

## Preface:

### *A Note from The Committee on Faith and Order to the General Conference and all the Members and Clergy of The United Methodist Church*

The United Methodist Committee on Faith and Order was established by General Conference action in 2008 as “a visible expression of the commitment of The United Methodist Church to carry on informed theological reflection for the current time in dynamic continuity with the historic Christian faith, our common heritage as Christians grounded in the apostolic witness, and our distinctive Wesleyan heritage.” Among its responsibilities is “to prepare and provide resources and study materials to The United Methodist Church as deemed appropriate” (2016 *BOD*, ¶444).

As its first task the committee received a request from the Council of Bishops to prepare a new theological teaching document on ecclesiology—that is, on a theological understanding of the church itself. The present document is a response to that request. It is intended to assist all of us in The United Methodist Church in gaining a clearer, more comprehensive vision of the reality of the church, and to place our life and work as United Methodists within the context of that vision. It is rooted in the scriptural witness and engages the common Christian tradition, our Wesleyan heritage, and the contemporary ecumenical discussion.

As a part of the process leading to this current document, the General Conference in 2016 received an initial document entitled *Wonder, Love and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church* and commended it to the whole church for study and feedback. The Committee on Faith and Order received feedback from a wide range of individuals and study groups throughout 2017. The comments we received from United Methodist pastors, teachers, and laity have been instrumental in the production of this new statement.

This document is meant to take a place alongside such official theological statements of the church as *By Water and the Spirit* and *This Holy Mystery*. These documents have set a precedent in relating United Methodist teaching to the growing ecumenical convergence on the topics with which they deal—respectively, Baptism and Holy Communion—and the present document provides a similar constructive synthesis.

It is the hope of the Committee on Faith and Order that this document might speak into the current context and serve as a resource for The United Methodist Church in all parts of the world. Our current global situation and changing local contexts present many challenges but they are also ripe with new possibilities. The present challenges include responses to the decisions and consequences of the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference. The discussions on the place and role of LGBTQ persons in life and ministry of the church showed our deep divisions as we struggle to grow into a worldwide connection. Will a document on the theological roots of the nature and life of The United Methodist Church help in such a situation?

As we seek to engage our changing mission fields with creativity and resilience, we hope this document might serve as theological grounding and as a springboard for contemporary reflection on the nature and mission of the church. It is intended to serve as a teaching document in different contexts within the church and beyond. Together with a forthcoming study guide, it is meant to be used in Wesley classes, small group discussions, Sunday schools, and other educational settings within The United Methodist Church and in ecumenical encounters. In addition, it should be useful for the training of elders, deacons, and other coworkers in the church as well as for the continuous education of ministers. May it serve both as doctrinal orientation and as inspiration for a continuous conversation about the place of The United Methodist Church within the wider Christian fellowship. May it guide

us as we join in mission with Christians from many traditions as together we seek the transformation of the world.

In Christ,

The Members of the United Methodist Committee on Faith and Order (2016-2020):

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2019

# Sent in Love

## A United Methodist Understanding of the Church

Committee on Faith and Order  
The United Methodist Church

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## **Part One: Introduction**<sup>1</sup>

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
joy of heaven, to earth come down;  
fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
all thy faithful mercies crown!  
Jesus, thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be.  
Let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee;  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

*(Charles Wesley, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," stanzas 1 & 4)*

1. Jesus Christ is calling United Methodists together with all Christians to live a new form of life. This new life is empowered by God's grace and perfected in love. As Christians experience the saving love of God, we are drawn together into a new community of praise and thanksgiving, mutual care, and spiritual support. We are entrusted with a radical mission of prophetic witness and loving service in the world. In this new community, Christians are restored by divine love and formed into the "redeemed and redeeming fellowship" we call the church (2016 *BOD*, "Preamble" to the Constitution). Our life together as United Methodists is caught up in the wider drama of God's saving action in the world. We are joined together with other Christians in the one Body of Christ and called and sent in love with all Christians to participate in the one saving mission of God.

2. With our fellow Christians everywhere, United Methodists witness a rapidly changing church, both within our denomination and in the larger Christian movement around the world. The growing presence and contribution of United Methodists in Africa and Asia, as well as in Europe, challenge the adequacy of a polity that has been essentially U.S.-centric, deepen the range of cultural differences to be found within the church, and expand the scope of issues that the church now faces in carrying out its mission. Add to that push and pull of globalizing forces that are reconfiguring the face of Christianity, as well as the larger religious make-up of the human family. In both cases, old customs and certainties are being challenged and a yet-unclear future beckons. United Methodists wish to enter that future with joy, resilience, grace, and hope.

3. The challenges presented by such rapid change are matched by exciting new opportunities for mission. In such times, we are invited to re-imagine the place and role of the church in responding to the material needs and deep spiritual hunger of the world. We are confronted each day with new possibilities for proclaiming the gospel to our neighbors in word and deed. If United Methodists are to respond courageously and faithfully to these new possibilities, we ought to begin with two basic questions: *what is the Church?* and *who are United Methodists within the wider Body of Christ?* In answering these questions, we draw from the deep well of Scripture, the common Christian tradition, the unique gifts and graces of our own Wesleyan heritage, and the shared wisdom derived from our ecumenical relationships.

We acknowledge our commitment to theological reflection as the task of the whole church. As the *Book of Discipline* states, our theological work must be “both critical and constructive, both individual and communal, contextual and incarnational, and essentially practical” (2016 *BOD*, ¶105).

### **A Renewed Vision of the Church in Ecumenical Perspective**

4. The great issues facing the body of Christ in the twenty-first century cut across lines of tradition and denomination. We ask how all Christians can make the love of God tangible in the world by joining together in worship, witness, and mission. All Christians need to ask questions about unity in diversity. These are necessarily missional questions about what it means to be called and sent in love by Jesus Christ. Toward that end, United Methodists are assisted by the larger ecumenical dialogue. In 2013 the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches released the document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (*TCV*). Like the earlier landmark ecumenical document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (*BEM*, 1982), *TCV* aims to represent the extent to which long-separated Christian communities are finding common ground in their ecclesial understanding and practice.

5. Many leading themes in these consensus documents resonate with our United Methodist heritage. We have learned a great deal from our own participation in the ecumenical discussions that produced them, and continued attention to these documents can assist us in bringing our own ecclesiology to fuller expression. As United Methodists, we find our considerable ecclesial affirmations drawn from resources throughout the broader Christian tradition, our hymnody and liturgy, and our statements of doctrine and polity. However, until now these affirmations and references have remained scattered and isolated from one another. The present document seeks to address this shortcoming. Documents like *TCV* and *BEM* can be important models and conversation partners in our effort to compile and formulate a renewed United Methodist ecclesial vision.

6. The United Methodist Church affirms itself to be truly the church, but it also acknowledges that is not the whole church. We have perspectives to contribute to a wider common Christian understanding of the church. We also learn about ourselves from other Christians and churches. United Methodists are graced with substantial learnings from many years of bilateral and multilateral dialogue at the national and international levels. These dialogues have advanced our mutual understanding and have sometimes led to new formal relationships between The United Methodist Church and other churches. As we undertake to realize a renewed ecclesial vision for The United Methodist Church, we are committed to continue doing this work in an ecumenical context.

