

The Methodist Churches

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History:

- The Handbook of Denominations also notes that **the Methodist Church was started by John Wesley** with his brother, Charles, **“Between 1739 and 1744 the organizational elements of Methodism were instituted: a circuit system and itinerant ministry, class meetings and class leaders, lay preachers, and annual conferences.** There was phenomenal growth in membership; more than 26,000 Methodists were worshipping in England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales in 1767.

Methodism was primary a lay movement, and Wesley did his best to keep it within the Church of England. An evangelical party grew within that church that would include luminaries such as hymn writer **Isaac Watts (1674-1748)** and philanthropist and abolitionist **William Wilberforce (1759-1833)**, but it became evident that a separate Methodist organization was needed to deal with the large numbers recruited from among the unchurched. **As early as 1739 John Wesley drew up a set of general rules that are still held by modern Methodists as an ideal delineation of biblical rules of conduct. A Deed of Declaration in 1784 gave legal status to the yearly Methodist conference...**

[‘At the time of the Revolution...’] Surprisingly, of all the religious groups in the Colonies, Methodists alone actually seemed to prosper during the Revolution. By the end of the war, membership had grown to 14,000, and there were nearly 80 preachers. It was now an American church, free from both England and the Church of England. Wesley accepted in the inevitable; he ordained ministers for the Colonies and appointed Asbury and Thomas Coke (1747-1814) as superintendents.

Coke brought with him from England certain instructions from Wesley, a service book and a hymnal, and authority to proceed with the organization. The Christmas Conference, held at Baltimore in December 1784, organized the Methodist Episcopal Church and elected Coke and Asbury as superintendents (later called bishops). The Sunday Service (an abridgement of The Book of Common Prayer) and Articles of Religion were adopted as written by John Wesley with the addition of an article that the Methodists should vow allegiance to the United States government...

All was not peaceful among the Methodists. Objecting to what they considered abuses of the episcopal system, several bodies broke away: the Republican Methodists, later the Christian Church, withdrew in Virginia; Methodist Protestants seceded in 1830. Between 1813 and 1917, **large groups of African Americans formed independent churches: the African Methodist Episcopal Church** [membership est. 2,500,000]; **the Union Church of Africans, now the Union American Methodist Episcopal Church; and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church** [membership 1,276,662 (1999)]. In 1844 came the most devastating split of all, the bisecting of the Methodist Episcopal Church in to the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Northern body, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, organized in 1845” (Mead, Frank S and Hill, Samuel S. *Handbook of Denominations in the United States. 11th ed.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001. P.225-227, [230-231]).
- The Handbook of Denominations reports that the United Methodist Church numbered 8,377,662 in 35,609 congregations in 1999.** “Two mergers of major importance produced the United Methodist Church. The first merger was actually a rejoining of three separated Methodist groups in 1939 when the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church were reunited under a new name, the Methodist Church. In 1968, this body merged with the Evangelical United Brethren (E.U.B.) to form The United Methodist Church (Mead, P.239).
- Also, the Handbook of Denominations notes that **the Salvation Army came from the Methodist Church** stating that **“William Booth (1829-1912), an ordained minister in the Methodist New**

Connexion in England, left that church in 1861 to become a freelance evangelist. In 1865 he dedicated his life to the poverty-stricken unchurched masses in the slum areas of London's East End. He first planned to supplement the work of the churches, but this proved impractical because many converts did not want to go where they were sent, and often when they did go, they were not accepted. Moreover, Booth soon found that he needed the converts to help handle the great crowds that came to his meetings.

He began the work under the name 'Christian Mission,' and in 1878 the name was changed to the Salvation Army. Booth first organized his movement along lines of Methodist polity, with annual conferences at which reports were made and programs planned, but when the name was changed, the whole organization became dominated by the new title. Articles of War (a declaration of faith) were drawn up, and soon the mission stations became corps, members became soldiers, evangelists became officers, and converts were called seekers. Booth was designated as general, and his organization was gradually set up on a military pattern, which provided a direct line of authority and a practical system of training personnel for effective action" (Mead, P.316, 318).

God, Christ, and the Spirit (Creation):

- The Book of Discipline of the Methodist Church says, "There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost" ("Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church." *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <archives.umc.org>).
- Regarding Creation and Evolution, the United Methodist Church states, "**We find that science's descriptions of cosmological, geological, and biological evolution are not in conflict with theology**" ("Science & Technology." *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Also, the Methodist Church stands, "WHEREAS, **The United Methodist Church has for many years supported the separation of church and State** (§ 164C, Book of Discipline, 2004, p. 119);
Therefore, be it resolved, that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church go on record as opposing the introduction of any faith-based theories such as Creationism or Intelligent Design into the science curriculum of our public schools" ("Evolution and Intelligent Design." *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

Scriptures: *God:* Gen. 1:1-2, Psa. 110:1, Isa. 9:6, 48:16, 61:1, Mic. 5:2, Matt. 12:46-47, 13:55-56. 28:19, Luke 3:22, John 1:1, 14, Acts 7:55, 10:38, Rom. 8:9, 15:30, 2 Cor. 13:14, Heb. 9:14, 1 Pet. 1:2, 3:18, 1 John 4:2; *Creation:* Gen. 1:26-27, Exo. 20:11, Matt. 19:4-5, **Mark 10:6-8**, Luke 11:50-51, Rom. 1:20.

