



Bishop Leonard Fairley

South Carolina UMC

Bishop Leonard Fairley has served as resident bishop of the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church since September 1, 2024. He previously served eight years as resident bishop of the Kentucky Conference.

During a tumultuous time for the denomination, Bishop Fairley remained a calm, prayerful leader, exhorting United Methodists in Kentucky to serve as the hands and feet of Jesus and to make passionate spiritual disciples for the transformation of the world.



Bishop Fairley is a native of North Carolina and served as a local church pastor and district superintendent for 32 years in that conference before being elected to the episcopacy. He is a graduate of Pfeiffer College and Duke University's School of Divinity. Bishop Fairley loves to write and has published a book of poetry, "Who Shall Hear My Voice."

He was married to Priscilla Ann Russell until her death in 2013. In January 2018, God answered a prayer for new love, and in September of that year, Bishop Fairley married Dawn Sparks. Dawn had lost her soulmate, Rev. David Sparks, in 2015. Between them, Bishop Fairley and Dawn have four adult children and 11 grandchildren.

Bishop Fairley was also the interim bishop for the North Carolina Conference (Raleigh Episcopal Area) from Sept. 1, 2021, to Jan. 1, 2023. During that time, he continued to serve the Kentucky and Red Bird Missionary (now Central Appalachian Missionary) conferences. In addition to his degrees from Pfeiffer College and Duke Divinity School, he has been awarded honorary doctoral degrees from Union College in Kentucky, and Kentucky Wesleyan College.

Before his election as bishop, he had served the North Carolina Conference since 1984. His last appointment was serving as superintendent of the Capital District, the conference's largest district. He served at St. Peter UMC in Hamlet and Soapstone UMC in Raleigh before becoming the Rockingham District superintendent. He served in that role for seven years before returning to the local church in 2012 as lead pastor at Saint Francis UMC in Cary.

Bishop Fairley served on numerous boards and agencies in the North Carolina Conference, including as Conference Vitalization Consultant, chair of Congregational Development, vice chair of both the Conference Council on Finance & Administration and Conference Board of Church and Society, the North Carolina Conference Transition Team, the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, the North Carolina Conference Episcopacy Committee, and as a General and Jurisdictional Conference delegate.

He has participated on mission work teams in Costa Rica, Jamaica, Montserrat, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Honduras and Serbia, and with the Appalachia Service Project.