

Do No Harm, Do Good, and Stay in Love with God

How Wesley's General Rules Guide the OK Annual Conference in these Troubling Times

Session 2

Wesleys Take the Web: A mobile friendly history of the UMC (3.27 minutes)

At the end of "Wesleys Take the Web" pause the video for discussion and start it again when ready

Discussion:

1. This video is a very quick and light-hearted scan of United Methodism. Go around the group and invite people to share something they learned or were reminded of about the "people called Methodist".
2. What brings you joy or concern about our denomination today?
3. In times of sharp division in our local and global church; how can we "do no harm" while still respecting our differences?

Division of the People Called Methodists

In our beginning, the "people called Methodist" were a fringe group of the Church of England or Anglican Church. The Methodists challenged the Church of England to more faithfully care for "the least of these" and to be more deliberate in personal holiness. And so, over time, the separation between the Methodists and the Church of England became inevitable. John Wesley and other leaders of the Methodists determined that the colonies that became the newly created United States of America had a shortage of Methodist ministers. Despite many efforts by Wesley asking the Anglican leadership to support the Methodist movement and ordain and send ministers to our country; they refused. Because he felt so compelled to share the Gospel here; with deep regret but determination, Wesley bypassed the authority of the Anglican bishops and ordained ministers to dispense the sacraments and lead the people called Methodist in this land. Until his death in 1791, John Wesley continued to encourage the Methodists to maintain a connection with the Church of England.

But the rift between the "Methodists" and the "Anglicans" only widened as the years passed. The issue regarding the dispensation of the sacraments continued to be a bone of contention between them (and even among the Methodists themselves). Some Methodists wanted to submit to the Church of England with regard to the sacraments, while others advocated for total separation. This issue was repeatedly addressed and not finally settled until 1795 after John Wesley's death.

Those were certainly difficult times but the world did not end, and God used and continues to use the descendants of the Church of England including "the people called Methodists" to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!

The Methodists grew and spread, and many familiar denominations exist today because of separations from their Methodist roots.

Some of the denominations that have roots in the Methodist movement are:

- The Salvation Army
- The Free Methodist Church
- The Church of the Nazarene
- The Assemblies of God
- The African Methodist Episcopal Church and African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion
- The Wesleyan Church
- The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

... and the reasons for their separations from the Methodists included different interpretations of scripture regarding “holiness” such as whether Christians should play cards, dance, watch movies, speak in tongues, purchase family pews, when and how to baptize, and whether both women and men could be ordained ministers.

At the time of the Civil War, most denominations in the United States including the Methodist Episcopal Church split in great part because of differences of opinion about slavery and segregation. The Methodist Episcopal Church North and South and did not reunite until 1939, just 83 years ago!

At each juncture, there were times of conflict and stress. Arguments over who was right and who was not raged, and in some cases brought death and destruction. In none of these times in our history did the world end or the message of God in Jesus Christ cease to be shared. In fact, Christianity grew. Despite our human disagreements God continues to grow the kingdom.

But there are not only separations. There are times of joining together as well.

This was the case in 1968 which was a volatile time in the United States and many other parts of the world. Even so, in that year the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church to form the United Methodist Church.

Was everyone pleased with the decision to unite the two denominations? No. Change is difficult. There were growing pains to be sure. And as this new denomination began, so did *new* challenges arise.

In **Session 3** we will explore some of the current concerns in the UMC over issues related to human sexuality and homosexuality in particular.

At this point, stop or pause the video for discussion. This is the end of Session 2.

Discussion

1. John Wesley urged the Methodists to remain in good relationship with the Church of England. Why do you think he felt it important to do so? What reasons do you believe the Methodists in the United States chose to separate entirely? What do you believe was right and wrong about each perspective?
2. Were you surprised about any of the denominations that have their roots in Methodism? What are your thoughts about some of the reasons for their separation?
3. The Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Churches united in 1968, just 54 years ago. Are there those in your group who recall that event or any of the blessings of and concerns over the unification?