

Bishop Laura Merrill

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Rev. Laura Merrill was elected as a bishop by the South Central Jurisdiction on November 2, 2022.

Early Life

Bishop Merrill was born in San Antonio, Texas. Her father, Rev. J. Charles Merrill, and maternal grandfather were both Methodist pastors, and she grew up deeply affirmed by the local churches they served. As a young adult, she was selected for the 3-year Mission Intern Program (MIP) of the General Board of Global Ministries. She served at the Centro Ecuménico de Misión Urbana-Rural de la Iglesia, in Concepción, Chile, during the final days of the Pinochet dictatorship. Her U.S. assignment was with the Desert Southwest Conference Border Ministry in Tucson, Arizona, where she continued as a National Division missionary following the MIP.

Education and Ordination

Bishop Merrill earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1984 from Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. Following her time in Chile and Tucson, she attended Candler School of Theology at Emory University and in 1995 earned the Master of Divinity degree. She was ordained deacon in 1996 and elder in 1999 by Bishop Ray Owen in the Southwest Texas Conference.

Ordained Ministry

Merrill's local church appointments in the Southwest Texas Conference began in 1997 and included five years as associate at First UMC Victoria, two years at Los Fresnos UMC, and six years as senior pastor of Wimberley UMC. During this time, she grew in her love of the liturgical life of the congregation.

Superintendency

In 2010, Merrill was appointed to the Cabinet and assigned as superintendent of the McAllen District, along the Texas-Mexico border. She worked to build relationships between churches and clergy in her district and those of the Rio Grande Conference (RGC), which shared many of the same communities. She served a brief time as superintendent of the Southern District of the RGC and was instrumental in the 2015

unification of the two conferences, resulting in the new Rio Texas Conference. In 2016, Merrill was appointed to the position of Executive Director of the Mission Vitality Center for Rio Texas, following the election of Ruben Saenz to the episcopacy. Ten months later, Bishop Robert Schnase appointed her as Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Clergy Excellence. Finally, in July 2021, Merrill was once again appointed as district superintendent, this time of the Capital District, in Austin.

Episcopacy

At the November 2022 South Central Jurisdictional Conference, Merrill was elected to the episcopacy on the first ballot, along with Dee Williamston and David Wilson. The vote was historic, electing the first Black woman bishop in the SCJ, two women for the first time in the SCJ, and a Native American for the first time in the denomination. Bishop Merrill was assigned to serve the Arkansas Conference, beginning January 1, 2023.

Connection

Before her election, Bishop Merrill served two quadrennia on the committees that developed and implemented the National Plan for Hispanic Ministry. She also served as a member of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, and the Commission on General Conference. She served as a jurisdictional reserve delegate in 2008 and as first-elected clergy delegate to General Conference in 2012, 2016, and 2020.

Family

Bishop Merrill is mother to Joe Sisto, a graduate student at Boston University, and Caroline Sisto, an undergraduate at Texas State University. Merrill enjoys the theater, live music, travel, thrift shops, time with her kids, and walks with her curious dog.

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Social Media

- Facebook – [Bishop Laura Merrill](#)
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