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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**The Bishop Thomas M. Berlin Named Class of 2023 Commencement Speaker**

Washington, DC —Two of the newest bishops of The United Methodist Church will highlight the 141st Commencement Service at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC., named for the founder of Methodism. Bishop Thomas M. Berlin, episcopal leader of The Florida Conference and Wesley's former Board of Governors chair, will deliver the Commencement Address, and Bishop Robin Dease, episcopal leader of the North Georgia Conference, will receive the 2023 John Wesley Society Alumni Award as a 1998 Master of Divinity and 2010 Doctor of Ministry graduate. Berlin and Dease were both elected by the Southeastern Jurisdiction in November 2022.

President David McAllister-Wilson said, "These two bishops represent the best of Wesley. Tom Berlin was and is my partner in shaping Wesley as a church-based seminary, and Robin Dease is remembered here as an exemplary student and community leader. Together, they will be architects of the future of The United Methodist Church." The Commencement Service will be at the Washington National Cathedral Monday, May 8, at 2 pm to honor the 140 members of the Class of 2023 with their families, the Board of Governors, alums, faculty, staff, and friends.

Bishop Berlin grew up at Braddock Street United Methodist Church in Winchester, Virginia. He attended Virginia Polytechnic and State University, earning a Bachelor of Arts in public administration. After graduation, he earned his Master of Divinity degree from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta and entered ordained ministry in Virginia in 1988. He subsequently was appointed pastor of the Brucetown-Welltown Charge in Frederick County, followed by an appointment as Toms Brook United Methodist Church pastor in the Shenandoah Valley. Since 1997, he has served as lead pastor of Floris United Methodist Church in suburban Washington, DC, until his election to the episcopacy.

Bishop Dease grew up in Brooklyn, New York. She joined the South Carolina Conference in 1992 and was ordained an elder in 2001. She was appointed Wesley United Methodist Church pastor in Johns Island, John Wesley United Methodist Church in Greenville, and then St. Andrew By-The-Sea United Methodist Church in Hilton Head. She also has served as superintendent of the Hartsville District and, in 2012, was interim chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Claflin. Her appointment as senior pastor at St. Andrew By-The-Sea made her the first African American woman to serve as lead pastor of a historically white United Methodist church in South Carolina until her election to the episcopacy.

**About Wesley Theological Seminary**

Founded in 1882, [Wesley Theological Seminary](https://www.wesleyseminary.edu) is seated in the nation's capital and centered in the Christian faith; it annually prepares more than 1,000 students representing more than 30 denominations to become exemplary teachers, preachers, and leaders in the world today. Wesley graduates are in ministry in all 50 states and 20 countries as leaders of churches and service organizations. The mission of Wesley Theological Seminary is to prepare Christians for leadership in the church and the world, to advance theological scholarship, and to model a prophetic voice in the public square.

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