### **Lessons from the History of The United Methodist Church**

7. The United Methodist Church traces its origins to certain movements of Christian renewal and revitalization within the established churches of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Methodism, or the Wesleyan Revival, was the most prominent and durable of a number of such movements in eighteenth-century Britain. Its leader John Wesley was an ordained minister in the Church of England. His aim was not to create a new church separate from the Church of England, but to help the Church of England toward a recovery of its spiritual vitality and its mission. On the continent of Europe another movement known as Pietism had been underway within the churches of the Protestant Reformation. Like Wesley and his people, the Pietists were intent upon realizing the transformative power of the Holy Spirit and upon the spread of the gospel. Wesley was inspired in part by various streams of pietism, including the Moravians whom he encountered in England and colonial America. He and the early Methodists adopted some unconventional ways of bringing the gospel of

Christ to many groups of people who were not being reached, or were not being reached effectively, by the established church. Wesley traveled to where the people were and preached—in an open field if necessary—wherever and whenever a group of hearers could be gathered. He commissioned and trained lay preachers to do likewise. Those who responded to the preaching were organized into small groups for mutual support and growth in grace. This organizing effort led to the emergence of a “connection” of people across Britain and Ireland that eventually (and only after Wesley’s death) took on the full identity of a distinct manifestation of the Christian church.

8. From the time of their independence as churches, the array of Wesleyan and Pietist denominations have lived and prospered with an operative, visionary, and evangelistic ecclesiology which nevertheless has remained largely undefined. John Wesley provided the outlines of a practical ecclesiology in his provisions for the church-organizing 1784 Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, which founded the Methodist Episcopal Church. Methodist ecclesiology was ordered for mission and ministry through Wesley’s revision of the British *Large Minutes*, constituting the new church’s first Discipline. Methodist ecclesiology was operative in Wesley’s *Sunday Service of the Methodists*, his revision of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. From baptism to burial, communion to ordination, it guided and provided text for Methodist spiritual and communal life and included the revised Articles of Religion. Methodist ecclesiology was performed and celebrated utilizing the *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* and given further expression in John Wesley’s *Standard Sermons* and *Notes Upon the New Testament*.<sup>2</sup> In weekly class meetings, through quarterly and annual conferences, and in itinerant preaching, Methodists enacted and lived into an ecclesiology, a missionary mandate, and a vision of the kingdom of God.

9. Our founders relied on these expressions of ecclesiology without developing formal doctrines of the church. As participants in both the Methodist movement and varieties of Pietism (which would help to shape the Church of the United Brethren and the Evangelical Association) established themselves in North America, they struggled with their relationships to the churches from which they came. Eventually declaring their independence as distinct churches, they retained much of their inherited official doctrine without conscious elaboration. However, they did adapt that doctrine into a lived practice of being the church which fit their new social/political context and expressed their new missional self-understanding.

10. Our Methodist forebears came closest to articulating an operative ecclesiology beginning with the 1787 *Discipline*. After addressing two questions that traced the rise of Methodism in Europe and America, it continued:

*Quest. 3.* What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design, in raising up the preachers called Methodists in America?

*Answ.* To reform the continent and spread scripture holiness over these lands. As a proof hereof, we have seen in the course of fifteen years a great and glorious work of God, from New-York through the Jerseys, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia; as also the extremities of the Western Settlements.

The United Brethren would frame their first Discipline in very similar evangelistic and missional terms. This impulse would be the lifeblood of Methodism’s lived ecclesiology.

11. During and after the American Revolution, Methodists sought independence from the Church of England. This reordering would authorize their self-governance and sacramental authority. Passionately ministering across ecclesial, ethnic, and racial lines from its start, Methodism numbered both slaves and freed persons of African descent as members and preachers. The first *Discipline* courageously mandated that its adherents free any slaves they held. The 1784 Conference also prefigured in a symbolic way the new church’s eventual ministry across numerous ethnic and linguistic boundaries. William Otterbein—pastor of

Baltimore's Evangelical Reformed Church (which helped to host the conference), whose itinerant revivalism preceded that of the Methodists by several decades, and who led in founding the United Brethren denomination—participated along with the Anglican Thomas Coke in the ordination of Francis Asbury. Later, Jacob Albright worshiped with the Methodists before leading other German-speaking converts in forming the Evangelical Association. This missional impulse also stimulated international boundary-crossing almost from the beginning. The Methodist Episcopal Church launched its missionary society as early as April 5, 1819. In desire, if not in practice, the church has been “global” from the start.

12. There has followed a complex and often ambiguous history of accomplishments and failures, growth and loss, separations and unions. As Methodists would want to testify, God has been steadily at work both within and despite human plans, decisions, and actions. The early commitment to the elimination of slavery was soon compromised, and the ensuing tensions led to several separations of the denomination in the years prior to the American Civil War. Racism in the United States significantly affected the institutional shape of the 1939 reunion of the several Methodist branches that came together to form The Methodist Church. In the American context, black Methodist conferences were segregated into a separate judicatory body called the Central Jurisdiction. While these racist policies were eventually dismantled with the creation of The United Methodist Church in 1968, their legacy continues into our own time. A heritage of racism, colonialism, sexism, and classism has affected our common life and our efforts at mission in both overt and subtle ways throughout our history. A lingering U.S.-centric mindset and old habits of paternalism, U.S. normativity, and racism continue to mark our struggles to be a worldwide church. At the same time, many of our core convictions have offered a constant challenge to these evils. The United Methodist Church is an heir to, and itself a part of, this history with its burden and its promise.

13. Like its predecessor bodies The United Methodist Church continues to reflect on its identity and calling as church. Originating in movements that became denominations by default, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church joined in 1968 with a strong awareness of the temporary and problematic character of any such denominational arrangements. Our church remains an imperfect and pilgrim church and continues to seek the guidance of God to live into the reality to which it is called. At its founding, The United Methodist Church committed itself to the ongoing quest for Christian unity. The preamble to its new constitution declared that “[t]he Church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world.” Our Constitution described the new body as “part of the Church Universal,” affirmed that “the Lord of the Church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity,” and committed The United Methodist Church to “seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life.”<sup>3</sup> The formation of the new church was to be understood not as an end in itself but as a relatively modest step on the way to fuller visible unity among Christians.

14. Created by the union of churches with distinct traditions, The United Methodist Church is ecumenical in its very nature. The historical statement in the *Book of Discipline* rightly indicates that United Methodism is heir to the lived theological self-understandings gifted to us by the several reformations (2016 *BOD*, “A Brief History of The United Methodist Church”). United Methodists celebrate our inheritance from the great ecclesial richness of the four Protestant strands of the Reformation—Lutheran (Jacob Albright - Evangelical Associations), Anabaptist (Martin Boehm - United Brethren), Reformed (William Otterbein - United Brethren), Anglican (John & Charles Wesley - Anglican/Methodist).

15. Later, in the revised statement on “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” adopted in 1988, the commitments of The United Methodist Church were renewed and given some further elaboration:

With other Christians, we declare the essential oneness of the church in Christ Jesus. This rich heritage of shared Christian belief finds expression in our hymnody and liturgies. Our unity is affirmed in the historic creeds as we confess one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. It is also experienced in joint ventures of ministry and in various forms of ecumenical cooperation. Nourished by common roots of this shared Christian heritage, the branches of Christ's church have developed diverse traditions that enlarge our store of shared understandings. (2016 *BOD*, ¶102)

Thus, the birth and development of The United Methodist Church have been shaped both by a concern for denominational integrity and a strong commitment to ecumenical fellowship. Our self-understanding and vision as a church are formulated in continuous conversation with our ecumenical partners.

### **The Classical Marks of the Church as the Foundation for Renewal**

16. The communities of Christian faith that came together in 1968 to create The United Methodist Church shared some distinctive convictions that continue to energize and guide its life and witness. Among these are the convictions that the saving love of God 1) empowers a missional community; 2) is meant for all people, not just for a favored few; 3) is transformative; 4) and creates community. These convictions are not exclusive to the Methodist tradition or The United Methodist Church. However, the unique manner in which they have been emphasized and held together in our history accounts for our particular United Methodist ways of being the church within the larger Body of Christ.