Christ's Words and the Scriptures:

- Regarding the Bible, the Methodist Church declares, "**In thinking about our faith, we put primary reliance on the Bible.** It's the unique testimony to God's self-disclosure in the life of Israel; in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ; and in the Spirit's work in the early church. **It's our sacred canon and, thus, the decisive source of our Christian witness and the authoritative measure of the truth in our beliefs.**"

In our theological journey we study the Bible within the believing community. Even when we study it alone, we're guided and corrected through dialogue with other Christians. We interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible as a whole. We use concordances, commentaries, and other aids prepared by the scholars. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we try to discern both the original intention of the text and its meaning for our own faith and life" ("Reflecting on our Faith: Scripture." *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

- The United Methodist Church reports, **“When the Methodist movement in America became a church in 1784, John Wesley provided the American Methodists with a liturgy and a doctrinal statement, which contained twenty-four ‘Articles of Religion’ or basic statements of belief. These Articles of Religion were taken from the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England—the church out of which the Methodism movement began—and had been the standards for preaching within the Methodist movement.** When these articles were voted on by the American conference, an additional article was added regarding the American context, bringing the total number of articles to 25.

These articles became the basic standards for Christian belief in the Methodist church in North America. **First published in the church's Book of Discipline in 1790, the Articles of Religion have continued to be part of the church's official statement of belief** (“Foundational Documents of the United Methodist Church.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

- The Handbook of Denominations notes, **“Historically, Methodists have not built theological fences to keep anyone out; they have stressed the foundational beliefs of Protestantism and have offered theological common ground...**

There is wide freedom in the interpretation and practice of all doctrines, with some congregations more liberal and others more conservative” (Mead, P229).

Scriptures: Luke 1:1-3, 1 Cor. 1:1-2, 10, 2 Cor. 1:1, **Eph. 3:3-5**, Col. 4:16, 2 Thess. 2:15, 2 Tim. 3:16-17 (cf. 1 Tim. 5:18), 2 Pet. 1:16-21, 3:15-16, 1 John 1:1-4.

Way of Salvation:

- The Methodist Church states, **“United Methodists do believe that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way the Bible gives as clearly God's gift and way of salvation and heaven. God can save anyone that God chooses to save and we cannot decide whom God will save. We simply trust the plain teaching of scripture. See John 3:16, Acts 4:12 and many other texts”** (“Do United Methodists Believe that Faith in Jesus Christ is Necessary to Go to Heaven?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Concerning “once saved, always saved”, the United Methodist Church says, **“A short, but very incomplete answer, is that our Church teaches we can end up ‘losing’ the salvation God has begun in us, and the consequence of this in the age to come is our eternal destruction in Hell... We thus remain free to resist God’s grace, to revert to spiritual torpor, and possibly experience spiritual death and Hell as its consequence”** (“Do United Methodists Believe ‘Once Saved, Always Saved’ or Can We ‘Lose our Salvation’?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- The United Methodist Church says, **“Baptism by water and the Spirit is the sign, and for many (though not all!) the usual channel of this great gift of God. ‘By Water and the Spirit’ reminds us that:**

Baptism is the means of entry into new life in Christ (John 3:5; Titus 3:5), but new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands. Our awareness and acceptance of our redemption by Christ and new life in him may vary throughout our lives. But, in whatever way the reality of the new birth is experienced, it carries out the promises God made to us in our baptism...

United Methodists can, do, and should proclaim God’s call to salvation in Jesus Christ and offer of new birth by water and the Spirit to all. It is the new birth that makes God’s salvation real and vital in our personal lives, and through our personal lives, alive to the world” (Burton-Edwards, Taylor. “Is the Concept ‘Saved, Born-Again’ Unique to Evangelicals and Baptists? Does It Apply to Methodists?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

- **Concerning baptism and salvation**, the United Methodist Church answers whether baptism is necessary for salvation, **“No, but baptism is a gift of God's grace to be received as part of the journey of salvation. To refuse to accept baptism is to reject one of the means of grace that God offers us”** (“Baptism and Confirmation.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Concerning the mode of baptism, the Methodist Church declares, **“Our church has always offered to people being baptized and to the parents of infants the choice of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. Sprinkling is a common practice, but the person being baptized (or their sponsors) can choose the method most meaningful to them”** (“Is Sprinkling the Only Way that United Methodists Baptize?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- **Regarding babies being born in sin**, the United Methodist Church declares, “Yes, we do believe that babies, at birth, are contaminated by sin. The ancient teaching of the church on this is called the doctrine of original sin...

