

United Methodist Beliefs

updated by Pastor Hamill 4-19-09

In general, United Methodists agree on major aspects of theology. Sources for the faith include: *The Bible*, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, and the writings of John Wesley. Those major aspects are listed below.

United Methodists share a common heritage with other Christians:

1. Conviction that God has mercy and love for all people
2. Belief in a triune God. There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.
3. Faith in the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ
4. Celebration of the Sacraments, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. We believe the Sacraments, ordained by Christ, are symbols and pledges of the Christian's profession and of God's love toward us. They are the means of grace by which God works invisibly in us, quickening, strengthening and confirming our faith in him.

The oldest known summary (creed) of belief held by most Christians is captured in the Apostles' Creed.

"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. The third day he arose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father, Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen."

United Methodist Distinctives

1. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Scripture.

United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace. We are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God in our midst whom we trust in life and death.

Tradition.

The story of the church reflects the most basic sense of tradition, the continuing activity of God's Spirit transforming human life. Tradition is the history of that continuing environment of grace in and by which all Christians live, God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ. As such, tradition transcends the story of particular traditions.

Experience.

Some facets of human experience tax our theological understanding. Many of God's people live in terror, hunger, loneliness, and degradation. Everyday experiences of birth and death, of growth and life in the created world, and an awareness of wider social relations also belong to

serious theological reflection. A new awareness of such experiences can inform our appropriation of scriptural truths and sharpen our appreciation of the good news of the kingdom of God.

Reason.

Although we recognize that God's revelation and our experiences of God's grace continually surpass the scope of human language and reason, we also believe that any disciplined theological work calls for the careful use of reason. By reason we read and interpret Scripture. By reason we determine whether our Christian witness is clear. By reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God's action and will.

2. Wesley's Theology of Grace

Grace pervades our understanding of Christian faith and life. By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as "prevenient grace," continues in "justifying grace," and is brought to fruition in "sanctifying grace."

Prevenient grace: bringing us to faith, reaching out and receiving us as we are.

Justifying grace: transforming us, restoring our relationship with God.

Sanctifying grace: nurturing our growth, drawing us toward perfect love and sending us to bear witness to God's love for the world in all that we do.

We believe we are never accounted righteous before God through our works or merit, but that penitent sinners are justified or accounted righteous before God only by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We believe sanctification is the work of God's grace through the Word and the Spirit, by which those who have been born again are cleansed from sin in their thoughts, words and acts, and are enabled to live in accordance with God's will, and to strive for holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

3. Faith and Good Works

We believe good works are the necessary fruits of faith and follow regeneration but they do not have the virtue to remove our sins or to avert divine judgment. We believe good works, pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, spring from a true and living faith, for through and by them faith is made evident.

4. In Unity with All Christians

United Methodists respond to the theological, biblical, and practical mandates for Christian unity by firmly committing ourselves to the cause of Christian unity at local, national, and world levels. We invest ourselves in many ways by which mutual recognition of churches, of members, and of ministries may lead us to sharing in Holy Communion with all of God's people.

In order to accomplish our mission and live our beliefs, there are three key objectives of the church manifest in the New Testament: Service, community and proclamation:

Service - Service provides ministries of outreach to share the love of God which we have been given with others, patterning our lives after the one who came to serve, so that we might be (and help others to be) disciples of Christ.

Community -- Community provides the educational and supportive activities necessary to incorporate individuals into the Body of Christ. We are to be inclusive, growing in the sense of community, striving to live our lives in a Christ-like manner so that we may become whole together.

Proclamation - Proclamation provides powerful worship which incorporates the historic Wesleyan emphases of Scripture, reason, tradition and the experience of grace. We are to grow in grace so that we might open ourselves to the full presence and power of the living God.

5. The Doctrine of Assurance

For many of Wesley's early years, he did not feel certain of his own salvation. His church (Anglican Church of England) did not teach that you could have "assurance." Through his searching, however, he did have an experience through which he received the "assurance" that his sins were forgiven and that he was indeed a God's child. Thereafter, he preached (and taught) that every Christian could (and should) sense God's assurance that they are a child of God. This too, is God's gift.

Wesley taught that the believer must remain on a spiritual journey toward "perfection in love," that is, coming to a state in which God's sanctifying grace develops us to a state where we have perfect love (or intent) toward our fellows in life. We never reach a state of perfection in action, but can be perfect in love toward God and our neighbor. This should be the goal of every believer.

6- Mission & Service

Wesley held that every believer shares responsibility for the needs of others, those in the church and those without, regardless where they are in the world. He said, "The world is my parish!" Our vision should be others-centered and world-wide in scope. That's why our church is involved in mission work all over the world, be it schools, hospitals, colleges, adoption services, retirement and nursing homes, children's homes, missionaries, disaster relief, etc. The UMC is a "connectional" church, that is, all churches and agencies involved in every type of mission around the world are connected to one another and share a burden for world outreach. "Theology is the servant of piety, which in turn is the ground of social conscience and the impetus for social action and global interaction, always in the empowering context of the reign of God . . . By joining heart and hand we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing." (BOD, '92, p. 46).

It is not enough to pray and bless the poor, we must also do what we are able to remedy the injustice. Wesley's maxim for handling money: Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.

7. A Thinking Faith

Methodists believe that Christians should "think and let think," that is, although we must agree on the basic tenets of the faith, we can disagree on the minor issues, and still be connected as brothers and sisters in Christ. Since thought is so important, we emphasize education of both the laity and clergy. Ordained clergy must have a seminary education (Masters of Divinity) or equivalent through course of study at an approved UMC seminary. We also have many private schools, colleges, universities, and trade schools around the world.

8. Doctrine & Discipline

“Evangelical faith should manifest itself in evangelical living” (par. 65, BOD, '92)

Wesley's General Rules

1. Do No Harm (avoid evil of every kind . . .)
2. Do All the Good You Can (and as far as possible, to all)
3. Attend Upon All the Ordinances of God (faithfulness to serve through the church)

“We proclaim no personal gospel that fails to express itself in relevant social concerns; we proclaim no social gospel that does not include the personal transformation of sinners” (BOD, '92, p. 48) “Support without accountability promotes moral weakness; accountability without support is a form of cruelty” (BOD, '92, p. 48)

For more information on the United Methodist Church refer to the national web site at "umc.org" or go to the Oklahoma Conference at "okumc.org".