17. These four convictions regarding God's saving love provide a promising guide to the main elements of a renewed ecclesial vision for The United Methodist Church. These convictions also offer a constructive Methodist reflection on the classical creedal marks of the church and provide the structural backbone of part three in this document. We begin with the affirmation that the church is first of all God's creation and not ours. Our participation helps shape the church. However, the church originates in the mission of the Triune God to the world (*missio Dei*) and it exists for the sake of this mission. As a sent community of witness and mission, the church is called to be apostolic—*the saving love of God empowers a missional community*. From this point, we move secondly to consider the implications for the life of the church that *the saving love of God is meant for all people* (the church is called to be catholic), third to a consideration of what it is to affirm and realize that *the saving love of God is transformative* (the church is called to be holy), and finally to a consideration of the conviction that *the saving love of God creates community* (the church is called to be one).

18. We believe that a renewed understanding of the church grows out of a faithfulness to the church's vocation from the beginning. We must carefully look back to move forward in a fruitful way. Since the second ecumenical council in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Christian church has understood itself to be *one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*. These *marks of the church* or *attributes of the church* have provided orientation for the church through the centuries. A United Methodist understanding of the church is firmly rooted in these marks formulated in late antiquity, long before the Methodist movement began.

19. The four marks mirror an experienced reality that the church is called to actualize in every time and place. To say that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic is a way of expressing God's love to the world through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. This means as we have already affirmed that the church is God's creation not ours. The church originates in the self-gift to us of the Triune God. God's mission to and in the world—the *missio Dei*—calls the church into being. Thus, our examination of the nature and purpose of the church begins by exploring first *who is the God* that brings this community into being (Part Two).

20. Grounded in the life and being of the “missionary God” the church is called to participate in this mission as a community of believers bearing the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity (Part Three). From a United Methodist perspective, we begin with mission itself and the mark of *apostolicity*. The church does not exist for its own sake. As an expression of God’s activity in the world, it is sent out to share the apostolic faith with others and to be there for the good of others. *Being with and for others* was key to Methodist self-understanding from the beginning. Apostolicity also means faithfulness to and acknowledgement of those sent out by Jesus Christ through the ages. The call to apostolicity frees the church to overcome its bent toward self-protection and empowers it to become a leaven in all its various historical and cultural contexts.

21. *Catholicity* has been a mark of the church since its inception and a vital part of Methodist self-understanding. One of the earliest expressions of Methodism’s commitment to catholicity is John Wesley’s sermon *Catholic Spirit* in which he leaves no doubt that God’s love embraces all of humanity. United Methodists are called to understand the fullness of the church as a participation in God’s love for all. The church must resist divisions along lines of age, nationality, and race.

22. The mark of *holiness* is wholeheartedly embraced by The United Methodist Church. John Wesley defined the essential task of the Methodist movement as the spread of “scriptural holiness over the land.”<sup>4</sup> Holiness is not merely an individual state of being, but entails a transformation both of individuals and of communities by the love of God. United Methodists understand holiness as a gift of sanctifying grace and as a call to embody God’s uncompromising love for the world.

23. The *oneness* of the church has its origin in the oneness of God. When United Methodists follow the calling to oneness as a gift from God, it becomes visible in the creation of inclusive communities as a testimony against all the polarizing forces in the world. These forces want us to believe that people need to lead separated lives. In a world where ethnic, cultural, and religious divisions plague humanity, the church’s oneness rooted in the love of God in Christ can serve as a reconciling and healing presence.

## **Part Two: The Mission of the Triune God and the Church**

24. From the beginning of salvation history, the God of the Church is a missionary God. God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the saving truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). God sends angels and prophets to God’s people as bearers of the news of salvation. “In these last days,” God has “spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds” (Hebrews 1:2). To be in mission means to be sent. The Father commissions the Son and the Holy Spirit by sending them to the world with a saving purpose. Mission begins with God and not the church. Thus, at its best, all thinking on the church is outward facing. The question “what is the church?” cannot be answered apart from the question “what is the church for?” Our affirmation “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” makes a strong, brief statement about the nature and mission of the church and even more significantly *about the God of the church*. When disciples of Jesus Christ are made, we participate in the mission of the Triune God who is at work transforming the world.

### **The Triune God Who is Love**

25. The power of God was shown when God created heaven and earth out of nothing and made human beings, both male and female, in God’s own image (cf. Genesis 1:26-28). We

do not call God Father because God is male. God is beyond the distinctions and limitations of creaturely existence including gender. We call God Father because this is how Jesus taught us to call the one who sent him (cf, John 20:17). Our profession of faith in the Father commits us to love and obey the God of Jesus Christ. We live in a world where many false gods and idols fight for our attention and allegiance. Yet, the apostle Paul writes, “for us there is one God, the Father” (1 Corinthians 8:6). As members of God’s covenant people, Christians affirm that “the Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam is the God of the Church.

26. The God of the Church is Triune. By God, we mean the eternal *koinonia* of three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, the Greek term *koinonia* can be translated in a variety of ways, expressing the many aspects of divine fellowship. The “communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 13:13), the “sharing in the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:16), our “fellowship...with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), and the hope that we may “become participants of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4) involve this reality of divine *koinonia*. We believe that the *koinonia* of the disciples of Jesus Christ is “a visible reflection of the eternal *koinonia* or communion of the Triune God who is the source, meaning, purpose and destiny of the Church.”<sup>5</sup> Another name for this divine *koinonia* is love. The God of the Church is love (1 John 4:8). The eternal love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is poured out for us, decisively in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The God who is love gives of God’s very own life to us: “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” (John 3:16). Love opens the communion of the Triune God to all creation and this communion is the source, means, and goal of the church’s mission to the world.

27. The *missio Dei*—mission of God—reaches out to all creation for reconciliation, redemption, and renewal. Through Christ, God intends “to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven” (Colossians 1:20). God loves all creatures and comes into the world as redeemer. The mission of God intends the renewal of all creation. God is at work “making all things new” (Revelation 21:5). When God crowns the new creation, there will be, as John Wesley described, “a deep, an intimate, an uninterrupted union with God; a constant communion with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ, through the Spirit; a continual enjoyment of the Three-One God, and of all the creatures in him!”<sup>6</sup> The final goal of the mission of God is the enjoyment of all creation in the fellowship and participation in God’s very being which is love. The *koinonia* of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the reason for the sending of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, God’s divine missionaries. All church mission derives from the sending of these divine persons. The church becomes God’s instrument for the redemption and renewal of the human and natural world only as it participates in the mission of God.

### **The Sending of Jesus Christ**

28. At the core of the mission of Jesus Christ is the salvation of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Scripture proclaims that “when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law” (Galatians 4:4). The name Jesus means “The Lord saves.” Everything that he does is for our salvation.

29. Jesus is fully and truly human. In his humanity, Jesus was like humankind in every way but “without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). The Hispanic Creed tells us, “God made flesh in a person for all humanity, God made flesh in an age for all the ages, God made flesh in one culture for all cultures, God made flesh in love and grace for all creation.”<sup>7</sup> When preaching his first sermon to a non-Jewish audience, Peter says that Jesus “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38). In his ministry he “healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners” (Great Thanksgiving, *UMH*, p. 9).