[Following beliefs about original sin] On the other hand, what a gracious hope and gospel we proclaim and live if we simply accept the desperate need **we are in from the beginning and the washing of water and the word in baptism where God claims us as God's own in union with Christ, dying to sin and living alive to God by the power of the Spirit”** (Benedict, Dan. “Does the Methodist Church Believe that Babies are Born in Sin?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

- **Regarding infant baptism**, the Methodist Church refers to, “Understanding the practice as an authentic expression of how God works in our lives, **The United Methodist Church strongly advocates the baptism of infants within the faith community:** ‘Because the redeeming love of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, **extends to all persons and because Jesus explicitly included the children in his kingdom, the pastor of each charge shall earnestly exhort all Christian parents or guardians to present their children to the Lord in Baptism at an early age’** (1992 *Book of Discipline*, par. 221) (para. 226, 2008 *Book of Discipline*)” (“What is the Appropriate Age for Baptism?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <archives.umc.org>).
- **Regarding whether children should decide to be baptized**, the Methodist Church responded, **“No. We no more wait for our children to decide about being in the family of God than we wait for them to decide if they would like to be a part of our human family”** (“Isn’t it better to wait until children can decide...?” *The United Methodist Church*. 21 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

Scriptures: Matt. 28:19-20, **Mark 16:16**, John 6:53-56, **Acts 2:28, 3:19, 8:38, 16:32-33, 22:16**, Rom. 6:3-7, Col. 2:11-12, 1 Pet. 3:21, 1 John 1:5-2:6.

Church Government:

- The Handbook of Denominations reports, “The local churches of Methodism are called charges; clergy are appointed by the bishop at the Annual Conference, and **each church elects its own administrative board, which initiates planning and sets goals and policies on the local level.** It is composed of staff members, chairs of various committees, those representing various program interests, and members at large. **Charge, Annual, and General Conferences prevail in most Methodist bodies. While the government is popularly episcopal, it is largely governmental, through this series of conferences”** (Mead, P.229-230).
- The United Methodist Church states, “United Methodists are sometimes asked where their church is headquartered, or what officer is ‘in charge.’

Deliberately, The United Methodist Church has no single central office, no archbishop, no pope. This reflects the representative nature of the church's organization - which also provides a system of checks and balances.

The church created a system that in some ways parallels that of the U.S. government when it came to America. The church has a General Conference, its legislative branch; a Council of Bishops,

somewhat like an executive branch; and a nine-member Judicial Council, the judicial branch” (“Structure & Organization: Governance.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

- Regarding women clergy, the Methodist Church states, “Clergymen have been part of Methodism since John Wesley licensed Sarah Crosby to preach in 1761. Although women were ordained in the Methodist tradition as early as the late 1800s, it was the May 4, 1956 General Conference vote for full clergy rights that forever changed the face of ordained clergy” (“Why Does the United Methodist Church Ordain Women?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

Scriptures: Acts 14:26, Acts 20:28, Eph. 1:22, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:18, 2:19, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Pet. 5:1-4.

Worship and Assembly:

- The United Methodist Church states, “A typical worship service at a United Methodist church may include a greeting and opening prayer, time for people to greet each other, scripture readings, silent prayer and meditation, an offering, the Lord’s Prayer, a children’s message, the sermon, special music and hymns, and a closing prayer.

Communion may also be served. All are invited to celebrate communion, but you can choose whether or not you wish to participate.

Often churches will print words and responses in the bulletins to help those who are unfamiliar with United Methodist worship.

There will be some differences in the services from church to church. Some churches have a more formal style, while others may have more casual or contemporary services. Some churches will offer more than one type of service” (“What will happen During a Typical Worship Service?” *The United Methodist Church*. 21 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

