

# GOOD NEWS

Leading  
Methodists  
Forward

## SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS: A SET APART PEOPLE



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# Inaugural Tennent Annual Lecture On World Christianity



**Dr. Timothy Tennent**  
The Army and Navy Club,  
Washington, DC  
April 14th from 6:00PM to  
8:00PM

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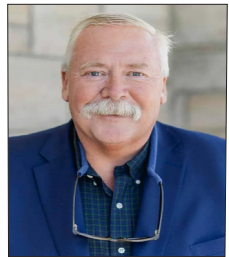


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"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands."

– Revelation 7:9



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# First Word

## THIS NEW ENDEAVOR

In my office in Washington, DC, just over a block from the White House, I now have every single issue of *Good News Magazine* going back to the 1960s. The magazines take up two shelves and I treasure them as witnesses to decades of faithfulness. The authors who filled the pages of *Good News* over many years loved the church. They loved Scripture. And most of all they loved God. Their commitment to the “faith once delivered to the saints” as St. Jude wrote in his letter is evident on every page of these historic issues. But there’s a story as to how these volumes ended up in my office at the John Wesley Institute (JWI) here in the Capitol.

In the Fall of 2024, when I heard that *Good News* as an organization was ending their work, I understood the reasons behind it – the realignment of mainline Methodism has now largely taken place – but I was sad to hear that the magazine itself was set to end. Later, I was sitting in my living room and like many of you I have copies of *Good News* on my coffee table. And I was, again, saddened to think that this resource was no longer going to be produced for the Wesleyan people until it struck me that instead of being sad, I should do something about it.

Thus began a conversation with a number of leaders: Mark Tooley, Helen Rhea Stumbo, Tom Lambrecht, Steve Beard, and others. The question was whether or not the magazine should continue under the auspices of the JWI. The response was unanimously positive, including a unanimous vote of the *Good News* Board that sealed the deal. So on January 1 of this year, *Good News Magazine* became a part of the JWI. And with it came Steve Beard, longtime editor of the magazine and a dear brother in Christ.

The JWI was founded in 2021 and is a formational program of the Institute on Religion and Democracy. From the beginning, I have had the privilege to serve as the JWI director. We equip and build up. We never engage in polemics. Our focus has always been “hold fast that which is good.” The mission of the JWI is to bring the best of faithful scholars and thoughtful church leaders together to produce formational materials for the laity in the broad Wesleyan tradition. I’ve often called the JWI a theological “hub.” At present, over 120 scholars have been a part of our work.

To give you a better idea of what the JWI does, in January 2024 we hosted something called the Next Methodism Summit II involving over 75 scholars and church leaders from 12 different denominations over the course of three days to write a document on holiness of heart and life, the key message of the Wesleyan revival. Throughout the history of the Wesleyan movement, almost every division can be traced to disagreements over holiness, or what the Christian life looks like. But at the Summit, the divisions ceased as we united to present the doctrine anew. The Summit was a time of worship, fellowship, and work as the participants crafted a text that will shortly become a book designed to equip the faithful with the transforming message of holiness.

The JWI holds the School of Methodism across the country. This is an event where scholars come to local churches and teach about the story, message, and practices of Methodism. So far, we have held the School of Methodism in North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. We are currently

Scriptural holiness is the work of God we receive through faith to make us a new creation, freeing us from the power of sin to live as a set-apart people.

designing an online version so stay tuned for that. In fact, we are looking at other online offerings, including an event on the 1700th anniversary of the Nicene Creed. We're never short of new projects.

Two of the JWI's earliest successes were the publication of *The Next Methodism: Theological, Social, and Missional Foundations for Global Methodism* (at that point, this meant worldwide Methodism), a book in which leaders were asked to describe their hope for the future of Methodism, and also *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness to Christian Orthodoxy*, a text produced by 56 scholars gathered in Alexandria, Virginia in 2022 for the first Next Methodism Summit, providing a basic outline of the Christian faith from a Wesleyan perspective. This text has now been used around the world.

There is so much more that that JWI does, including Anglican political theology conferences and events (we have one here in DC in March with Fr. Philip Corbett coming from London to talk about the Church and the Monarchy), the first annual Tennent Lecture on Global Christianity will be delivered by Timothy Tennent here in DC in April with the title "Staying Centered in the Midst of the Shifting Center of World Christianity." And the new Sermons for America project – designed to equip pastors with the tools necessary to address the public square without falling into partisanship or losing sight of the gospel – is now taking shape thanks to a faithful donor. I encourage you to see our website for more details about all of these initiatives. I would love to see you at our in-person events.

But I want to take this opportunity now to write about the future of *Good News Magazine*. The JWI works with the broad Wesleyan tradition – Anglican, Methodist, Holiness, and Pentecostal. The heirs of Wesley include faithful believers in the Wesley brothers' own tradition (Anglicanism), the forms of Methodism that emerged institutionally in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the churches that came out of the holiness revivals of the mid to late 19th century, and even the churches that arose from the Pentecostal revivals of the 20th century. This large family doesn't always look alike, but we share a common DNA that is hard to miss.

The heirs of Wesley can be thankful for the tradition that we've received: Christ died for all, grace (the power of the Holy Spirit) transforms and calls us to a relationship with God, we are pardoned and made whole by faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit enables us to cooperate with God's transforming work both in our own lives and in our communities, the Scriptures are true, we can know that we are saved, and sin doesn't have the final word in this life but holy love does.

*Good News Magazine* will not only include voices from the extended Wesleyan family, but will focus on equipping the Wesleyan faithful with the riches of their own tradition, a heritage that boldly proclaims the transforming work of God in this life, a transformation that not only changes our relationship to God and to others, but actually heals us, sets us free, entirely. St. Paul wrote about this many times, but I'm reminded of his closing words from 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (in Wesley's own translation): "May the God of

peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may the whole of you, the spirit and the soul and the body, be preserved blameless unto the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.” This message of sanctification, or holiness, or perfect love is at the heart of the Wesleyan movement. In fact, Wesley wrote that this is the only reason God “raised up the Methodists” in the first place. This is our purpose.

In the pages of this first issue you will find voices from faithful leaders in the Global Methodist Church, the United Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Church of England. We will try our best to be pan-Wesleyan in every issue we publish. Some of our articles are focused on the GMC and that is to be expected given how new it is and what it means to start afresh with a new Methodist denomination. I am pleased that Steven Hoskins has written about the Church of the Nazarene, a denomination born out of the American Holiness Movement. In the coming year, we will highlight a different Wesleyan denomination in each issue to introduce the family to one another. Our next issue will highlight the Free Methodist Church.

Suzanne Nicholson has written about the Asbury Outpouring and the newly released book that she edited with other members of the Asbury University community describing their experience of the Spirit’s movement. Jessica LaGrone has artfully written on the church, the body of Christ, based on remarks that she made at the JWJ’s Mere Methodism Conference held in Virginia last year. Biblical scholar David Watson has written about scriptural holiness, the very heartbeat of Wesleyanism. Tammie Grimm has written about formation in the Christian life, particularly the means of grace, in an article that will be the first in a series. We have ethicist James Thobaben writing on the patterns of Methodism, maybe even the sociology of Methodism, and what this might mean for the future of the Wesleyan movement.

My hope and prayer is that this issue and those that follow will be a resource for your walk with Christ. Whether you are new to the faith or have been a Christian for many decades, each of us needs to attend to our walk, to be faithfully engaged, in following the way of the savior. Wesley wrote in his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* these beautiful words that speak to our ever-present need for Christ:

The holiest of men still need Christ, as their Prophet, as

the light of the world. For he does not give them light, but from moment to moment: the instant he withdraws, all is darkness. They still need Christ as their King; for God does not give them a stock of holiness. But unless they receive a supply every moment, nothing but unholiness would remain. They still need Christ as their Priest, to make atonement for their holy things. Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ.

Trusting in Christ we receive the benefits of his cross and resurrection. Walking with Christ, we learn his ways, which are the ways of wholeness, to become who God always meant for us to be.

Wesley once said, “reading Christians are knowing Christians” and I hope that proves true of the material we produce here. The reason that I champion the Wesleyan tradition isn’t because it’s new or unique, but quite the opposite. It’s because it’s basic Christianity. We’re not proclaiming a new gospel, but the historic faith of the church, or what Wesley called “scriptural Christianity.” The so-called “distinctives” of Wesleyan thought such as Christian perfection are anything but new, God has been in the business of making saints for a long time and he’s still at it. It’s to him and his work that we point, cooperating with him by his grace so that we can truly sing, as Charles Wesley wrote:

*Christ, whose glory fills the skies,*

*Christ, the true, the only light,*

*Sun of Righteousness, arise,*

*Triumph o’er the shades of night;*

*Dayspring from on high, be near;*

*Daystar, in my heart appear.*

---

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# NAVIGATE FORWARD



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## GOOD NEWS

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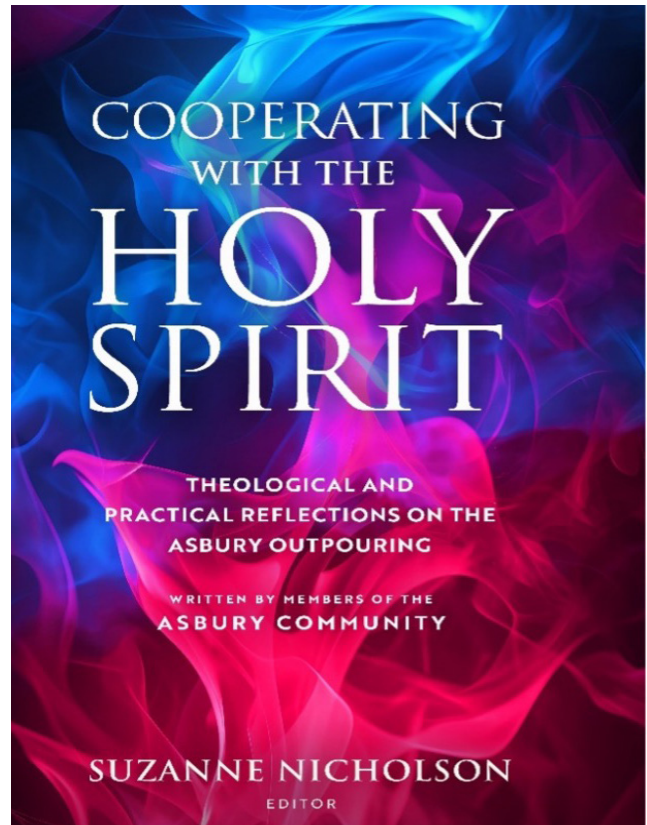
## THE EXPERIENCE AND THEOLOGY OF THE ASBURY OUTPOURING

By Suzanne Nicholson

In C. S. Lewis's well-known fantasy story, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the White Witch has enchanted the land of Narnia so that winter is ever-present. The woodland creatures eagerly await the return of their true king, the lion Aslan, so that this Christ figure will break her spells and restore peace and the fruitfulness of summer to the weary land. When icicles begin to drip and the first hints of green appear through the melting snow, it becomes clear that "Aslan is on the move!" The expectation of a better tomorrow is palpable.

The post-COVID world was longing for just such a thaw in February 2023 when the Holy Spirit suddenly showed up in powerful ways after a regular chapel service on the campus of Asbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky. Students who were plagued by anxiety, depression, addictions, and hopelessness experienced the overpowering but gentle, peaceful love of Jesus in Hughes Auditorium. Overcome by this love, students responded to a call to deep repentance. They confessed their sins, prayed for one another and the world, and remained in worship for hours and days on end. News of this ongoing experience rapidly spread across the world on social media. For sixteen days worship continued in Hughes Auditorium and overflowed across the street to Asbury Theological Seminary and local churches in Wilmore as pilgrims from across the U.S. and the world flocked to experience this profound and palpable presence of the Holy Spirit. Aslan was on the move.

Now, two years later, I've edited a new book describing these experiences and considering questions arising from this kind of revival. *Cooperating with the Holy Spirit: Theological and Practical Reflections on the Asbury Outpouring*, published by Abilene Christian University Press, brings together the voices of 23 faculty, staff, and administrators from the



Asbury community who experienced firsthand this powerful movement of God.

**“Waves of Liquid Love.”** The six chapters of the first section describe the experiences of those present during the Outpouring. From the prayers that preceded this visitation of God, to the diversity of those in attendance, to moments of divine timing, to the spread of worship across the street at the seminary, authors give firsthand accounts of what they witnessed. Greg Haseloff (associate dean of spiritual life and university pastor), for example, uses Charles Finney's description of “waves of liquid love” to describe the beauty of this Outpouring: “From the very beginning hours of the



“The theology of the Outpouring is about the in-breaking of God in otherwise unexplainable ways as well as the empowering grace for the complexity, the not yet, and the ordinary.” — Maria Brown

Outpouring to the final day, worshipers drank deeply of the ‘liquid love’ of God! . . .The very breath of God filled thousands and thousands with a love that infused hope, inspired healing, compelled joyful worship, and instilled peace!”

**Historical Roots.** In the second section, professors from the university’s School of Christian Studies delve into biblical, historical, and theological questions about revivals. The scriptural testimony of God’s design to be with his people, as well as God’s missionary impetus to send those who have experienced God out into the world to tell others, provide the focus of the initial chapter. The historical testimony from previous Evangelical revivals is then explored and compared to the experiences at Asbury. Authors also consider questions about sacred space (why did so many people feel compelled to travel to Wilmore and worship in Hughes?) and a theology of prayer. Given that Asbury University is rooted in the Wesleyan tradition, the final chapter of this section considers the Outpouring phenomena through the lens of Wesleyan theology.

**Practical realities.** In the third and final section of the book, authors address the practical realities and decision-making that occurred at the Asbury Outpouring. University president Kevin Brown discusses the need to balance the institutional mission with a holy imagination: “. . .godly women and men exhibited spiritual maturation and imaginative capacity to provide both order to foster what was unfolding and enough space to step back and let the Spirit move.” Other authors in this section discuss worship music choices and practices for managing the flood of media members arriving on campus, while Wilmore mayor Harold Rainwater addresses public safety challenges. Ramifications of life after the Outpouring are also addressed, such as the need to send out witnessing teams and the impact the Outpouring had

on believers who work in the secular marketplace. Finally, ministry associate Maria Brown closes the book by noting the tensions between spiritual outpouring and ordinary life. She describes how the incarnate Jesus meets us in these complexities: “The theology of the Outpouring is about the in-breaking of God in otherwise unexplainable ways as well as the empowering grace for the complexity, the not yet, and the ordinary. All is transformed—our imagination of what God can do, our memory of what God has done, and our experience of him in the everyday moments.”

David Watson, academic dean at United Theological Seminary, offers his praise for the book: “As the history of revival in the United States is written, this will be an invaluable resource for historical and theological reflection. We can learn a great deal from these essays on the Asbury Outpouring, including how to respond when the next such move of God takes place.”



The Asbury Outpouring is one movement among many signaling the dripping icicles and the first hints of green in a world frozen by the chaos of sin. Aslan is on the move. Where will he head next?

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Suzanne Nicholson is professor of New Testament at Asbury University. Cooperating with the Holy Spirit is available at [acupressbooks.com](http://acupressbooks.com) and [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).

# SCRIPTURAL HOLINESS: A SET APART PEOPLE



*Painting of John Wesley by the Nathaniel Hone. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.*

## David F. Watson

At its 2024 Convening General Conference, the Global Methodist Church adopted the following mission statement: “The Global Methodist Church exists to make disciples of Jesus Christ and spread scriptural holiness across the globe.” As one of the people who helped craft this mission statement, I was elated at the overwhelming majority that voted in favor of its adoption. Naming scriptural holiness as the center of our mission was an important step in claiming an authentically Wesleyan voice and vocation. After all, it was none other than John Wesley who told us

that God’s design in raising up Methodist preachers was to “reform the nation and, in particular, the church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”

Since that time, however, a number of people have asked me to explain the term “scriptural holiness.” I get it.

Many Methodists haven’t talked about scriptural holiness for generations. While a brief definition is difficult, the following description might get us started: *Scriptural holiness is the work of God we receive through faith to make us a new creation, freeing us from the power of sin to live as a*

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“Of all the things these angels could say about God, they proclaim his holiness. God is separate from us. The eternal God who created all things is perfectly righteous and loving, all-powerful and all-knowing. We are not.”

*set-apart people.* In what follows I'll unpack this a bit.

### **Holiness as Separation**

At root, holiness is about separation. The Hebrew word we translate as “holiness” is *qodesh*. It refers to things that are set apart, separate from the ordinary world. It is first and foremost an attribute of the transcendent and perfect God. Consider Isaiah's vision of God in Isaiah 6:

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke” (vv. 1-4).

Of all the things these angels could say about God, they proclaim his holiness. God is separate from us. The eternal God who created all things is perfectly righteous and loving, all-powerful and all-knowing. We are not.

Isaiah perceives the contrast between the holiness of God and his own profane nature. He thus cries out in fear. “Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!”

### **A Set-Apart People**

The good news, though, is that God wants to share his life with us. For this reason, he created a set-apart people to represent him among all the other peoples of the earth. As

he says to Israel in Leviticus 20:26, “You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.” Israel is to receive something of the character of God. Just as God is set apart from this world, so Israel will be set apart from other nations. This separation from other peoples involves covenant fidelity between God and Israel. As God says in Exodus 19:5-6, “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” The people of Israel are to worship and live differently than the other nations. They are to be holy.

Israel and Judah went through periods of faithfulness and periods of rebellion against God. At times God would send prophets among them to warn them that they had departed from the covenant they had made with him. Sometimes the people listened. Often they did not. The kings rarely did. Following Jeroboam, all the kings of Israel were wicked, as were many of the kings of Judah. Yet the calling of Israel as a holy nation was only a part of God's plan of salvation. It was never the entirety. When we reach the last verse of the last book of the Old Testament, the story continues.

### **Jesus Sets Us Free**

In the fullness of time, God became incarnate as one of these Israelite people whom he had set apart. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus, both divine and human, has made the holiness of God available to us in a new way. He not only calls us to holiness, but empowers us to live as

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“Jesus, both divine and human, has made the holiness of God available to us in a new way. He not only calls us to holiness, but empowers us to live as holy people. On the cross, he took our sin upon himself, broke its stranglehold over our lives, and set us free for joyful obedience.”

holy people. On the cross, he took our sin upon himself, broke its stranglehold over our lives, and set us free for joyful obedience. As Paul explains this to the church in Rome, “But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17-18). We were once slaves to sin, but now we have been set free to love and serve God.