30. Jesus is fully and truly God. Jesus is, in the words of the Nicene Creed, “God from God, light from light, true God from true God, of one being with the Father.” In Christ “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19). It is from the fullness of Jesus Christ that humanity receives grace upon grace: as our Methodist tradition would describe it, convincing grace upon prevenient grace, justifying grace upon convincing grace, sanctifying grace upon justifying grace, glorifying grace upon sanctifying grace.

31. Jesus shares his mission with others and invites us to join him in fulfilling the will of the Father. When the church attends to the needs of the socially marginalized, it participates in the mission of Jesus Christ whom God anointed with the Spirit “to bring good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18). The church’s service in the world may resemble the work done by governmental and nonprofit agencies with which it can collaborate. However, the church may not forget that its mission is fundamentally the mission of Jesus Christ. God has made Christ the head of all things for the church (cf. Ephesians 1:22). As Lord of the church, the living and active Christ is the ultimate norm for its doctrine and life.

### **The Sending of the Holy Spirit**

32. The presence of the Holy Spirit has the power to transform ordinary things into saving instruments. When United Methodists gather around the Lord’s Table, we call upon God to send the Holy Spirit saying, “pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood” (*UMH*, p. 10).

33. The Holy Spirit is “the Lord, the giver of life,” who hovers over the waters at creation (Genesis 1). Where the Spirit is present, there is freedom (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:17). At creation humankind receives this animating Spirit of freedom (Genesis 2:7). Through life in the Spirit we are meant “to know, to love, and to enjoy [our] Creator to all eternity.”<sup>8</sup> Yet in our present state, we are unable rightly to exercise those capacities for knowledge, love, and happiness. Thus, what we need is nothing less than a regeneration of those capacities. We need to be set free from our bondage to ignorance, lovelessness, and hopelessness, from our captivity to lies and distortions, and from misguided loves and misplaced hopes. We need to be born again and nourished in a new life in “the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). This is the possibility that Christ brings to us, and that the Holy Spirit empowers within us.

34. The Holy Spirit is leading the church into all truth as one of its missionary objectives (John 16:13). While many spirits in the present age seek to exclude, to set truth and love against each other, the mission of the Holy Spirit opens new possibilities. “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit “searches everything, even the depths of God” and helps the church understand truths that transcend human knowledge (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:10). The Spirit of truth is also the Spirit of love which empowers the church to speak the truth in love (cf. Ephesians 4:15). The Holy Spirit is at work in the hearts and minds of individual believers and communities to affect their renewal and reformation in accordance with God’s holy love.

35. The Holy Spirit preserves the communion of the church over time and space, binding the communities of the apostles with the disciples of Christ today. United Methodists join the early Christian writer Irenaeus of Lyon in stating that: “where the church is, there also is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church and all grace.”<sup>9</sup> As the soul animates the body, “from generation to generation, the Spirit is the living continuity of the Church.”<sup>10</sup>

## **The Triune God Who Calls, Sends, Accompanies, and Transforms**

36. The God of the Church is the God who calls. All humanity is invited into loving communion with the Triune God. The call of God is fundamentally affirming because Jesus came into the world that we “may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Paradoxically, responding to this call requires dying. Paul poses this challenge in the form of a question - “do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3). Jesus is more direct, saying, “if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). The Risen Lord calls each person by name to take up the cross and follow him. All must die to be raised again and transfigured by God’s grace. The call of God in its universality leaves no realm of human existence untouched. With Christians from all over the world, we believe that “the whole people of God is called to be a prophetic people, bearing witness to God’s word; a priestly people, offering the sacrifice of a life lived in discipleship; and a royal people, serving as instruments for the establishment of God’s reign.”<sup>11</sup>

37. Those whom God calls in love, God also sends in love. We are gathered in order to be scattered as God’s good seed. The dynamic of self-denial present in the call is carried over into the commission. Jesus says that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Vocation and mission are inseparable. The disciples learned this important truth in the Upper Room on the evening of the resurrection. When Jesus appears before them, in spite of their locked doors, he assures them that “as the Father has sent me, so I send you.” He then breathed on them and instructed them to “receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21). The church is sent in love as a community of witness which announces Christ’s death, resurrection, and return. The church is a community of service which sows seeds of the kingdom of God throughout the entire world, especially in the most broken places on earth.<sup>12</sup> The church is a community of worship which teaches faithful obedience to what Jesus taught and baptizes people from every nation in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>13</sup>

38. God accompanies those whom God calls and sends. When the Hebrew people left their bondage in Egypt, they discovered that God accompanied them as a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (cf. Exodus 13:21-22). Prophets like Elijah discovered God’s companionship and providence when they faced resistance, threats, and violence (1 Kings 17:4). The risen Jesus promises his disciples that he would be with them always, “to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). God accompanies the church with the active presence of divine love as it journeys through history.

39. God transforms those whom God calls, sends, and accompanies. When God says, “be holy, for I am holy” (Leviticus 11:44), God does not command the impossible. God sends the Holy Spirit to make us holy by conforming us to the image of Christ. The touch of God’s hand transforms us into a new people.<sup>14</sup> When Jesus visits Zacchaeus, the tax collector is transformed from a self-serving, self-centered life to one of hospitality, humility, and holiness.<sup>15</sup> Salvation comes to Zacchaeus and his entire house (cf. Luke 19:1-10). God’s work of salvation is both deeply personal and intrinsically social. For this reason, God uses the church as the chief instrument for announcing and enacting God’s loving plan for the world.

## **The Church of the Triune God**

40. God is love and the church is born of love and for love (cf. 1 John 4:8). The abounding love of the Creator God gathers the disciples of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit in the visible community that we call the church.<sup>16</sup> The church of God bears the image of the God of the church. The life of the church is a sharing in the love of the Triune God. The

mission of the church is to communicate that possibility to a world ravaged by sin and in need of salvation. Salvation is “a present thing,” Wesley declared. The term rightly embraces “the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.”<sup>17</sup> Human beings are “created in the image of God, and designed to know, to love, and to enjoy [their] Creator to all eternity.”<sup>18</sup> Wesley’s understanding of our fallen state involves the distortion or loss of those capacities for knowledge, love, and joy—in short, for communion with God and with one another—and salvation involves their recovery and their eventual fulfillment in glory, when (as his brother Charles wrote) we will be “lost in wonder, love, and praise” (*UMH*, p. 384). To the extent that these Wesleyan themes still inform our witness, hymnody, and common life, we have ample reason to make our own the affirmation that communion is indeed “the gift by which the church lives,” and the gift that it is called to offer the world.<sup>19</sup>

41. The Bible does not set forth one normative model or understanding of the church. There is no blueprint in the New Testament to be followed. However, Scripture does offer abundant resources, images, and concepts for thinking about the ways God works to establish or restore communion with and among humankind. Three of the more prominent ones—“people of God,” “body of Christ,” “temple of the Holy Spirit”—have been frequently cited and explored in contemporary ecumenical discussion. Together, they help to make the point that *koinonia* is the gift of the Triune God and our responses to that gift may take different forms. The richness and variety of images, metaphors, and ideas that the biblical writers used all contribute to a full description of the new community God is creating.

42. *Ekklesia* is one term most frequently used in the New Testament to designate the Christian community. In New Testament times, *ekklesia* was a common Greek term for an assembly, such as the meeting of voting citizens in a Greek city-state. It is also the word normally used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures—the Septuagint—to translate the Hebrew term *qahal*. *Qahal* is a generic Hebrew term for assembly or gathering. The term could be applied to a religious assembly or to an army ready for battle. Two significant uses of *qahal/ekklesia* are the assembly of the people at Sinai at the giving of the Torah (“the day of the assembly,” Deuteronomy 18:16) and with the anticipation of an ultimate joyous and redemptive gathering of all the people of God as described for instance in Isaiah 25:6-9. New Testament writers like Paul use *ekklesia* to refer to a particular local community of Christians, the collective sum of such local communities, or the whole people of God in all times and places (the “church universal”).

