

## **Blessings in the name of Jesus Christ,**

My name is Gary Allshouse, and I recently began serving on the Executive Committee of the National Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors (NFAMLPA) as the Associate Member representative. This appointment came as a surprise to me, especially since I was unaware that a national fellowship even existed until nine months ago. As Local Pastors and Associate Members, we should know that the *Book of Discipline* provides for local fellowships within each Annual Conference—or at least that is the intent. The national fellowship exists to offer support for annual conference's FLPAM, educational opportunities and to serve as a unified voice to General Conference on matters that directly affect Local Pastors and Associate Members.

The value of the national fellowship's educational opportunities became clear to me at our gathering last September at Jumonville. I attended a seminar focused on bi-vocational ministry. Since entering ministry in 2018, I have served full-time in one-point charges and had limited awareness of the distinct challenges bi-vocational pastors face. I heard stories of congregations whose expectations exceed what a part-time pastor can realistically provide, as well as accounts of pastors feeling tension between local church needs and conference requirements.

The conference broadened my perspective and challenged me to consider how I can offer support proactively rather than waiting to be asked. Our discussions also revealed that Annual Conferences often interpret the *Book of Discipline* differently regarding part-time pastors, particularly in areas such as vacation and sabbatical leave. In some cases, this results in local pastors receiving less time for rest and spiritual renewal than they truly need.

Additional concerns were raised about district meetings and worship gatherings frequently being scheduled during the hours when bi-vocational pastors are engaged in secular employment, which can unintentionally contribute to isolation. Furthermore, bi-vocational pastors must often use vacation time from their secular jobs in order to attend Annual Conference, as required. These realities create both practical and emotional strain.

I left the national fellowship meeting with a renewed commitment to pray more intentionally for Local Pastors and Associate Members and to advocate for them at district and conference gatherings. It is my hope that, together, we can strengthen our support for those faithfully serving in these vital roles within the life of the Church.

Blessings,

Rev. Gary Allshouse