Wesley knew we could never do this on our own. In our own strength, we can never truly live the way God wants us to live. Sin is too powerful. It warps our minds. It makes us believe that good is evil and evil is good. Apart from the grace of God, we cannot perceive our own sinfulness. In his sermon, “On Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse the Tenth,” Wesley writes,

“Know thyself. See and feel thyself a sinner. Feel that thy inward parts are very wickedness, that thou are altogether corrupt and abominable.... Know and feel that thou are a poor, vile, guilty worm, quivering over the great gulf! What art thou? A sinner born to die; a leaf driven before the wind; a vapour ready to vanish away, just appearing and then scattered into the air, to be no more seen!”

If this sounds harsh to our ears today, we should understand that Wesley was trying to get across the extent to which sin has warped our hearts and minds. Everyone has sinned — everyone, and even when we know what is right, we often end up doing wrong (Romans 7:14-24). Until we

diagnose the problem, we cannot find the cure. The problem, as Wesley understood from the teaching of Scripture, is the pervasive and coercive power of sin. The cure is the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

Continuing his argument in Romans 6, Paul contrasts an old life of sin with new life in Christ. He reminds the Christians of Rome that they used to be enslaved to sin. “But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life” (6:22). This word we translate as “sanctification” is *hagiasmos*, and it means, “being made holy” or “being set apart.” Now that you’ve been freed from sin, the advantage you get is that you’ve been set apart. You’re empowered to think, speak, and act differently than you did before. You’re called to and empowered for a different kind of life. Those who don’t know Christ will not understand why you live in this strange new way, but you can invite them to be part of this set-apart people as well.

#### **A New Creation**

Once we receive Christ, we are not simply the Revised Standard Version of our old selves.

The change God works in us is truly radical. The word “radical” comes from the Latin *radix*, which means “root.” Our transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit is not superficial. It is fundamental. It occurs at the very root of our being. We call this the New Birth — a crucial element of the Wesleyan understanding of salvation. As Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, “No one can see the kingdom

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# “Scriptural holiness is the work of God we receive through faith to make us a new creation, freeing us from the power of sin to live as a set-apart people.”

of God without being born from above.” We are made new. In Christ we are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). This happens because we become “participants of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Put more simply, God shares himself with us, and in so doing makes us into the people we were always meant to be.

## Faith and the Means of Grace

Holiness is an aspect of the nature of God, and it is something he shares with us. What part, then, do we play in becoming holy people? Do we simply sit back and watch TV while God does all the work? Wesley would bristle at the idea. We are saved by grace through faith — by putting our whole trust in Jesus Christ for our salvation. That faith will result in certain behaviors that will make us increasingly open to the work of God. We call these “means of grace.” Wesley identified particular means of grace as the “ordinances of God,” which he listed in the General Rules:

- The public worship of God.
- The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
- The Supper of the Lord.
- Family and private prayer.
- Searching the Scriptures.
- Fasting or abstinence.

None of these practices saves us. None makes us holy. None changes our hearts. Only God can do these things. Rather, these practices are responses of faith to the work of God. They are ways in which we beckon the work of the Holy Spirit. When we sin, we quench the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but when we partake of these means of grace in faith, we invite the Holy Spirit to change us.

When we read Scripture, worship God, pray, receive the Lord’s Supper, or fast, we engage in practices commended or commanded in Scripture that serve as conduits of the Holy Spirit. As the Spirit works in our hearts, we are made new.

Scriptural holiness is the work of God we receive through faith to make us a new creation, freeing us from the power of sin to live as a set-apart



people. When God makes us new, we will think, speak, and act differently from the world around us in important ways. We will live as set-apart people. Many will think us strange. They may even regard us with animosity. Yet it has been this way since the church’s earliest days. Our calling is not to seek the favor of an unbelieving world, but to love and serve God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit —

who shares his nature with us and sets us apart to bear witness to his love.

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David F. Watson serves as Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He holds a PhD from Southern Methodist University and is an ordained elder in the Global Methodist Church.

# BODY LANGUAGE



*The very same word used by medical professionals to recount the medical history of our bodies was the word used at the Communion Table to recount the holy history of Christ, his ministry, death, and resurrection, which includes his actions and words of institution at the table in the Upper Room: “Take and eat, this is my body, which is given for you.” Photo by Pegah Sharifi (Pexels).*

**By Jessica LaGrone**

The first paying job I ever held was as a Health Aide in a doctor’s office that primarily treated patients and families who were unable to pay for medical care. I wasn’t qualified to do much in the way of real medicine, so one of my main jobs was to call patients in from the waiting room, to take their height and weight and blood pressure, and then to ask them

a set of questions to obtain a medical history known as the anamnesis.

Most of us have been through this process so many times that we might be able to reconstruct the questions off the top of our heads:

- What brings you in today?
- How are you feeling?

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The very same word used by medical professionals to recount the medical history of our bodies was the word used at the Communion Table to recount the holy history of Christ, his ministry, death, and resurrection, which includes his actions and words of institution at the table in the Upper Room: “Take and eat, this is my body, which is given for you.”

- Where does it hurt?
- How long have you felt this way?

An anamnesis includes not only our immediate symptoms, but also our family medical history, allergies, questions about alcohol and drug usage and risk-associated behaviors. The result, recorded in a medical chart, sounds a little like a story, a little like a puzzle, a little like a problem to be solved.

But it’s also vitally important to remember that behind each anamnesis is a person, that the symptoms described are not disembodied, but belong to a living soul whose experience of that story feels very, very personal. Can you imagine anything more intimate than the things you experience happening within your own body?

*Anamnesis* is a Greek word that means “a calling to mind,” or “a remembrance.”

It’s a calling to remember — here specifically a remembrance or a recalling of the experience of one body. But it’s also the medical history going even farther back than that person’s own medical memory.

When I had the job of collecting an anamnesis from each patient I was not yet “in ministry,” but let me tell you that hearing the story of the body feels like holy work. It feels a little like being a priest: hearing confession and helping someone enter into healing.

Years later I found myself on one of those God-prescribed U-turns and began to realize that my calling was not medicine but ministry. One day I was sitting in a seminary

class learning about the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion when the professor began recounting the historic names of the different parts of the eucharistic liturgy: Confession, Absolution, Sursum Corda, Sanctus, Anamnesis, Mysterion, Epiclesis.

I loved learning all of the mysterious-sounding words, but one of them in particular stood out to me. Anamnesis: The remembrance, reenactment, and participation in the history of the Body.

The very same word used by medical professionals to recount the medical history of our bodies was the word used at the Communion Table to recount the holy history of Christ, his ministry, death, and resurrection, which includes his actions and words of institution at the table in the Upper Room: “Take and eat, this is my body, which is given for you.”

I felt like pausing for a moment to send a quick message to my dad, who once told me I was throwing away an undergraduate degree in premedical biology to go into ministry. I thought about telling him: It turns out, they’re basically the same thing! (Aside from the earning potential, anyway.)

Just like an anamnesis in a medical chart follows the journey of a body, an anamnesis at the Table describes the journey of Christ’s body. A holy history of how Christ came to live and die and rise again for us. An anamnesis of love.

In a passage from the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes a shocking claim: “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (I Corinthians 12:27).

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Here Christ is saying: *That's how closely I relate to you, those who believe in me, who follow me. You are my body. You are the way I long to physically and outwardly express my thoughts, my will, my impulses. When I long to touch the world, I touch it through you. When I pour out resources, I do it through you.*

I can't imagine a way of addressing someone in any more intimate way than referring to them as one's own body. Can you?

Nothing is more intimate for us than the experience of our bodies. Our bodies are responsible for all of our input and output to the world around us. They move at our slightest impulse. They provide contact with the world through our senses. Our bodies are both the way we receive input from the world around us, and the way we move outwardly to impact the world around us.

Here Christ is saying: *That's how closely I relate to you, those who believe in me, who follow me. You are my body. You are the way I long to physically and outwardly express my thoughts, my will, my impulses. When I long to touch the world, I touch it through you. When I pour out resources, I do it through you. When I want to share my joy and celebration at the good world I have made, I want to experience and express that through you, my body.*

Back in the doctor's office where I worked, our storeroom held shelves and shelves of medical charts containing the stories of each patient's symptoms, subsequent diagnoses, and treatments. Some patients had charts so thick that we filled them and had to open up a second chart, and a third, and more, just to hold their story.

Imagine how thick a medical chart would be for a 100-year-old patient. What if a patient could be more than a millennium old? Two millennia old? How long would their story stretch? Imagine, if you will, that patient's anamnesis:

The patient is a 2000-year-old who presents with both acute pain and rampant disease, but also a remarkable capacity for healing and resilience. She has been through a multitude of cancers, amputations, and treatments, but also astonishing recoveries.

Her greatest scars include the Crusades, her silence during the Holocaust, her complicities to slavery and injustice and abuse. Some of these diseases are so disfiguring those closest to her would say she doesn't even look like herself.

She has been through many treatments, recoveries, and regenerations, often stirring from the point of near death. Sometimes it seems that she is in a coma, or on life support, but that's usually when she is revived somewhere it is least expected.

Without her, our laws would have no foundation, our societies would lack moral guidance, purpose, and hope. Without her we would miss the depths of compassion brought through her works in hospitals and schools and missions. Through her diseases have been cured, orphans taken in and raised. Countless lonely people in her have found family and purpose and strength.

Because this body is always shifting and growing, it's difficult to find ways to describe her physical anatomy. What exactly is her height, weight, mass? Is her temperature hot or cold or lukewarm? Is her heartbeat racing or slowed to a flat line?

It's hard to say what should go in her chart under physical characteristics. Is she a tiny country church up on a hill or a mega-church auditorium? Is she shouting or meditating,



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dancing or repeating liturgy? Is she gathered under trees, in tents, in cathedrals or auditoriums, at schools or in homes? Is she in schism or in unity? Marching in protest or in bowing in deep contemplative silence?