43. The standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church contain authorized teachings on the Church, along with other material relevant to the subject. Our Articles of Religion, inherited from the Church of England and revised by John Wesley, state that “the visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men [*sic*] in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ’s ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same” (2016 *BOD*, ¶104). This article identifies the church as a “congregation of faithful” people assembled by Christ’s ordinance for Word and Sacrament. According to this doctrine, there are two essential characteristics of the church—authentic proclamation of the Word and the proper administration of the Sacraments. Implicitly, however, a third characteristic is included in this definition, namely the faithful lives of discipleship within the gathered congregation.

44. Our Confession of Faith which we inherited from the Evangelical United Brethren Church contains the basic ecclesiological affirmations found in the Articles of Religion but enriches them in several ways. It reads as follows:

We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the

redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men [*sic*] divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world. (2016 *BOD*, ¶104)

This statement makes more explicit our location as United Methodists within the church universal. Through our faithful response to the divine call, we are incorporated by Word and Sacrament into a "redemptive fellowship" that spans the globe and the centuries. The edification of believers involves forming them for faithful discipleship and sanctification. We recognize ourselves as full members of this universal fellowship as we accept Christ's appointment to work "under the discipline of the Holy Spirit" for "the redemption of the world." The Confession also affirms the marks from the Nicene Creed (though in a unique ordering) and identifies us as belonging to the church that is "one, holy, apostolic and catholic."

45. A noteworthy feature of our ecclesiological definition contained in the Articles of Religion is that it offers a definition of the *visible* church. A distinction between the "visible church" and the "invisible church" was common at the time of the Protestant Reformation. The visible church is an actual community—a local congregation of professing Christians or a larger body incorporating many local congregations—who hear and affirm the Word rightly preached, partake of the Sacraments, and support the church's ministry. The invisible church is the totality of persons who are actually saved, on their way to salvation, or already among the great cloud of witnesses. This company is 'invisible' because only God knows with certainty who is ultimately included. With a few exceptions, the members of the invisible church—the truly saved—were also assumed to be professing Christians and members of the visible church. However, this conviction that the work of God's grace extends beyond the walls of the *visible* church has important implications for how the church understands itself in relation to its non-Christian neighbors.

46. Another noteworthy feature of the two articles is their emphasis on Word, Sacrament, and, implicitly, Order. These terms help underscore the missional nature of the church. Through its proclamation of the Word, the church declares the good news of Jesus Christ to a world in desperate need of truth, goodness, and beauty. The church is a herald who prepares the way of the Lord. The centrality of proclamation for the United Methodist understanding of the church is evident in the importance given to the reading of the Bible in Christian life. John Wesley considered himself a *homo unius libri* -- a man of one book -- because he believed that the Bible was "the way to heaven" and to true life.<sup>20</sup> The *Book of Discipline* aptly describes Wesley's way of reading scripture: "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason" (2016 *BOD*, ¶104). The Bible is given a place of honor in United Methodist sanctuaries and worship spaces, testifying to the centrality of preaching in the United Methodist understanding of church. At the same time, John Wesley's desire to preach in plain language to all people and to preach beyond the church buildings in the fields testifies to the Methodist missionary impulse. The proclamation of the Word of God for the people of God is meant to be heard by all peoples. The Holy Spirit's invocation in worship empowers the preached Word so that it might be fruitfully received by those that hear it. When the Spirit of the Lord energizes the words of the preacher in the hearing of the congregation, the people feel like they are living through a "new Pentecost" and that the church is almost born again.<sup>21</sup>

47. The United Methodist doctrinal definitions of the church also call attention to the importance of the Sacraments. The church preaches the need for repentance, the possibility of justification, and the hope of sanctification. The sacraments are instruments through which God graciously acts to convert, forgive, and regenerate. The grace of God as God's favor and

gift can come to us in many ways. Even so, “United Methodists affirm that God has designated certain channels through which grace is surely and readily available.”<sup>22</sup> Methodists, along with other traditions, refer to these as the means of grace. Among these means of grace, The United Methodist Church recognizes two sacraments—baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper have been instituted by God as privileged places of encounter with the grace of Jesus Christ: “in baptism we receive our identity and mission as Christians. Holy Communion is the sacrament that sustains and nourishes us in our journey of salvation” (*THM*, p. 7). The grace that we receive through the sacraments illumines and empowers us for God’s mission in the world. There is an important connection between our sacramental celebrations and our life in the world. The material elements of our sacramental practice (water, bread, wine) continually return us to thanksgiving for the goodness of creation and call us to care for a fragile planet marred by human sin and greed.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, “the issues of safe and suitable work environments and just wages are at the heart of the church’s social justice concerns as derived from our Eucharistic practice” because our sacramental practice depends upon processes of human production in growing, harvesting, and manufacturing.<sup>24</sup>

48. In ecumenical dialogues, United Methodists have learned to speak of the sacramental nature of the church itself. The church is sacramental in that sacraments and other means of grace are found within her; the church as a divine and human reality is like “an outward sign of an inward grace” (cf. *THM*, p. 7). As the body of Christ, the church is Christ’s visible, material instrument to make known the love of God for the world and announce the coming of the kingdom. In union with Christ, the church is both human and divine, visible and invisible, militant and triumphant, a pilgrim church in history and a church at rest in the kingdom. In its journey through history, the church is a community of weak and vulnerable human beings who often fail and fall, alone and together. Hence, the church is in constant need of renewal and reform. The church is also a communion of saints called to glory. The humanity of the church is to be understood in distinction but not in opposition to the depths of divine love at work within it. In and through the creaturely reality of the church, God continues to raise up witnesses and saints, perfecting the body through the grace of its divine Head.

49. The sacramental nature of the church warrants speaking of the church as a mystery. The Greek word *mysterion* is the term used by the church for what is commonly called the sacraments. The church is a visible and tangible community. Its visibility is not to be lamented as an unfortunate temporary condition but welcomed as a precious gift which allows it to accomplish its mission in the world. The church is sent to human beings and it bears the good news in human, embodied ways. At the same time, “there is more to the Church than meets the eye, and only the eye of faith can discern its deepest reality, its invisible mystery.”<sup>25</sup> The mystery of the church of God at the heart of its nature and mission is the invisible indwelling of the Triune God, the God who is Holy Love.<sup>26</sup> The mystery of God’s love is the source of the mystery of the church. Through the mystery of the church, God heals humanity’s blindness and deafness to the supernatural and discloses what eyes have not seen and ears have not heard (cf. Isaiah 64:4).

### **3) The Marks of The United Methodist Church**

#### **Introduction**

50. The United Methodist Church understands itself to be “part of the church universal” (2016 *BOD*, ¶4, c.f. ¶102), joint members with other Christians in the communion of the Triune God, sent by this God on a mission to the world. We affirm with many Christians throughout the ages that the church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic (2016 *BOD*, ¶104).

United with all other Christians by faith in Christ's redeeming life, death and resurrection and knit together by a common baptism, The United Methodist Church seeks to embody the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity as genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit in our common life.

