christ, knew what they were called to do for Him, had the skills to pull it off, and the character to maintain their integrity through it all.”

## Prayer

When asked how he is praying for the Free Methodist Church, Perkinson said he is praying “that God gives our leaders revelational clarity. I pray that God gives us a Holy Spirit boldness, that we’re not afraid, that there’s this understanding and clarity of who we are and what we’ve been called to, that we come together around the Free Methodist Way, and that we set aside suspicions and distrust, and, where there’s been hurt, that we figure out how to resolve it and move forward as a community of sons and daughters.”

The podcast concluded with Perkinson praying “that the things that You have placed in us as a Free Methodist people would be translated into our lives in such a way that the world would see Jesus shining brightly through our lives, and that we would proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness and to His marvelous light, and that we would bring Your healing and loving justice.”+