When we try to picture her some of our feelings are warm and nostalgic, others are pockmarked with trauma or pain. “Church hurt” is a diagnosis repeated all too often these days. Being part of a body can be both painful and healing. When a physical body has encountered an illness or pathogen, it develops antibodies that are specifically targeted, specifically shaped, to take down those challenges the next time it faces them. It’s the reason I won’t have chicken pox again — my body still carries the antibodies it made when I was nine.

One of the miraculous things about being a member of a body that has existed over 2000 years is that there is very little we can experience today that it hasn’t gone through in some way before. If we are paying attention to the incredible connectivity to the history of this body, we may find many of our diagnoses are not new at all. If we search our chart we may also find treatments there that help.

Scripture can inoculate us against individualism. The Psalms can give us a booster of lament and praise and anger and repentance and joy. Liturgy and history swirl within us, bringing nourishment and reminders that this is not the first time the church has faced challenges.

Church history carries in its bloodstream stories like Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s, who knew the Church during some of her darkest days of sickness. Surrounded by evidence of disease, he still worked to build a new kind of Church that stood on conviction, even when it meant losing his own life to save hers.

Perhaps when we encounter the dizzying effects of nationalism, or the painful symptoms of tyrants and conflicts and wars, pieces of the past will rush at us like white blood cells ready to fight again the very things that threatened before and threaten again.

In the last few years it seems like story after story has broken with news of leaders of the church inflicting harm on the body through misconduct and abuse.

Recently when one of these horrifying scandals broke, a

preacher close to the events used his platform to offer those at the center of pain the metaphor from scripture of Lot’s wife, telling those facing a church torn apart by abuse not to turn back, not to dwell on the past, but to continue moving forward in faith.

Whatever his intentions, many heard it as a call not to reveal or process the wounds laid bare by the scandal that had broken only days before. Unfortunately, his message brought more pain to those already hurting. It was heard as a call to silence the heartbroken rather than facing an honest and open counting of the cost, lest the Church be hurt by the stories that might be told.

If I learned anything in the patient intake room long ago, it’s that the telling of the story of pain is part of the healing. Until the body bears witness, tells its whole story of hurt and grief, there is no chance for true healing. That’s what an anamnesis is — to tell the story of the body so that help and healing and intervention can rush in to the areas that need it the most.

To tell the truth is the beginning of getting the help we need. But to hide a wound means risking that it will fester to the point of infection, dismemberment and ultimately loss. If we want to heal, we will tell the stories of the body, even those that make us flinch.

I sometimes talk to young people who have experienced so much pain as they’ve witnessed the flaws of the Church that it makes them want to withdraw into a little corner of the faith. They haven’t given up on Jesus, just the people with the keys to his house.

Sometimes they wonder if they could leave all the trappings behind and start over. As one of them told me recently: “I don’t know if I can bear the Church, but I think I could do just Jesus and me and a few friends.”

“Well,” I said, “then you’ve just started the Church all over again!”

For those who want to authentically follow Jesus, amputation is not an option. We can’t do it alone. Christians need Christians. Churches need churches. Our medical history would urge us not to let the moments of struggle drive us away from the place that healing can happen. Amputation has never gone well for the limb.

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“For those who want to authentically follow Jesus, amputation is not an option. We can’t do it alone. Christians need Christians. Churches need churches. Our medical history would urge us not to let the moments of struggle drive us away from the place that healing can happen. Amputation has never gone well for the limb.”

There are no single-celled Christians. No healthy single-celled churches. Bodies need connective tissue to survive.

In Communion, the anamnesis, finds its climax in these words: “On the night he was betrayed and gave himself up for us, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it and said: “This is my body, given for you.”

The same night of deep pain and betrayal was the night when the blessing of the body was offered. This same story of crucifixion is followed by triumph of resurrection. Jesus knows how to sit with a body in pain and suffering. It’s his body after all — both suffering and mended, broken and blessed, all at one table

When my son and my daughter were small, they often had skinned knees and elbows, bruised foreheads and shins. Each night in the bathtub was an anamnesis in and of itself — recounting that day’s bumps and bruises, the most recent wounds of normal childhood play.

Sometimes there was some wound, scabbed over, that would change from night to night, almost as if by magic. “Look mommy,” they sometimes said: “Look! My skinned knee isn’t so bad, my bruise is going away. Why? What happened?”

Who tells a three-year-old about platelets and macrophages and hemoglobin? Who would explain to a preschooler the veritable processional of internal saints streaming to the site of their hurt to bring healing? I would. Because of my dual obsession with medicine and ministry, I did.

And each time we talked about their bodies’ remarkable ability to heal I would also tell them: “God made your body this way! Isn’t that cool? God made your body so that it knows how to heal itself from the inside out.” And sometimes I would even get choked up thinking about these precious bodies, and all the wounds to come, and how God would be there with them for every single one.



After a while, perhaps because I had explained it so often, they just stopped asking. They did what children do: instead of asking the questions, they began to narrate the answers themselves. They would point to a knee or elbow or scab, still hurting but better today than the day before and declare: “Look mommy! God is healing me!”

May it be true of you and me. May it be true of the body itself. Amen.

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Jessica LaGrone is the chaplain at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky.

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# WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO



**By Tammie Grimm**

I require students in my Christian formation classes to read John Wesley's *Character of a Methodist* as their first assignment. I want them to hear from Mr. Wesley himself that though early Methodists of the 18th century were considered particular and peculiar people, they were no more particular or peculiar than the earliest Christian

disciples. Being a Methodist, as Wesley contends, is in fact to be Christian and to live out the Great Commandment — to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength and love their neighbors as themselves. But most of all, I want students to wrestle with the fact that the Christian life is first and foremost about being like Jesus — to grow in Christlike character and not merely do the things that Jesus did.

It is the way of the world to describe our life by what we do. Wesley confronted that reality in writing his tract. Yet, our identity as Christians doesn't stem from the things we do. Rather, our Christian identity is grounded in a loving relationship with God made possible through the grace of Jesus Christ as we live in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. We can't work to earn our place in God's kingdom. It is God's love and grace that accepts us and makes us his children. It is out of his love that we respond. For those claiming a Wesleyan-Methodist heritage, we believe it is the presence of God's grace in our lives that initiates our faithful response to help us demonstrate love for God and neighbor by appropriate word, deed, and action in the world. Our ability to do Christian things flows out of our being Christ followers.

Certainly, there are particular activities Christians do. Whether we consider ourselves Methodists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Pentecostals, or Calvinists (gasp!), Christians are called to demonstrate our love for God and neighbor. And, some of the activities Christians do are peculiar by the world's standards. Wesley and his people were called Methodists because others found them to be peculiar in the regular method by which they disciplined their lives. Not only did they regularly gather together to pray, worship, and study scripture, they sought to relieve the sick and impoverished as well as visit those in prison. Just as early Methodists sought to discipline their lives after Christ's example, we in

the contemporary church, embrace those practices of faith that are consistent and coherent with Christian witness throughout the ages.

It is not uncommon for Christians to engage in classic spiritual disciplines because we are taught it's necessary to do so. We believe these disciplines are good things to do! But, those reasons are not motivation enough keep us going for the long haul.

True inspiration to engage in the spiritual disciplines can only ever be out of loving obedience to God's grace present in our life. No matter how earnest we are about practicing our faith or how well we perform the disciplines, there is simply nothing inherent in the performance of these disciplines themselves that fosters spiritual transformation into Christlikeness. Any growth and maturity in Christ we experience is not and will never be a result of our doing Christian things. God is the one who does the transformative work in us, through the means he chooses.

Thankfully, God is not capricious. He does not dispense grace on a whim. It is the witness of the Christian faith that God uses spiritual disciplines to demonstrate his grace and goodness. The spiritual disciplines we regularly practice out of loving obedience become the means of grace that God uses to mature us further in grace and Christlike character. God's grace does more than inspire us to Christian action: as grace matures in us, it fuels and sustains our continual engagement in the disciplines. We not only act out of Christlike character, the actions become imbued with Christlike character and are a means by which the fruits of the Spirit are known.

Wesley had several purposes for writing *Character of A Methodist*, just as I have reasons for assigning it. Yet for the thrill that it might be to see students of Methodist history catch Wesley sparring with his detractors in his writing, I'm far more grateful when my students recognize Wesley's formational content that speaks across the ages. Christians aren't to be known for what we do, but how we embody the disciplines as a means to demonstrate God's love and grace.

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Tammie Grimm is Associate Professor at Wesley Seminary in Marion, Indiana.

# All out for souls!



*The Church of the Nazarene's M25 Conference.*

**By Steve Hoskins**

Last week I attended the Church of the Nazarene's M25 (Mission 2025) conference in Kansas City, Missouri, with about 4,000 other members of my church. The conference has become a recurring gathering of Nazarenes held between our every four-year General Assembly (a convention when elected representatives from churches around the world get together to do the business of our denomination and elect church leaders to oversee the work of our church) and designed to keep the church inspired and focused as it goes about the task of winning the world to saving faith in Jesus

Christ.

The crowd was a good cross-section of a church that numbers about 2.7 million members and over 30,000 churches in 165 countries across the globe. The conference was a three-day meeting with large worship gatherings, mega-seminars, regular seminars, and a good number of exhibitors from denominational ministries and Nazarene partners designed to promote a renewed commitment to the task of evangelism among us.

