

The United Methodist Church

Compiled at Kona United Methodist Church

Who is **A United Methodist?**

In the words of John Wesley (1703-1791)

“A Methodist is...one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his mind, and with all his strength.”

A United Methodist is a person who loves God “methodically” or “systematically.”

METHODIST

This is not a name we gave ourselves. John Wesley and others were a part of the Holy Club at Oxford University. They were so organized, so methodical, so disciplined about Bible study, worship, prayer, and helping the poor that others made fun of them: “You’re nothing but a bunch of method-ists!” However, rather than be angry, Wesley and the others simply claimed the name Methodist.

What is **THE United Methodist Church? [History]**

Methodism began as a movement within the Church of England. The Methodist movement was born in England in the 1700s. John Wesley who is the founding father was an ordained Anglican priest. At a prayer meeting in London on May 24, 1738 at Aldersgate, John Wesley’s heart was “strangely warmed”; he felt for the first time that God truly loved him and had forgiven him that led him to become the first teacher of “Methodism.” He encouraged people to discern how they should live out our faith in Christ by looking at four important aspects in developing thoughts on God which is called “**Wesleyan Quadrilateral**”: *Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason.*

WESLEYAN QUADRILATERAL

When discerning (deciding something thoughtfully, carefully, and prayerfully), use these four things to inform your decision and to find confidence that you are walking in the way:

Scripture, Tradition, Experience, and Reason.

After his experience in 1738, Wesley set out with his brother Charles to form societies of “Methodists,” so called because the members followed a daily routine of religious observance and social work. As students at Oxford University, they practiced a disciplined or methodical, approach to Christianity, including both piety (devotion) and social issues [*Scripture Holiness (Personal Piety)& Social Holiness (Social Conscience)*].

JOHN WESLEY’S GENERAL RULES (a.k.a. “3 simple rules for living)

1. Do no harm.
2. Do good.
3. Attend upon the ordinances of God (a.k.a. “Stay in love with God.”)

In 1769 Francis Asbury was one of four Methodist lay preachers sent by John Wesley to America to help spread the revival and organize the movement. He began to preach, to teach, and to organize churches. When the Revolutionary War (1775–1783) broke out, he was the only Methodist preacher to remain in America. Francis Asbury would be active in the American church for the next 40 years and would become one of our first two bishops

After the Revolutionary War, American Methodists wanted to form their own church. John Wesley reluctantly agreed and appointed Thomas Coke to work with Asbury in heading the new church. Coke sailed to America. On Christmas Eve 1784, at the Lovely Lane Meeting House in Baltimore, Maryland, The Methodist Episcopal Church was born. The preachers meeting there chose Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury as bishops; they adopted a Discipline, or a guide to church policies; they ruled that Methodist ministers should not use alcohol; and they took a position against slavery. This first conference in America became known as the “Christmas Conference.”

During the early years, as Methodism was getting organized, there were numerous German-speaking people who were Methodists. Mainly due to language reasons, they did not join The Methodist Episcopal Church. Instead, they formed their own churches: The Evangelical Association and the United Brethren in Christ. Later, these churches united and formed The Evangelical United Brethren (or EUB) Church. In 1968, the EUB and The Methodist Church united. That’s what gives us the word United in our name.



[The Symbol of The United Methodist Church]

The cross and flame form the symbol of The United Methodist Church. The cross reminds us of Christ, who loves us and calls us to serve in his name. The flame represents the coming of the Holy Spirit. It also reminds us of John Wesley’s faith (“a heart strangely warmed”). Having two parts that make up the flame is a reminder of the coming together of two great church traditions- The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church

SAMUEL & SUSANNA WESLEY

John Wesley (1703-1791) and his younger brother Charles (1707-1788) were two of nineteen children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel was a clergyman who served the Epworth parish north of London.

Both Samuel and Susanna began each child’s education when he or she reached the age of five; the training was thorough and demanding. Susanna home-schooled all of her children. Susanna also set aside one hour each week with each child to discuss religious concerns. It was not by accident that John Wesley would later seek Susanna’s judgment before he made decisions that would change the religious life of England and America.

The United Methodist Theology

The theology and practice of United Methodists can be summarized with one word “GRACE.” John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, had a distinctive understanding of God’s saving grace. Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in salvation by grace. He, however, combined these many views in a powerful way which emphasizes “Grace” as a central to our understanding of Christian faith and life.

