November 2, 2026

Dear Colleagues in the Fellowship,

If you're like me, this is a hectic yet joyful time of year. Nomination committees and charge conferences, budgets and pledge campaigns, and oh, yeah Advent and Christmas to plan for too! You can get so busy you almost forget to introduce yourself to new people. Hi, I'm Mark Smith, a pastor who for some reason loves to volunteer for things and then sometimes forgets that I did so.

At the invitation of our colleague Marikay Green, I volunteered to write a letter for the newsletter as one of the new members of the NFAMLP executive committee. At this year's National Gathering I was honored to be elected the Local Pastor representative. I look forward to serving with the team on behalf of all the hard working, faithful clergy who happen to be Licensed Local Pastors or Associate Members.

A little about myself. Since 2015 I have been serving as a Licensed Local Pastor in the California Nevada Annual Conference. I currently serve as the pastor at Wesley UMC in Fresno. Most of the time I love being a pastor. Sometimes I don't. But I'm always a pastor because it's the call on my life, and I don't believe I had a choice in that matter.

What I've learned over the years is that I could not possibly do this alone. My wife and family support me through the ups and downs of ministries. They've been along the journey for moves (yes, some local pastors do itinerate), for more funerals than we can count, and for all the unimaginable things that we encounter as pastors. I also have learned to rely on trusted clergy colleagues both within and outside of the UMC. This is part of why I said yes to serving on the National Fellowship's executive committee - because the Fellowship is a place for us clergy who don't quite fit nicely into the standard categories and can relate to and support one another.

I'm hoping to get to know more of you along the way, and to get some more of my West Coast colleagues to come and join the fellowship too. We have the privilege to serve an amazing God, and share the amazing good news of God's grace. That work is more rewarding, meaningful, and powerful when we are able to work together.

I look forward to working with you as part of the Fellowship. May God bless you and the ministries you serve.

With grace,

Mark Smith