I spoke to 56 of my former students who reminded me that

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“It has been an apparent fact that for some time we have been reaching few new people in our revival meetings. We need a revival! ... Primarily, we need a revival among all of us: superintendents, general church executives, our college men, our evangelists, our pastors, our missionaries — all of us need to have a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us.”

I have grown old and a number of friends and folks I sat in classes with during my undergraduate and seminary days who were happy to be old with me. It was a fun gathering.

That the Church of the Nazarene is in need of a consistent and continual renewed commitment to evangelism is not something new nor is it germane only to our denomination. The M25 conference is the continuation of a series of mid-quadrannium conferences on evangelism that began in 1947 as we entered our fourth decade of existence. The ‘hot holiness’ days of our infancy and continual revivals had begun to fade and we were settling in to the reality of being an ‘organized’ church complete with assigned budgets, denominational initiatives, Sunday school contests, and some real success in creating a nation-wide, international holiness church with a growing cloud of administrative tasks.

In the mid-40s we were called to an “All Out For Souls” evangelistic renewal in a sermon by J.B. Chapman, a denominational General Superintendent, who laid on the pulpit as he preached, beating the drum and crying out for renewal. His words struck a chord. That “All Out For Souls” sermon resulted in “The Mid-Century Crusade for Souls” (think Billy Graham revivals in the early years), an eight year denomination-wide emphasis on soul-winning evangelism with revivals in churches, tents and radio airwaves, the creation of Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City to train evangelistic pastors, and the Evangelism Conference (today’s Mission conferences) which held its first event on

the campus of the seminary with a slate of preachers and papers aimed at bringing renewal to a denomination that had begun to sense receding waters in both membership gains and souls saved at revival altars.

At the conference D. Shelby Corlett, who had just finished a lengthy term as editor of the denomination’s magazine, *The Herald of Holiness*, and was headed back to pastoral ministry to join the effort put it bluntly: “It has been an apparent fact that for some time we have been reaching few new people in our revival meetings. We need a revival! ... Primarily, we need a revival among all of us: superintendents, general church executives, our college men, our evangelists, our pastors, our missionaries — all of us need to have a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon us.” And so it continues.

The Church of the Nazarene is part of the Holiness Movement wing of the pan-Methodist family history, begun out of a merger of Holiness Movements and churches in 1907-1908 when the word Nazarene was code for “Angry Methodist.” Groups from different regions of the United States, almost all the children of the Methodist Church and born out of the holiness revival fires of the National Holiness Association of the late nineteenth century came together to create a new denomination in the new century.

The vision of its founding leader, Phineas Franklin Bresee, who in 1907-08 had grown old after a long and fairly successful career as a Methodist minister and regular delegate to the Methodist General Conference, started

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## Phineas Bresee's church chose its name to identify with "Jesus, the lowly Nazarene," and shot its arrows at the goal of the Methodist "preferential option for the poor" in preaching the gospel and dressing like Salvation Army officers, without the marks and colors of the Army.

the Church of the Nazarene in Los Angeles in 1895 to do ministry to the poor in downtown urban centers and bring revival to regularly scheduled church services.

Bresee's church had as many as seven services on a Sunday including an evening "Glory Room Prayer Service" where the sanctified prayed until the glory of God filled the room no matter how long it took. It held three services throughout the week that featured a Wednesday night prayer meeting, a Youth Evangelism service, and a Tuesday afternoon meeting for the "Promotion of Holiness" just like Phoebe Palmer.

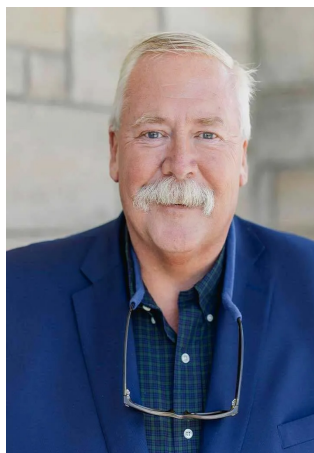
Bresee's church chose its name to identify with "Jesus, the lowly Nazarene," and shot its arrows at the goal of the Methodist "preferential option for the poor" in preaching the gospel and dressing like Salvation Army officers, men and women alike, without the marks and colors of the Army on their shoulder pads and suit coats.

By the time of the merger, Bresee's church had created a network of churches on the railroads of the West Coast that stretched all the way to Seattle ministering to the poor and often disenfranchised. Holiness Churches, evangelistic associations, and missions from the east coast, Texas, and some scattered throughout the great expanse of the United States with a similar vision joined the Nazarenes from California and brought with them even larger dreams of doing the same thing in missionary work around the world. (The title of the great Timothy Smith's book accounting of that drama from the early days, *Called Unto Holiness*,

captures the mergers and events well and you can find a good history there.)

As I wandered the hallways of the convention center in Kansas City during M25, my radar kicked in. As a historian, I work with two things: time and dead Nazarenes. Time is always interesting not only as a reminder of the past, but, as Augustine says in his *Confessions*, the ways that God has

always drawn our attention back to his memories and his intentions for our future. The times in which we live are in no less need of this reminder than we were when the Evangelism Conferences started in 1947.



This may be news to some of you in the broader pan-Methodist family, but occasionally there is trouble in churches. Mine is no different. Perhaps what I saw

in Kansas City was a mirage or maybe it was a small oasis in what has been a difficult desert. Navigating the crowd at M25, I did not see any MAGA hats or "Bring Back Joe" T-shirts. I did not hear anyone preaching (in front of a crowd or in the hallways) a political agenda. Hopefully, we are showing signs of getting past the divisiveness of recent days.

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As a historian, you are always aware that in history two things happen: Things get better and things get worse and almost always at the same time. The Church of the Nazarene's M25 conference is proof of this. Christians still need stories from the past to find inspiration for the future. We do need to have a good dialogue, Platonic style, about the definition of Evangelism and how that includes words like revival, compassion, and mission(ary).

As to dead Nazarenes, well there were a few there. I believe I have the best job in the church because working with dead Nazarenes is much easier than working with living ones. The dead have less to prove and let their work and the words stand as their testimony. I was there to be a part of a series of workshops on the history of Nazarene evangelism and how my church has done evangelism in its storied past.

I reminded the folks that there was a time in 1930 when Los Angeles First Church, Bresee's Church, put a metal sign on the street by the door of the church that simply read "War Declared on Hell." I showed a church fan from Nashville, Tennessee, First Church that asked the people in the pews to write down the names of unsaved people and backsliders on the back of the fan along with their names and addresses so we could go and seek them out. Some of my history colleagues such as Jim Fitzgerald and Ryan Giffin reminded us that church bulletins used to be a great evangelistic tool and the constant reminder of the urgent task of winning to Christ those who do not yet know him as Savior and Lord.

As a historian, you are always aware that in history two things happen: Things get better and things get worse and almost always at the same time. The Church of the Nazarene's M25 conference is proof of this. Christians still

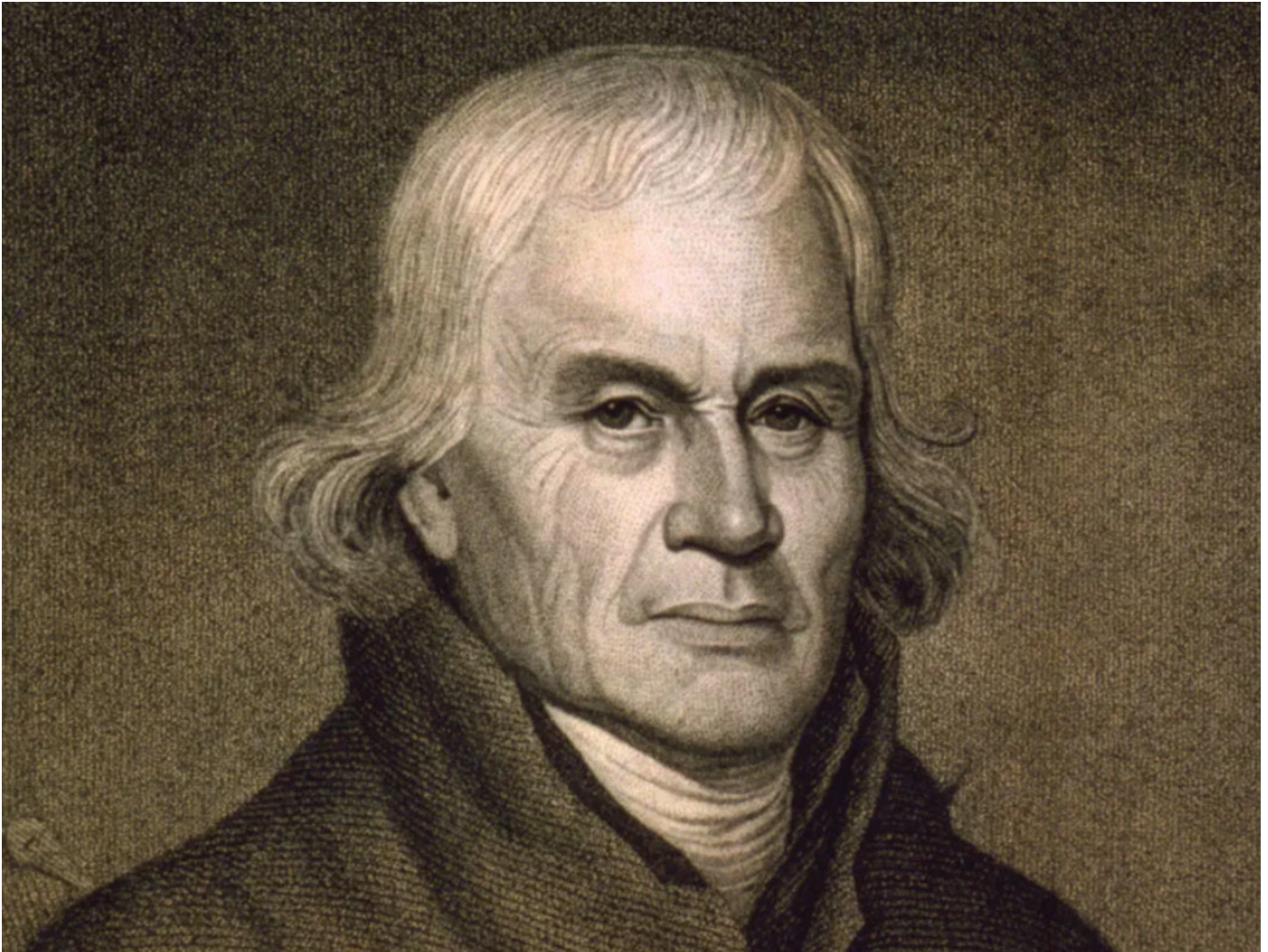
need stories from the past to find inspiration for the future. We do need to have a good dialogue, Platonic style, about the definition of Evangelism and how that includes words like revival, compassion, and mission(ary). We need to think long and hard about why and how revival meetings were the key to evangelism and may need to be a part of our future. We need, as the Wesleyan Keith Drury of blessed memory, told us to figure out "the main thing" and be sure it remains so. All of this is key for the Church of the Nazarene and all of us who are working together with a Wesleyan Methodist witness for Jesus Christ in these days.