51. Speaking of the Christian church as a whole, *TCV* offers a helpful brief account of ecumenical convergence on how the four Nicene marks cited in our Confession of Faith may be understood. "The Church is one because God is one (cf. John 17:11, 1 Tim. 2:5). . . . The Church is holy because God is holy (cf. Isaiah 6:3; Leviticus 11:44-45)." The church is catholic because God intends it for all people, the whole world. The church is apostolic because of its origins in witnesses sent (an apostle is "one who is sent") by the Triune God and its call "to be ever faithful to those apostolic origins."<sup>27</sup>

52. These marks are at once a gift and a vocation - a calling, a task. As gift, the Body of Christ receives them by grace through faith, trusting that the one who began a good work among us will bring it to completion (Philippians 1:6). As vocation, these marks beckon us to ongoing self-reflection, renewal, and reform in order that our life together as church might be worthy of the calling to which we have been called (Ephesians 4:1). Every historical church in every place has sometimes more perfectly and sometimes less perfectly lived into the vocation of these marks. United Methodists bring to this vocation a wealth of gifts and challenges which are at once shaped and informed by the wider Christian tradition, while also offering to the wider tradition our own distinctive set of characteristics and emphases.

53. The four convictions regarding God's saving love described in the introduction provide the backbone for our constructive depiction of how we as the people called United Methodist seek to embody the gift and vocation of these classical marks. We begin with the conviction that *the saving love of God empowers a missional community* (called to be apostolic). We then take up in order the convictions that *the saving love of God is meant for all people* (called to be catholic), that *the saving love of God is transformative* (called to be holy), and finally that *the saving love of God creates community* (called to be one).

### **Called to be Apostolic – The Saving Love of God Empowers a Missional Community**

*"Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of your Spirit, to give ourselves for others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

(*"A Service of Word and Table I," BOW, p. 39*)

54. Being sent by God in the strength of the Spirit, Methodists have been a people on the move, crossing lines of convention, geography, race, class, gender, and language. In its earliest expression Methodism was characterized by a movement outside the walls of conventional ecclesial life, and into the streets and fields where its preachers encountered people hungry for the gospel. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century context, Methodism resonated with marginalized and economically displaced persons in British society who were themselves on the move to new centers of production and mining in the budding industrial revolution. Methodism owes its presence on the American continent to people on the move. Immigrants to the continent carried the Methodist mission and ethos with them starting new communities through their grass-roots spiritual leadership. Methodism was held together and expanded by traveling and itinerant leadership. From John Wesley to his lay preachers in England, from Bishop Francis Asbury to the circuit-riding ordained ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist ministerial leadership was and is expressed through movement. Methodism expanded across the continent as lay people on the frontier started new communities, attended annual camp meetings, established Sunday schools, and built Methodism from the ground up. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century Methodist missionaries, clergy and lay, men and women, were on

the move taking the gospel to the far reaches of the world in word and service. Today, as members of a global denomination United Methodists continue to follow the movement of the Spirit as God calls and sends disciples into mission “from everywhere to everywhere.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***United Methodists and the Missiological Imperative***

55. The church has its origins in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) and in the sending of the Son and Spirit into the world to call and empower a “redeemed and redeeming fellowship” of disciples and witnesses (2016 *BOD*, “Preamble” to the Constitution). The sending God in the person of Jesus Christ sends forth a community of followers with the apostolic commission to go into all the world (Matthew 28:18-20). In describing the apostolic character of the church, United Methodists emphasize first its *missional nature as a sent community*, a community on the move.<sup>29</sup> Called into being by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ the church exists in order to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (2016 *BOD*, ¶120). For United Methodists this missiological imperative is the foundation of our self-understanding and of our understanding of what it means to be the church.

56. The United Methodist Church shares in the ecumenical recognition of the various ways the church is called to be apostolic in its teaching, maintenance of worship, and transmission of ministerial leadership and oversight (*episkopé*).<sup>30</sup> In affirming all of this, we emphasize another convergence in the ecumenical discussion, namely that each of these components of the apostolic life of the church is intended to empower and send the whole church into the whole world in witness, service, and mission.<sup>31</sup> The apostolic community exists not for its own sake, but as a means of grace for the whole world, an instrument of God’s transforming and redeeming love. Starting with the sent character of the church should guard against an inward-looking and self-protective stance for the church toward the world. Maintaining the apostolicity of the church requires that a concern for continuity in the essentials of faith and practice be matched by an equal concern for an outward reaching missional perspective. From this perspective we are mindful that encountering the world with the gospel calls the church to ongoing reform and renewal of its life, a “traditioned innovation” that allows the church to express the life-giving truth of the gospel in fresh ways as the faithful encounter new people in new places.<sup>32</sup>

57. The historical willingness among Methodists to transgress boundaries of convention, class, and culture in pursuit of God’s gift of community illumines the essentially missional character of our “connectional” form of life together. From the beginning, connectionalism stood in service of mission, tuning every aspect of Methodist communal life—from structure to polity to discipline—to an “evangelizing and reforming” purpose.<sup>33</sup> Connectionalism, affirms the United Methodist mission document *Grace upon Grace*, “expresses our missional life. . . . [It is United Methodism’s] means of discovering mission and supporting mission; in this bonding we seek to understand and enact our life of service.”<sup>34</sup>

58. The connectional pattern of sent and traveling preachers (itinerancy) and of expanding networks of small groups (classes) with significant lay leadership would remain the norm in Methodist life. This was true even after the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 added to this pattern the basic aspects of ecclesial life: a confession of faith (Articles of Religion), liturgy and sacraments (Sunday Service), and ordained ministries. Thus, traditional ecclesiological characteristics were added to the connectional structure of Methodist society life, transforming the connection into an explicit sacramental fellowship and giving rise to a distinct kind of missional ecclesiology.

## *Connectionalism and Ministry*

59. Connectionalism emerged as a missiological principle to empower and mobilize the apostolic witness, service and leadership of *every* Christian. All Christians, by virtue of their baptism and the bestowal of diverse gifts by the Spirit, are called to a life of ministry rooted in the very ministry of Christ himself. All ministry in the Church is derived from the servant ministry of Christ, is empowered by his living presence to the Church, and is to be modeled on his life and teaching (2016 *BOD*, ¶126).

60. The ministry of the laity is indispensable to carrying out the church's God-given mission (2016 *BOD*, ¶¶127, 301.1). The Methodist tradition has depended heavily upon the ministry of the laity from the very beginning. Methodist lay people have always been at the forefront of founding new worshipping communities, beginning new organizations for the support of educational and missionary endeavors, and responding to injustice in society through acts of compassionate service, healing, and prophetic advocacy. Today the ministry of the laity is encouraged at every level of church life. A host of leadership roles, commissioned offices, and lay-led organizations exist in The United Methodist Church for empowering the genuine exercise of apostolic ministry by the laity. Thus, The United Methodist Church joins the wider ecumenical community in affirming that all those baptized into Christ "share in his priestly, prophetic, and royal office, together as a communion and individually each in their own way."<sup>35</sup>

61. Because the pattern of Christ's prophetic, priestly and royal ministry informs the life and mission of the whole people of God this pattern also shapes ordained ministry. Accordingly, The United Methodist Church at its uniting conference in 1968 adopted an account of the ordained ministry which describes it as a "specialized ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order."<sup>36</sup> In the 1980s The United Methodist Church began placing additional emphasis in the *Book of Discipline* on the overarching theme of Christ's servanthood as a model for ministry. Drawing upon other biblical images of Christ as shepherd (John 10:1-18) and suffering servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Philippians 2:5-11), The United Methodist Church situates the ministry of the whole church under the rubric of "servant ministry" and "servant leadership" (2016 *BOD*, ¶¶133-139), and has added the ministries of "service, compassion, and justice" as specific tasks of the ordained ministry (¶¶303.2).

