



Fraser Venter

Nominee for Bishop

Hi, my name is Fraser Venter and I serve the Free Methodist Church as a Strategic Catalyst for Love-Driven Justice. My heart for this role is to encourage the FM church, our conferences and leaders nationally and globally to understand and reflect God's heart for justice. I am excited about praising our efforts and motivating future actions, and, of course, helping guide those who may be leaning into spaces they shouldn't be. Previously, I was also a Co-Superintendent in Southern California, and I have served both as a lay person and pastor in diverse and multilingual, multicultural congregations of all kinds of different sizes.

I was asked to talk about my calling, and I feel like I've reached a point where my calling feels more lived than sought. It used to be what needed to be accomplished to prove that I had a calling. But now it's more about the who rather than the what and the how to who I serve and how I obey and how to love graciously doing justice and remaining obedient.

I grew up in a biracial home in Ontario, Canada. So, if you hear an "eh" every once in a while, that's why. I also spent a short time in Providence, Rhode Island. But then we moved to California, Southern California, when I was a teenager. And, you know, our family experienced both privilege and poverty, and we experienced all the tensions of being a biracial, multicultural family. But, of course, you know, all through all those challenges that were very formative, the most transformative event for us was when we all came to Christ. And it was kind of a domino experience. And I'm so grateful that that happened for us.

Of course, I married Jo Anne 33 years ago, claiming that I married up, and it's still a truth I hold to today. We are the proud parents of four grown children, two by birth, two by love. And then, of course, I recently became a grandfather to my amazing grandsons, Gabriel and Emmanuel. And they fill my heart with joy. They empty my wallet with expenses. And they give me this renewed purpose to live out a Christlike legacy, not only for Jesus' sake, but also for their sake and the next generation.

My schooling? I earned a degree at SDSU in Psychological Research and Management, and I came from a family of pioneers and business type people. And so I was going to initially pursue a career in business, which I did coming out of college. And then I was going to enter into graduate school, to pursue a law and psychological program, graduate degree.

And all of my life, I saw my parents model care for the marginalized and generosity and speaking for the voiceless. And so my mind had led me to think that a law degree would be

my best vocation and my best way to give back and to help, which, of course, explains my love for justice.

However, God's plan changed my path to a pastoral ministry. I jumped out of the marketplace into pastoring, and then earned my master's and doctorate degree from Azusa Pacific Seminary. And then I recently completed a master's of Justice and Advocacy from Fuller Seminary. I'm also a certified facilitator and trainer in various things such as cultural intelligence. And then I do some leadership coaching, and I serve on various justice boards, including our Free Methodist Charitable Gift Fund.

What eyes? You know: What fresh eyes do I have for the FMC? Well, over the years I've observed and worked for various iterations of our Board of Bishops, both as a superintendent and of course, in my current role. And I think this has given me a unique perspective on our family, both nationally and globally, from the inside out and outside in. You know, I've been able to interact with many in our denomination, and I've seen their longings and losses and successes and joys and sadness in many of our different regional contexts. And they are different, beloved, and need to be acknowledged and honored.

And so it's a great time for us as a church to re-envision God's plan for us. I believe the Free Methodist Way helps us do that. It unifies and sparks new hope and fruitfulness. I may be a little biased on that, but I really believe that it's working.

I think the idea of the new conference networks can expand our ministry ideas, influence our resources, help us have shared vision and connectivity.

And then I would also add that understanding our global partnership in this next season will help us in so many ways. The Free Methodist Church around the world has so much to teach us here in the United States, and I'm really grateful for that continued partnership.

I think we need to remember, friends, that as Free Methodists we do the best work when we're addressing our culture and we're addressing the culture's longings and losses. We are a holy people who steward piety and prophetic presence in our communities, showing zeal for loving people in the kingdom instead of ignoring them.

And as resident aliens, as Scripture calls us, we thrive in being holy and different, and the world is looking for holy and different. I really believe that.

What if it's at this moment, you know, the Free Methodist Church, we shifted our witness and our voice from what we are against to who and what we are for, from selectivism and opinions, to actual presence and gospel witness and listening and empathy? Our name, Free Methodist, reflects our commitment to the freedom of all people to uplift the marginalized, even the marginalized voices within our own church who are eager to serve and lead with excellence. We need to listen and learn and make ways for these exceptional leaders in the now and next generation, our BIPOC and female leaders, to see them now infuse their voice into our church boards and conferences. Their voice will make us better.

We live in anxious times. It's causing a lot of polarization, distrust and fear. Fear is probably the main spiritual attack I would see. And I think what happens with fear when we let it go wild; it leads to the dehumanization and the othering of the Imago Dei. But Christ and God's church are the answer, aren't they, beloved? A Witness of perfect love that casts out fear and reconciles all to Him.

I believe we're entering a new season where our Free Methodist identity in Christ symbolizes the freedoms communities seek. The unity that people are seeking, the peace and hope that people need in Christ.

Our emphasis on holiness is a key distinction welcoming and challenging, purifying and loving, but embracing and being a part of the people we are called to serve and love. Howard Thurman once wrote, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and do it." So, may we be eager to engage in that again, in discipleship, and multiplication, evangelism, and acts of justice and compassion and prophetic presence and inspired witness. That's our uniqueness, beloved, and I believe it wins hearts for Christ. It brings shalom to communities. It witnesses to biblical justice, compassion, and salvation in the right way. And it is the fulfillment of what God desires, both now and not yet.

Finally, I've been asked what scriptures guide my life and journey, and maybe even for our church. My life verse is Philippians 2:3. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. "But you know, consider yourself less than for the sake of others. And I really believe that. I believe that humility sets us free from our love of ourselves, our pride, our fear, our own greed and arrogance. And it turns us into agents of reconciliation and hope and healing. And to demonstrate that what God can do in brokenness and through love.

I would pray for our church often. Ephesians 3, where it's a powerful prayer where Paul says, you know, I pray that we can even comprehend what God has given us and His love to know it that surpasses all things that we could even imagine or think. Now to Him who is at power at work with us, would He continue to accomplish abundantly far more than we can all ask for or imagine.

And I have to believe that's true for us as Free Methodists. Let's believe in the God who has a great imagination to bring glory into the church forever and ever. I believe this is the kind of love that will triumph over my need to be right. Or as Thomas Aquinas says, "Lord, in my zeal for love, the love of truth, let me not forget the truth about love."

Finally, I would just say this as Henri Nouwen reminds me often: Are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence, to listen to God's voice, and to look at God's beauty, to touch God's incarnate Word, and to taste God's infinite goodness fully?

That would be my hope, my vision and dream for our local churches, conferences, and denomination and in doing so, continue to bring wholeness to the world by loving God, loving people, and multiplying followers of Jesus.

I'm encouraged, and I pray that you be encouraged that this is a season for the FMC to do great work and that God has places and for us, such a time as this, to see the reconciliation of Christ bring peace and hope and restoration. And I believe that for us in this season as Free Methodists.

Amen.