So let us give thanks as we turn our face toward the sun of a brighter tomorrow. Let us accept that our history is not the past, as much fun as that was, but that history, our history and our efforts at the tasks God is giving us to do like evangelizing the world for Christ's sake, history is a creation of things out of our past of life with the living God designed to be a roadmap to a better future. Events like M25 are signposts along the way. Our history has much to teach us. All we have to do is pay attention.

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# RECURRING PATTERNS & UNHEEDED WARNINGS



*Francis Asbury, engraving by Benjamin Tanner, 1814.* Asbury, along with Thomas Coke, initiated a new organization, the Methodist Episcopal Church.

**By James R. Thobaben**

Humans see patterns. It is not enough to see facts, that is, bits of information that correspond to the world around us. It is also necessary to have knowledge, that is an understanding of how those facts fit together. Indeed, to live and thrive, we must also see patterns.

Still, sometimes, we perceive and/or describe patterns incorrectly. This is especially true of historical patterns. There really are patterns that exist and repeat. This is even true about the little corner of humanity describable as Wesleyan-Methodism. Patterns exist. Tendencies are discernable. Probabilities are evident.

One of the most helpful schemas for understanding the



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Modyfying the terms and definitions of the church-sect model just a bit to fit more contemporary language and circumstances, once can divide up Christian Protestant ecclesial organizations using four patterns; a state-approved church, a sect, a routinized denomination; an assoction of syncretistic individuals.”

history of Methodism is that of Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) as modified by H.R. Niebuhr (1894-1962). Troeltsch's theology is not of very much value to orthodox/orthopraxic believers, but his sociology is. Troeltsch developed the 'church-sect' model which was later supplemented by H. Richard Niebuhr, another excellent sociologist who also made dubious theological assertions.

Unfortunately, their sociological arguments are more than a bit “academic-y.” And, these are made even more confusing by Troeltsch's and Niebuhr's propensity to use very common words like “church,” “sect,” “mystic,” and “denomination” in very narrow and often counter-intuitive senses. For instance, for them “sect” does not mean a closed group of crazed religious extremists, “mystic” does not refer to one who is lost in the adoration of God, nor does “denomination” mean an organized autonomous branch of Protestantism. Even so, their general description of the patterns of church history are very helpful in understanding Methodism.

So, modifying the terms and definitions of the church-sect model just a bit to fit more contemporary language and circumstances, one can divide up Christian Protes-

tant ecclesial organizations using four patterns:

- **A state-approved church:** An organization that directly cooperates with those holding political and economic power; often the “state-approved church” (in the most extreme form, this is a “theocracy”).
- **A sect:** An organization in tension with the surrounding society's power-holders due to the high membership standards that are contrary to the values of the popular culture or, at least, those holding political authority.
- **A routinized denomination:** An organization with primary focus on maintaining institutional structures and only loose concern with the original mission for which they were created; often there is little expectation of, nor concern for, the local congregation's membership beyond their financial support ( the word “routinized” means “routine-ized” and often implies an unaccountable bureaucracy).
- **An association of syncretistic individuals:** A loosely-affiliated group in which members do not necessarily have common beliefs and behaviors; but tensions are minimized by high individualism and low shared expect-

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tations.

Although these are ‘ideal types’ or generalized patterns, they are helpful for describing the reoccurring organizational patterns in Methodist history and likely where it will go in the future. Knowing this can help the new expressions of Methodism (perhaps) resist such tendencies and maintain fidelity to the God they claim to serve and the mission for which they first came into existence.

### Seeing Historical Patterns in Methodism

At first, Methodist was a “sect” but within a state-sanctioned church. In a sense, it was a Protestant version of a monastic community within Catholicism. The Oxford Methodists (Charles Wesley, William Morgan, and Bob Kirkham, to be joined by John Clayton and George Whitfield, and soon led by Charles’ older brother John) were very strict, holding high membership expectations. They freely chose to be accountable to one another in order to spur one another into living out Christian holiness even while serving as clergy in a broader national church with only nominal membership standards.

Soon enough, these early Methodists — all affiliated with the most elite educational institution in the English-speaking world — began to insist that religious excellence was possible for and expected of all. This claim, and some of their methods (field preaching, visiting the imprisoned, etc.), resulted in significant tension between themselves and ecclesial authorities.

Rejection by their social peers did not impede the early Methodists’ efforts to follow their shared mission of spreading scriptural holiness in “reforming” the nation and the Church (Large Minutes). To the first Methodists this meant offering Christ to any with “a desire to flee the wrath to come” and assisting those born-again to mature in faithfulness. The movement was open to men and women, the rich and the poor, the educated scholar and the day laborer. Methodism grew beyond the founders’ expectations, and it did so quite rapidly. It maintained its sectarian strictness (evidenced by the expulsions noted in the early editions of the “Minutes”), even while remaining within the state church (the Wesleys and several others remained priests).

The development of formal structures was necessary to maintain both the extremely high membership expectations and significant outreach. In this necessary development of structure — this “routinizing” — lay the insidious kernels of the organization’s spiritual decay. The pattern was set.

Methodism and its revivalism first made its way to the colonies of North America through the ministry of Calvinist Methodist George Whitfield (1740), who allied himself with Jonathan Edwards. The former was the key preacher of the Great Awakening, the North American side of the British Evangelical Awakening that in England and Ireland was being led by the Wesleys. Revivalism in the American colonies lost momentum, in part due to limited organizational follow-up, but Methodism itself picked up again in 1760s under the leadership of committed laypersons. Methodism was still a “sect in a state-sanctioned church” with strict small groups maintaining moral and doctrinal standards.

The American Revolution, though, compelled an organizational change. Some Methodists, and a great number of Anglican priests left for Canada or Great Britain. Those remaining concluded they did not need a state church. Still, the sacraments were a means of grace, Methodists believed an ordained ministry was necessary for consecration. American-based ordination would have to be. The circuit preachers could be ordained, and the strict class and band system would then be maintained by North American lay leadership. Francis Asbury, along with Thomas Coke, (recently sent by Wesley) initiated a new organization, the Methodist Episcopal Church, for this purpose. The “sect-in-state-sanctioned-church” had become a “sect.”

High expectations of members (e.g., regular prayer, mutual accountability, attendance upon the sacraments, regular financial support, and active service to the marginal, including explicit opposition to slavery) once again put the group at odds with some of the newly established political, social, and economic authorities. The sect’s leadership accepted such as inevitable. As Wesley

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“Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder [the Methodist from] ‘running the race that is set before him.’ He knows that vice does not lose its nature, though it becomes ever so fashionable...He cannot, therefore, ‘follow’ even ‘a multitude to do evil’” (*Character of a Methodist*)

had several decades earlier noted: “Nor do the customs of the world at all hinder [the Methodist from] ‘running the race that is set before him.’ He knows that vice does not lose its nature, though it becomes ever so fashionable...He cannot, therefore, ‘follow’ even ‘a multitude to do evil’” (*Character of a Methodist*, 1741).

The now unattached sect remained strict for two to three generations. During this time it grew, and grew rapidly (it turns out that people who take Christianity seriously often want to be serious Christians). A huge upswing occurred with the Wilderness Revivals of the first decade of the 19th century (often called the Second Great Awakening, centered at Cane Ridge Meetinghouse in Kentucky). While other congregations were established, it was the strict, revivalist Baptists and even more so Methodists that exploded west of the Appalachians. Wesley instructed the early Methodists to “[g]ain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence in your calling” (*Use of Money*). He also realized, long before those sociological thinkers, that this would lead to increased wealth and status and, perhaps, spiritual problems associated not only with materialism but with social “acceptability.”

“I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out” (“Thoughts on Methodism,” 1787).