62. Noting that, "In ordination, the church affirms and continues the apostolic ministry through persons empowered by the Holy Spirit" (2016 *BOD*, ¶303.1), The United Methodist Church recognizes two orders of ordained ministry, deacons and elders. Deacons embody in their life and ministry the "primary form" of Christ's own ministry and that of the whole church in service (*diakonia*). Called to Word, Service, Compassion and Justice, deacons "personify or focus the servanthood to which all Christians are called," and lead "the community's service in the world for the sake of enacting God's compassion and justice" (2016 *BOD*, ¶305).

63. Elders in The United Methodist Church are those called to ministries of Word, Sacrament, Order and Service. The unique gifts of Word and Service that characterize the ordination of deacons are included here among those exercised by elders in their own distinct ministry, establishing a profound connection between the character of Christ's servant ministry, the ministry of deacons, and that of elders. Elders are also authorized by virtue of their ordination to administer the sacraments and "order the life of the Church for service in mission and ministry" (2016 *BOD*, ¶332).

64. In the ecumenical journey toward Christian unity, much has been made of the pattern of a "threefold" ministry in deacons, presbyters/elders, and bishops.<sup>37</sup> The United Methodist Church structures the ministry of the ordained in a threefold pattern that is distinctive to our tradition. For instance, we ordain deacons and elders; we do not ordain bishops, who are elected from among the elders to exercise a special supervisory role (2016 *BOD*, ¶402).

Furthermore, our history as a church focused on mission and ministry has shaped a many-layered model of church leadership and service. Alongside the threefold pattern for those exercising ordained ministry, we have many who are appointed or commissioned to serve local communities or special ministries without ordination. The latter include Licensed Local Pastors who are publicly authorized by bishops to preach, lead, and perform the sacraments in their specific ministry setting. All forms of leadership, whether ordained or otherwise, are understood to be in support of the ministry of all the baptized. Our church remains open to a diversity of usage and interpretation in the structures of ministry in the universal church. We affirm that no single pattern of ministry can be derived from the New Testament witness or can lay exclusive claim to the apostolic shape of ministry in the church, even as we continue to renew and enrich our own ministries through dialogue with the wider Christian family.<sup>38</sup>

65. Bishops within The United Methodist Church occupy a set-apart, distinct and consecrated ministerial *office* of oversight (*episkopé*), even though they do not constitute a separate *order* of ministry. In concert with John Wesley's understanding of the unity of order between bishops and presbyters,<sup>39</sup> this distinct office of oversight in The United Methodist Church is exercised within the Order of Elders as a unique aspect of the call to order the life of the church. Nevertheless, bishops are consecrated to this office through the laying on of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit (*BOW*, pp.704-705). Our church affirms the apostolic roots of delegating certain persons among the ordained for the distinct superintending role (2016 *BOD*, ¶¶401). Such persons are charged to "guard, transmit, teach and proclaim, corporately and individually, the apostolic faith as it is expressed in Scripture and tradition, and, as they are led and endowed by the Spirit, to interpret that faith evangelically and prophetically" (¶403). Bishops in The United Methodist Church exercise distinct ministries of teaching, ordination, mission, and unity which share similarities with episcopal ministries of other churches even as these are exercised in ways unique to our church.

66. A distinctive and crucial feature of the episcopacy in The United Methodist Church is the role of the bishop in setting the appointments of clergy within the annual conference. This peculiar exercise of oversight marks the episcopacy as "an integral part of the system of an itinerant ministry" (2016 *BOD*, ¶401). The significance of the itinerant form of ministry looms large within the self-understanding of The United Methodist Church. From its earliest expression the sent and traveling character of ministry within the Methodist tradition was understood as the recovery of a distinctly biblical and apostolic pattern. In annotating the *Discipline* in 1798 Bishops Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury located their own itinerancy as bishops within the witness of the New Testament claiming that "Timothy and Titus were traveling bishops." They would further claim that "every candid person, who is thoroughly acquainted with the New Testament, must allow, that whatever excellencies other plans may have, *this* is the primitive and *apostolic plan*."<sup>40</sup>

67. While the practice of itinerancy has undergone drastic transformation in the more than two centuries since the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, it remains true that our current system of an appointive and itinerant ministry is a distinctive feature of United Methodist practice and identity and one interpreted through the lens of a biblical and apostolic pattern. Modeled on the ministry of Paul, grounded in Jesus' commissioning and sending of disciples into the world (Mark 6:7-13, Luke 10:1-3), and rooted in Jesus' own self-understanding ("As the Father has sent me, I am sending you," John 20:21), the practice of itinerancy carries within it "profound understandings of the gospel, of church and of the ministry."<sup>41</sup> "Itinerancy – and the next move, and the next one after that – have to do fundamentally with how Methodists understand God to work in the world. God works by sending. Itinerancy is a biblical and apostolic form of ministry."<sup>42</sup>

## Called to be Catholic – The Saving Love of God is Meant for all People

*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races?*

***I do.***

(“Baptismal Covenant I,” *BOW*, p. 88)

68. “God our Savior . . . desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4). John Wesley’s comment on this statement from 1 Timothy in his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* emphasizes the “everyone”: *all* of humankind is included in this desire - “Not a part only, much less the smallest part.” He also notes another implication of the statement: “They are not compelled.” The grace of God extended to all does not override human freedom but empowers it, so that our salvation, while entirely a gift, involves our free participation. This conviction regarding the universality of God’s saving intentions for the world, and thus God’s universal offer of grace to all people of every age, nation, and race remains a vital part of United Methodist witness today. When we as United Methodists affirm that the church of God is “catholic” we mean to affirm that God’s saving love has a universal intention, and wherever this saving intention draws people together in Christian fellowship, there the fullness of the church is present. By using the term “catholic” we recognize both that the church is spread across the whole face of the globe, and that the whole church is present in every place where faithful persons are gathered.

69. Central to this affirmation is the conviction that God’s grace “goes before” and empowers every human response of love, good will, and saving faith in Christ. Despite the universal sinfulness of humankind, God demonstrates a desire that all might be saved by giving every person a measure of that “preventing grace...which waiteth not for the call of man [*sic*].”<sup>43</sup> Every impulse toward good, every stirring of human conscience, every genuine act of repentance, reconciliation and love among humankind has its source in this universally bestowed prevenient grace of God.

70. Wesley combines this conviction regarding the wideness of God’s grace with an equal conviction of the limits of human perception regarding God’s work. God’s grace does work in order to bring persons to a unifying love of God and neighbor through faith in Jesus Christ. Yet Wesley recognizes that Christians in different times and places will come to different conclusions regarding practices, modes of worship, or opinions enjoined by the Christian faith. He further acknowledges that God’s grace is mysteriously at work even beyond the bounds of visible Christian community in ways that exceed our comprehension.

### ***Universal Grace and a Catholic Spirit***

71. Wesley encourages all Christians to exhibit what he calls a “catholic spirit.” Recognizing that genuine love of God and neighbor, a saving faith in Jesus Christ, and pure desire to serve God in the world are consistent with a diversity of practices and opinions, Wesley argues that the truest mark of the Christian community is a “catholic love” that binds Christians together across such differences.<sup>44</sup> Stated negatively, this catholic spirit is necessary given that we are assured that we will be mistaken in some of our practices and opinions without knowing which ones. As Wesley writes, “*humanum est errare et nescire* – to be ignorant of many things, and to mistake in some, is the necessary condition of humanity.”<sup>45</sup> Such a natural limitation requires humility on the part of the faithful so that diversity of practice does not engender animosity between Christians.