Grace can be defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. We read in the letter to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The United Methodist heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God’s grace. This incredible grace flows from God’s great love for us. Did you have to memorize John 3:16 in Sunday school when you were a child? There was a good reason. This one verse summarizes the gospel, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” The ability to call to mind God’s love and God’s gift of Jesus Christ is a great resource for theology and faith.

John Wesley described God’s grace as threefold: (1) prevenient grace, (2) justifying grace, and (3) sanctifying grace.

THE WAY OF SALVATION
is discussed as 3 types of grace in the United Methodist tradition.

Prevenient Grace: the grace that is present from the day we are born, always going before us to prepare our lives for the message of Christ’s love for us. We did nothing for it, and the grace is the gift of God’s presence in our lives, preparing us for a life in Christ. (*Prevenient* means “comes before.”)

Justifying Grace: the grace that convicts us and brings us to a place of realization that we need Jesus’ forgiveness and need to be justified, righted with God. It is the grace we receive when we are able to articulate that we are sinners in need of God, when we are able to recognize and follow Jesus. This is a grace we may either accept or reject—we get to choose to live in this gift of grace or not.

Sanctifying Grace: the grace that is with us as we seek to live a life worthy of our faith in God through Christ; the grace that the Holy Spirit uses to nudge us in ways of peace and love for God and neighbor. It is the grace given to live daily into a new way with Christ. It sustains us and enables us to serve. It is the grace that, even though God does not expect us to be perfect, allows us to live righteous lives.

THREE WAYS TO EXPERIENCE GOD

God has revealed himself in three different ways: as *Creator* (green segment), in *Jesus* (red segment), and in the *Holy Spirit* (blue segment).

Each of these three revelations corresponds to a specific way in which we can experience God.

Problems start as soon as we emphasize one of the three “colors” (Gods) and neglect the others.



Too much emphasis of *Creator* over others,
you might become too liberal facing the danger of syncretism.
Too much emphasis of *Jesus* over others,
you might become too evangelical facing the danger of dogmatism.
Too much emphasis of the *Holy Spirit* over others,
you might become too charismatic facing the danger of spiritualism.

*We will only experience greater fruitfulness
if all three dimensions are integrated into our lives in balance.*

The United Methodist Structure

The United Methodist structure and organization began as a means of accomplishing the mission of spreading Scriptural Holiness over the land. John Wesley recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability and developed what he called the “connexion,” which was an interlocking system of classes, societies, and annual conferences. So, the United Methodist Church is a “connectional” church.

No local church is the total body of Christ which means local United Methodist churches are bound together by a common mission and common governance that accomplish reaching out into the world. Connectionalism shows through the clergy appointment system, through the developing of mission and ministry that United Methodists do together, and through giving.

The United Methodist Church has a three-part structure, just as the Federal Government does. We also have a constitution and doctrinal standards that help determine who we are and how we live as United Methodist.

- **EXECUTIVE:** Council of Bishops -> College of Bishops-> Bishop and District Superintendents -> Pastor in Charge
- **LEGISLATIVE:** General Conference -> General Boards and Agencies -> General Commissions and Committees -> Jurisdictional (5) and Central Conference (7) -> Annual Conferences (66) -> District Conference -> Charge Conference (one for every church)

*Kona UMC is in Hawaii District of the California-Pacific Annual Conference in Western Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church.

*General Boards and Agencies & General Commissions and Committees are organized by its function such as General Commission on Archives and History, General Commission on Communication (United Methodist Communications), General Commission on Christian Unity & Interreligious Concerns, United Methodist Publishing House, General Commission on Religion and Race, General Council on Finance and Administration, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, General Board of Discipleship, General Commission on United Methodist Men, General Board of Global Ministries, General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, General Board of Church and Society, and General Commission on Status and Role of Women.

*In 2004, the General Conference created a new structure called *Connectional Table* to guide the work of the church. The Connectional Table, a place for collaboration, conversation and decision, is the first significant restructure for The United Methodist church since 1972. This body oversees

the coordination of mission, ministries and resources across the denomination. The 47 member body consists of equal numbers of lay persons and clergy; female and male, including at least 10 percent youth and young adults; at least 30 percent members of racial-ethnic minority groups, and no fewer than seven members from The United Methodist Church in Europe, Africa and Asia. It also includes bishops and staff executives and officers of denominational agencies. Top executives of the general boards and agencies have the right to speak, but cannot vote.

- **JUDICAL:** Judicial Council interprets the Constitution and rules on the constitutionality of decisions made by the conferences, bishops and so on. Nine persons are elected by General Conference for the judicial tasks.