By the third and fourth generation Methodists had begun their rise into the new middle class and started

to lose their sectarian mutual accountability. This was evidenced in increasing cultural accommodation. For instance, as Asbury bemoaned:

“My spirit was grieved at the conduct of some Methodists, that hire out slaves at public places to the highest bidder, to cut, skin, and starve them; I think such members ought to be dealt with: on the side of oppressors there is law and power, but where is justice and mercy to the poor slaves? what eye will pity, what hand will help, or ear listen to their distresses? I will try if words can be like drawn swords, to pierce the hearts of the owners.” (*The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815* (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821), 2:273)

Along with their economic success and a desire for social acceptance came what could only be called an abomination: the toleration of chattel slavery amongst a wide swath of the membership. The first Book of Discipline (1785) of the Methodist Episcopal Church had required that, “unless they buy them on purpose to free them,” anyone dealing in the trafficking of slaves was, “immediately to be expelled.” Sadly, by the third decade of the 19th century, a bishop owning slaves was tolerated by far too many. Perhaps this was inevitable due to the disregard some fifty years earlier of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones and perhaps 40 laypersons.

The 1830’s toleration of slavery was not the cause, but the proof that Methodism had moved from being a “sect-within-a-state-sanctioned church” through being an independent “sect” to become a “routinized denomination.” Though a debate raged, some denominational

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elites made excuses for the tacit (or sometimes explicit) approval of the societal convention. Schisms over the moral and doctrinal compromise had already occurred and schism after schism would follow.

Methodism's willing compromise with the culture seemed to be the inevitable, a sociological pattern. Methodists had become economically successful, the mutual accountability of the band system had gone into decline, and bishops had found pleasure hobnobbing with cultural elites. Methodism did continue to grow in numbers, but also in the social acceptability that coincided with cultural accommodation, in that case over the toleration of slavery.

Schisms over the perceived abandonment of early Methodism's sectarian fervor occurred. Sometimes this led to a belligerent legalism with the split-off organizations maintaining a small, highly sectarian membership. There is no reason to rehearse all of Methodist history. The pattern is one that has obviously recurred. Sectarian purity with high membership expectations is modified, rightly or wrongly, for more effective outreach. The organizational structures develop with leadership seeking social approval, and then routinize into unaccountable bureaucracies. Schism after schism occurs in the hope of a "primitive," Scriptural purity, but then the pattern is reiterated by the third or fourth generation.

Finally, the Methodist movement made it to the late 20th century. In Britain, the pattern of this stage was marked by innumerable abandoned Methodist buildings. In Canada and Australia, Methodism was absorbed into "united" churches, seemingly gaining nothing but more managerial positions. In the U.S. the "mainline" churches — including the United Methodist — were no longer "main." The oldline denominations, as well as many evangelical ones as well, were deemed mediocre in fulfilling their missions, at best.

Completing the sociological pattern, many of those oldline congregations had become nothing but "associations of syncretistic individuals." The oldline churches were often made up of people with a shared appreciation for potlucks but having little else in common. Certainly, the "average Methodist congregation" was not theologically or morally consistent. Accountability on personal purity and doctrine for the laity (and, arguably for the clergy

and bureaucrats) was gone. "Social holiness," a term referring to mutual accountability on core doctrine and morality, had come to mean agreement with the bureaucracy's social agenda.

The historical pattern has been reiterated time after time. Dynamic reformers coalesce in effort to reinvigorate their community. Keeping their original fervor and strictness, they start to grow. They are respected by some for their integrity and rejected by others for their legalism. Small reform groups form internally and a few split off. Paradoxically, the new main body's social acceptance so compromises its character that it becomes unappealing, and it starts a slow decline. The dissipation is slow at first, because the group has significant social and economic capital which continue to fund the managerial level of the organization.

### **Can Patterns of Decay Be Resisted?**

Does this repeated pattern indicate a sort of sociological predestination? No, but, so what?

- **What will happen to the UM Church?** In all likelihood, decline continues, especially overseas. Eventually, that will stabilize, perhaps with the societal presence of the UMC being similar to that of the UCC or the PCUSA. A few congregations may remain strong or even grow in small towns or in urban enclaves. Denominational resources that remain will be devoted to organizational maintenance.

Internationally, the UMC brand has not been as damaged as in the US, but it is becoming so. These churches will either decline or split off (the trust clause will be less effectual, though the US funding will remain enticing to bishops and bureaucrats). Lost members will go to growing neo-Pentecostal denominations or become postmodernist non-participants. Some congregations and conferences may become GMC or go autonomous.

There is some hope for those individual UMC congregations that want to remain true to that original mission of the Oxford Methodists. They can survive and thrive, but only to the extent that they operate distinctly from the central administration. Unfortunately, toleration of such by those with organizational authority is unlikely.

- **What happens to the GMC?** It may become a slightly more conservative version of the UMC. It is likely that

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rules will quickly arise that limit significant experimentation in order to promote the maintenance of the organization.

Fortunately, this process of routinization is currently being delayed by the stripping down to basics in the new Discipline. Still, it is important that the GMC not confuse sectarian theological and moral conservatism with political and cultural conservatism. The goal cannot be to replicate ideals of post-WWII suburban Methodism. If the GMC establishes mechanisms and requirements for mutual accountability for both personal purity and social service, and if it allows experimentations in ministry forms, then it may actually flourish, at least for three or even four generations.

• **What happens with the small congregations that have gone independent?** They likely become something akin to independent Baptist churches that happen to allow infant baptism. Though there will be exceptions, most will likely function as “family chapels” with strong pastoral care but little concern beyond the walls, so to speak.

• **And, what happens with the Foundry Network, the “Collegiate” body, and other very large churches that are not formally affiliating with others?** Ironically, as with the very small independents, the lack of accountability beyond the organization may lead to institutional inbreeding. Though their being better at adopting techniques from the popular culture will keep their numbers up at first, they will grow increasingly dependent on the personal charisma of their leadership and an erroneous belief in their own irreplaceability or the spiritual exceptionalism.

The hope for such is that those individual leaders will recognize their need to be accountable, for as Wesley put it “there is no holiness but social holiness.” This includes for those in authority. These churches must demonstrate a genuine willingness to cooperate in ministries, a willingness to participate in outside educational endeavors, and — most importantly — a willingness to be answerable to someone outside the formal congregational structures. Still, if those leaders can direct the church toward expectations of purity (not just numerical growth) and service outreach (not just seeking popularity), then

much good ministry can occur (at least until a problematic leader arises).

It is hard to believe any of these groups remaining in or coming out of the UMC will continue to spiritually thrive in their current forms for more than three generations. This is not cynicism, but an acknowledgement that patterns are called patterns because they recur, over and over.

So, in the future, will any offer good ministry, meaning serving the marginal in the Name of our Lord and preaching the Good News to those needing salvation, be offered? Yes, of course, for the glory of God cannot be stopped by human failure. And, there have recently been small expressions of renewal. Perhaps more are coming.

For Methodists to be part, though, they will have to figure out new ways to reiterate the original mission of Methodism and the original mission of the Church. Breaking patterns is hard. And, my suspicion is that these patterns will be sadly replicated.



So, are these “new expressions” following the UMC schism all doomed by a sort of sociological predestination? No. This pattern of rise and decline can be resisted, but I do not see it happening. Then again, I could be wrong.

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# Seven Next Steps for the Global Methodist Church



*The first General Conference of the Global Methodist Church was held in Costa Rica in 2024. Photo by Steve Beard.*

**By Timothy C. Tennent**

Most of us are familiar with the ancient Egyptian myth of the Phoenix who dies in the ashes, but rises again with renewed life. As Christians, this myth became reality in the person of Jesus Christ who died and rose bodily again in real history. Resurrection is at the heart of our identity as Christians.

The Global Methodist Church has arisen out of the ashes of decades of struggle for historic orthodoxy and faithful scriptural witness to our Wesleyan heritage. In May of 2022, the Global Methodist Church rose out of the ashes and in September of 2024 held their first General Conference. I have had the privilege of traveling across the country and around the world and speaking firsthand with many pastors and lay leaders during the disaffiliation process.

Despite the arduous process of disaffiliation, the optimism

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“Now is the time to renew our commitment to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have no memory of the struggles which gave birth to a new denomination.”

and excitement about this new chapter for the “people called Methodist” is palpable. There is a powerful sense that a new day is dawning for us! The question is, “What Now?” What should be the top priorities and defining pathways that will help to set the DNA of the Global Methodist Church for decades to come? I suggest that we consider the next seven steps.

#### **Disaffiliation to Affiliation**

First, we must shift from the “disaffiliation” process to the “affiliation” process. The last few years witnessed around 20 percent of United Methodist churches voting to disaffiliate. This resulted in over 4,500 congregations uniting with the GMC, bringing our membership to over 650,000 members! This means that the GMC is already larger than many of the smaller Wesleyan denominations. However, despite that remarkable initial surge in membership, there are still over 3,000 congregations who successfully disaffiliated, but who have not yet united with the GMC or any other denomination. If those congregations were to be brought into the GMC, then we would have over one million members. There needs to be a concerted effort to demonstrate the value of our connectional system and why we are better together.

While the GMC is structured to empower the local church as the locus of ministry, the wider denomination can provide important support structures, discipleship materials, accountability, and sharing of best practices which can help the denomination as a whole to thrive. We cannot let the dysfunction of the UMC structures we once suffered under lead us to distrust the new faithful leaders God has raised up in the GMC. Let’s seize the opportunity to collaborate and rebuild trust in the connectional system which has historically served us so

well. When functioning well it will allow the church to be guided doctrinally and missionally in fruitful and faithful ways.

We must also not neglect the thousands of men and women in congregations who held a vote for disaffiliation but were not able to reach the 2/3 vote required to disaffiliate. Many of those departing members are finding their way into GMC churches, but others have left their congregations and not yet found any church home. This is the best time to complete the affiliation process by also reaching out to these brothers and sisters, bringing them into new, more orthodox fellowships.