- Regarding **the Lord’s Supper**, the United Methodist Church says, “Each local United Methodist church determines how often to serve communion. Many churches celebrate communion once a month, often on the first Sunday. Communion is also celebrated on special days of the year, such as Christmas and Easter. There has gradually been a move toward more frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Some United Methodist churches now celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week” (“How Often Do United Methodists Take Communion?” *The United Methodist Church*. 21 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- “*The United Methodist Book of Worship* says, ‘Although the historic and ecumenical Christian practice has been to use wine, the use of unfermented grape juice by The United Methodist Church and its predecessors since the late nineteenth century expresses pastoral concern for recovering alcoholics, enables the participation of children and youth, and supports the church’s witness of abstinence’” (“Why Do Most Methodist Churches Serve Grape Juice instead of Wine for Holy Communion?” *The United Methodist Church*. 21 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Concerning **instrumental music for worship**, the United Methodist Church notes, “The vast majority of Christianity today affirms, uses, and celebrates the role of instruments in worship, including pipe organs, pianos, all orchestral instruments, drums and percussion, as well as the more modern electronic and computerized instruments. A small minority, mostly descendants of Calvin and Zwingli, continue to condemn the use of instruments in worship. Instruments are used in worship today for a variety of roles: to accompany congregational singing, choirs, and soloists; as a vehicle for the musicians’ expression of praise to God; and to enable the congregation to meditate and experience the presence of God” (McIntyre, Dean. “Question Regarding the Use of Musical Instruments in Christian Worship.” *The United Methodist Church*. 21 Mar 2012. <gbod.org>).

- **Adam Clarke, a Methodist commentator, commented on Amos 6:5 about instrumental music for worship saying, “I farther believe that the use of such instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is without the sanction and against the will of God; that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion, and that they are sinful. If there was a wo to them who invented instruments of music, as did David under the law, is there no wo, no curse to them who invent them, and introduce them into the worship of God in the Christian Church? I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity. The late venerable and most eminent divine, the Revelation John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into the chapels of the Methodists said, in his terse and powerful manner, ‘I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither Heard nor Seen.’ I say the same, though I think the expense of purchase had better be spared”** (Clarke, Adam. “Amos 6:5.” *Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible*. 1810-1832).

Scriptures: Matt. 6:1-18, 15:1-9, 23, John 4:21-24; **1 Cor. 11:17-34**; 14; Col. 2:18-23; Heb. 10:24-25.

Morality:

- The United Methodist Church states, **“We affirm our long-standing support of abstinence from alcohol and illegal drugs, and we support the rehabilitation of drug-dependent persons... We call on Christians to abstain from gambling and to be in ministry with persons who are the victims of this societal menace...**
We believe war is incompatible with the teachings of Christ, and we claim that it is the primary moral duty of every nation to resolve disputes peacefully. We endorse the United Nations and commend all who pursue world peace through law” (“Church and Society.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Concerning **abortion**, the Methodist Church says, “We recognize tragic conflicts of life with life that may justify abortion, and in such cases we support the legal option of abortion under proper medical procedures” (“Abortion.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Regarding **“Human Sexuality” addressing homosexuality, the General**, **“The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons”** (“Human Sexuality.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- Regarding environmental concerns, the United Methodist Church states, “We affirm that we're responsible for the way we use the Lord's creation. We support social policies that promote the wise use of water, air, soil, minerals, and plants. We support the conservation of energy and oppose energy-using technologies that threaten human health. We're concerned for the humane treatment of animals and the respectful use of space” (“Church and Society.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

Scriptures: Rom. 12:9-15:13, **1 Cor. 5:9-11**, 6:9-11, Gal. 5:16-6:10, Eph. 4:17-6:18, Col. 3-4:6.

Marriage and Divorce:

- In response to the statement and question, **“I have been married before. Can I get remarried and still be a member?”**, the Methodist Church answers, **“Yes, divorced and remarried persons are welcome to join The United Methodist Church”** (“I have been married before...” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- **“We affirm the sanctity of marriage and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We recognize divorce as regrettable and intend to minister to the members of divorced families. We affirm the integrity of single persons. We recognize that sexuality is a good gift of God and that sex between a man and woman is only to be clearly affirmed in the marriage bond”** (“Church and Society.” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

Scriptures: Matt. 5:31-32, 19:9, **Mark 10:5-12**, **Luke 16:18**, 1 Cor. 6:16-18, 7:10-15, Heb. 13:4.

The End Times & Afterlife:

- The Methodist Church states, **“United Methodists have varied interpretations and understandings of the second coming of Christ as referenced in scripture. While you would find many who take a literal approach to belief in the second coming, most United Methodists would be uncertain about the meaning of the second coming”** (“What Does the United Methodist Church Teach about the Second Coming?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).
- **“Wesley and his spiritual children are not into the future in the kind of rapture/left behind approach.** He and we are into the present--living in love toward God and neighbor. Our doctrine focuses on the order of salvation--prevenient grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace and the assurance of salvation that God gives in trust” (“Where Does the ‘Rapture’ Fit into the United Methodist Realm of Beliefs?” *The United Methodist Church*. 20 Mar 2012. <umc.org>).

Scripture: Matt. 24:29-51, 25:31-46, Mark 13:24-37, Luke 21:25-36, John 14:1-4, **Acts 1:9-11**, 1 Cor. 15:23-28, 50-53, 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11, 2 Thess. 2:1-12, 2 Pet. 3:1-13, Rev. 19-22:5.