#### **Evangelism and Church Planting**

Second, we must have a renewed emphasis on evangelism and church planting. The last few years have rightly focused on disaffiliation and bringing thousands of existing congregations into the GMC fold. However, now is the time to renew our commitment to sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with those who have no memory of the struggles which gave birth to a new denomination. The percentage of people in N. America who identify as religious “nones” has risen in my lifetime from around two percent of the population to a peak in 2022 at an astonishing 28 percent. This dramatic rise has mostly been among the younger generations – millennials (born 1981-1996) and Gen Z (born 1996-2012). Yet, beginning in 2023 this number has begun to drop for the first time in over twenty years. This reflects a growing dissatisfaction among young people, including record levels of isolation, depression, anxiety and loss of meaning. This has, in turn, created a new openness to the power of the gospel and having an authentic encounter with the risen Lord.

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# The Methodists were a renewal movement out of the Anglican church, and now there are over 80 distinct Wesleyan denominations. There are around 500 new denominations started every year.

We saw this firsthand during the 2023 outpouring at Asbury University and Seminary. During those 16 days we saw thousands of young people encountering Christ in fresh ways. Since that time, this awakening has continued to spread across the nation and the world. The church must not lose this opportunity to bear witness to Christ in our day, especially among the young adults of our nation. The GMC mission statement calls us to “witness boldly.” This will not happen without establishing a spiritual culture of witnessing in the GMC. When I was a pastor, I took time to train our lay people how to witness for Christ. Our evangelism strategy cannot be merely hoping people in our community will visit our church. There must be a commitment to intentionally reach out to those who otherwise would never set foot in our churches.

Another area for effective church planting is among the emerging immigrant populations in N. America. The fastest growing churches in N. America are the immigrant churches. Extending hospitality to these groups, as well as offering language specific services must be central to our mission. We need to start new congregations with services in Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, and Portuguese in particular (the ethnic groups vary based on where you live in the country). Furthermore, there are over one million new homes built in the USA every year, and a half a million new apartments. These new housing developments are wonderful opportunities for evangelism and starting new churches. The Alpha Course is a series of conversations, discussions and video presentations in a relaxed setting (often over a meal) which has proved to be one of the most effective evangelisms tools for a secular society such as ours.

## **Embracing Networks**

Third, the Global Methodist Church must actively engage in a range of new networks that will connect us to the wider Body of Christ. The 16th century gave birth to the proliferation of denominations in the world-wide Protestant movement. When the Reformation spawned three distinct movements (Anglican, Reformed and Lutheran), it provided clear boundaries of belonging within very large groupings of Christians, spanning entire countries or regions. However, as time progressed the number of denominations grew dramatically.

The Methodists, for example, were a renewal movement out of the Anglican church, and now there are over 80 distinct Wesleyan denominations. The number of global denominations of all kinds now exceeds 45,000. The vast majority of these new denominations have emerged since 1970. There are around 500 new denominations started every year around the world. The Global Methodist Church is one of these. We must see that the Protestant and independent churches are becoming segmented into smaller and smaller groupings of Christians. While denominations can help define our identity as Christians, they can also silo us off from other Christians.

If our view of the church only reaches the horizon of our particular denomination, we will experience the church in a narrow, almost tribal way. However, there are amazing things happening all across the wider church which we can learn from. We need to model much greater collaboration with other evangelical movements around the world. This mostly happens through our participation in networks which share ideas and insights in areas which





*The United Methodist Church's top legislative body, which usually convenes every four years, gathered in Tampa, Florida, in April/May 2012. Photo by Steve Beard.*

are of interest to all Christians.

There are trans-denominational networks dedicated to areas as diverse as community outreach, evangelism, worship design, youth ministry, older adult ministries, missions, and so forth.

The Global Methodist church must become a highly networked church which works collaboratively across the larger evangelical church for more effective witness and service for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Denominations are useful for defining theology and producing structural support for ministry, but the actual work of ministry will be greatly enhanced through our participation in networks. I have already mentioned the importance of the Alpha Course network which is helping to equip churches all over the world in evangelism. Marriage Encounter a network which has helped millions

of marriages grow stronger. The Lausanne movement is the largest global network for empowering the church for missions. Pastors and churches throughout the GMC should be deeply networked within the Lausanne movement. These large networks will be crucial for the vibrancy of the GMC.

### **World Missions**

Fourth, the Global Methodist Church must help to foster a strategy to mobilize and deploy hundreds of Christians to bring the gospel to those who have not heard. In recent decades, the United Methodist Church was not a significant contributor to bringing the gospel to those who have not yet heard.

The GMC must re-engage the world with a vibrant global witness. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, he called us to preach the gospel and to disciple "all nations." He did not use the word for nation as we often use it today

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“When I was President of Asbury Theological Seminary, I used to regularly exhort our students to go to the town mayor or county officials where they would be located and ask what keeps them awake at night. Once you learn what the biggest problems are in your community, then organize your church to address that need.

which refers to political countries. Instead, he called us to bring the gospel to every people-group in the world. There are 195 political countries in the world, but there are 17,466 distinct people-groups in the world. Of those, there remain 7,400 people groups with no church. In addition, there are 1,000 languages which still do not have a single verse of Scripture in their tongue. It is the responsibility of all churches to give attention to this great need.

This is where a denomination can help foster a deep awareness of the global need for evangelism and church planting by helping to network with mission agencies like TMS Global or OMS to bring the gospel to the hundreds of people-groups who otherwise would not hear the gospel.

Our daughter Bethany has spent the last fifteen years doing church planting and Bible translation among the Alagwa in Tanzania. They are one of those 7,400 who had no access to the gospel until she and her team arrived fifteen years ago. Today, a small church has been planted and a good portion of the New Testament has been translated into their language for the first time. The GMC must be reinvented as a mission sending church.

#### **Ministries of compassion and hope**

Fifth, the Global Methodist Church must connect with the local communities to be a shining light of hope and grace for those who are hurting and in need of the ministry of the church. The Scriptures have several

summary statements which describe the ministry of Jesus around preaching, teaching and healing (Matt. 4:23, 9:35). This is a powerful reminder that we should not only be preaching and teaching the gospel, but we should also be bringing healing to our communities, which itself is a powerful testimony to the inbreaking of the kingdom of God.

When I was President of Asbury Theological Seminary, I used to regularly exhort our students to go to the town mayor or county officials where they would be located and ask what keeps them awake at night. Once you learn what the biggest problems are in your community, then organize your church to address that need. It might be homelessness. It might be opioid addictions. It might be hunger or poverty. It might be catastrophic levels of anxiety and depression. Whatever needs are in your community, your church should be seen as an integral part of the solution.

The mission statement of the GMC calls for us to “love extravagantly.” So, let’s build that into our founding identity as a church! Every new GMC church should take time to build relationships with those in their community who are vulnerable and living on the margins, as well as those facing acute needs which the power of the gospel addresses.

#### **Biblical Literacy and catechesis**

Sixth, the Global Methodist Church must be committed to the teaching and training ministry of the church. The

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Great Commission commands us to “teach everything he has commanded us.” The American Bible Society conducts an annual survey which asks Christians how often they engage with the Bible. This percentage has been in steady decline for many years. For example, if someone engages with Bible even 3-4 times per year outside of church, they are counted as having “engaged” the Bible. Even with that very low bar, only 53 percent of Christians in 2014 engaged with the Bible 3-4 times per year or more. Today, that percentage has dropped to 39 percent. In fact, this past year, the survey found that 40 percent of all Christians never engage the Bible outside of church. Only 21 percent engaged in the Bible on a weekly or daily basis. The growing biblical illiteracy, even in the church, is astonishing. We must encourage the regular reading of Scripture in our churches. We need a deep commitment to train new believers in the basics of the faith. If we simply encourage a “conversion” experience and regard the rest as optional, we will carry the same lethargy we inherited from the mainline churches into our new church.

Warm heartedness is highly regarded in our churches, and that is a good thing, but we also need people who understand the teachings of Scripture and who can think as well-informed Christians. Formation is a matter of the head as well as the heart.

### **Vibrant Worship**

Finally, the opening phrase of the Global Methodist Church’s mission statement is to “worship passionately.” Worship has always been central to our movement. We should be known first and foremost as a people of worship. John Wesley was known for his commitment to preach, teach, organize and disciple the emerging movement. But we should not forget the ministry of Charles Wesley, whose commitment to hymn writing and worship dramatically influenced the early formation of the Methodist movement during the Great Awakening. It was significant that every delegate at the founding GMC General Conference was gifted with a hymn book, *O For*

*a Heart to Praise My God*, which is a collection of Charles Wesley hymns. It was a reminder of the amazing legacy of theologically solid hymns that have influenced not only Methodism, but much of the global church as well. The hymnal, *Our Great Redeemer’s Praise* was published to coincide with the founding of the GMC in order to establish a solid foundation for worship in our churches. The tension in our day is not the classic tension between “contemporary” and “traditional” worship. Rather, the



tension is between those hymns or choruses which reflect solid theology and those which do not.

We must be ever mindful that the content of our worship is one of the primary ways men and women, young people and children are shaped and formed theologically. The church has historically embraced the

phrase, “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” which loosely translated means, “how we worship is how we believe.” The genius of Methodism was historically rooted in an understanding of this, .and it should not be neglected by the GMC

In conclusion, the future of the GMC is bright. We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help shape and form the DNA of this new denomination. May the Lord bless and guide this new movement for His glory and our good.

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