72. Stated more positively, however, the catholic spirit enjoined by Wesley recognizes that God's grace at work in every place and every time comes to each one within their peculiar historical, cultural, social and even ecclesial circumstances. The catholicity of the church means both that God's saving love is universal, but also that in every local and specific situation in which God's love draws people together in Christian community, there the fullness of the church is present. It is in and through one's connection to this or that local and finite community that one's faith in Christ is kindled and one's affections are sanctified by the Spirit through receiving the means of grace, joining in public prayer, hearing the proclamation of the gospel, and being schooled in the concrete love of one's neighbor.<sup>46</sup>

73. Wesley himself would not have been attuned to the kind of questions which characterize much of our ecclesial discernment today, related as they are to our own contexts and variety of cultures. However, his emphasis on the universal presence of God's empowering grace, and his identification of the catholic spirit with universal or catholic love, have important implications for the expression of United Methodist identity and practice today. We affirm that no single cultural expression of the Gospel is fit for all times and places. A catholic love rooted in the essentials of faith in Jesus Christ, worship of the Triune God, and holiness of heart and life must find itself enculturated in ways appropriate to their time and place. This theological truth is captured beautifully in the story of Pentecost, where the Spirit calls the church into being by empowering people of every nation to hear and receive the saving deeds of God in their very own languages (Acts 2).

74. At times the church has sinned against this Spirit of Pentecost and the catholic or universal scope of God's saving intention by serving, whether unwittingly or deliberately, as the instrument of an ideology of national, racial, ethnic, or gender superiority. The witness of the church has at times been allied to programs of violent colonization, exploitation and tribal conflict. In recent years, The United Methodist Church has been brought to a new awareness that its own history is not free of involvements in events of this sort. We acknowledge that our own history with regards to race and the treatment of indigenous populations demonstrates past complicity with cultural ideologies that have marred the witness of the church. Recent acts of repentance and remembrance adopted by the General Conference give witness to the ways Methodists have repeatedly failed to resist sinful divisions within the human family.<sup>47</sup> Such acts of repentance are not an end in themselves but are best understood as a first step on the long journey toward racial justice and reconciliation.

75. Our conviction that God's love extends to all of God's creatures, and not just to some, illumines our ongoing attempts to more fully express the catholicity of the church. The line from 1 Timothy 2:4 cited previously could be a United Methodist motto: The God revealed in Christ "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God's grace is available to all, and that *in equal measure*. Among other things, this accounts for the emphasis placed in The United Methodist Church upon full inclusivity in membership and ministry, as well as its constitutional commitment to racial justice, so that the church might be a faithful sign of the truly universal scope of God's grace (2016 BOD, ¶¶4-5).

76. In the same vein, one gift The United Methodist Church can offer the universal church, along with many other communions, is our commitment to the full and equal inclusion of women in all forms of ministry in the life of the church. We affirm that women are called to participate in all offices of leadership and ministry in the church. We believe men and women are equally created in the image of God, are addressed and called by the same universal saving intention of God and are endowed with an equal measure of the authority of the Holy Spirit.

77. Women were often the first to open new initiatives for ministries of compassion, healing and justice which prompted the creation of the lay order of deaconesses in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. While it took many decades for churches in the Methodist tradition to finally grant lay

women representation at conferences and open offices of ordained ministry to women, the Methodist movement has depended heavily upon the ministry and leadership of its women from the very beginning. Women were class leaders, preachers, and educators in their homes and communities. Through the women's mission societies, lay women led the church in massively-scaled efforts in mission and advocacy, work that continues today through United Methodist Women and other women's organizations in conferences outside the United States. One recognized expression of *diakonia* (service) in our denomination today continues in the ongoing witness of the lay order of Deaconess and Home Missioner (2016 *BOD*, ¶1914). The continued presence of this order in our denomination offers the church a vital witness to prophetic ministry among the marginalized.

78. Through great endurance and persistence women were eventually granted entrance into ordained ministry and a share in the episcopal oversight of the church. Women were first granted full clergy rights in the Methodist Church in 1956. The first woman bishop in The United Methodist Church was not elected until 1980. While our church has much more progress to make to empower the full and equal participation of women in ministry, we affirm that the leadership and ministry of women in our denomination express both our apostolic mission and the catholic or universal nature of God's saving grace.

79. Finally, the church is truly catholic when the universal love of God as the foundational truth of the Gospel is put into practice in local communities of discipleship, worship, and mission. Recognizing that human responses to God's universal offer of saving grace will be expressed in a variety of legitimate cultural forms in different times and places, The United Methodist Church acknowledges the need for a variety of practice within its own global polity. While much of our ecclesiastical expression has been and remains centered in the culture of the United States, The United Methodist Church continues to strive to more fully live into its global nature, celebrating the remarkable growth of its churches in many conferences outside the United States. Central Conferences, which exist to carry out the work of The United Methodist Church outside the United States, were first organized in the 1880s. In recognition that many specific cultural presuppositions mark our current institutional structure these Central Conferences are given latitude to adapt the regulations of the *Book of Discipline* in contextually specific and culturally appropriate ways, even while we maintain a core of shared practice and conviction (2016 *BOD*, ¶101). In this way we seek to express the catholicity of the church as we relate a global connection to a wide variety of distinct local contexts.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Universal Grace Exceeding Ecclesial Boundaries***

80. Wesley's description of the catholic spirit describes universal love as a central aspect of the visible church, an aspect that is to characterize life within distinct Christian churches and across lines of denominational difference. But the universal character of God's saving intentions for the world also carries important implications for those outside the bounds of the visible Christian church. The perspective of many Christians and of many Christian communities on this matter has shifted in more recent years. For instance, *TCV* affirms "that God reaches out to those who are not explicit members of the Church, in ways that may not be immediately evident to human eyes."<sup>49</sup> Thus, persons who are not explicit or visible members of the church are yet recipients of God's grace and may be responding to this grace in a greater or lesser degree. The statement does not suggest that all persons are, in fact, responding to the love of God in such a way, nor does it imply that those who do so respond are therefore "really Christians" without knowing it. It does, however, imply that God's saving love may be encountered in other forms and other places.

81. John Wesley lamented the fact that many professing Christians of his day seemed at best to have “the form of godliness, but not the power thereof” (cf. 2 Timothy 3:5). This was not because God had decreed their exclusion from salvation, but because they were refusing to use the grace they were given by the God who “wants all people to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4). At the same time, Wesley was unwilling to believe that the multitudes of people who were *not* professing Christians—for example, the large numbers of the poor in England who were alienated from the church and felt excluded by it, or the millions around the world who had never heard the Gospel—were utterly deprived of God’s grace on that account, for reasons beyond their control. On the contrary, he was convinced that Christ died for all, that the guilt of “inbeing sin” that may have been incurred through the fall of our first parents had been cancelled for all, and that grace was available to all.<sup>50</sup> A lesson we might learn from Wesley is that we need to exercise a realistically self-critical capacity when it comes to the quality of our own life and witness as Christians and Christian communities, to be alert to the dangers of self-deception and aware of our own permanent need for repentance and renewal. Additionally, we need to be open to the presence of God in our neighbors, including our non-Christian neighbors, and open to the love of God that may come to us through them. Such a stance is, in fact, reflected in United Methodist teaching concerning our relations to those of other religious traditions.<sup>51</sup>

82. Our recognition that God’s saving work extends beyond the bounds of the visible church leads us to affirm that there is no time and place, no culture or society that is utterly bereft of the presence of God’s life-giving grace. While sin has marred all forms of human community, God’s universal grace continues to empower persons to live together in love, to seek peace and justice among peoples, and to pursue many expressions of truth, beauty and goodness. As the church engages the world through its explicit witness to Jesus Christ, it does so in the recognition that the “Spirit of life” precedes it in its mission in every instance.<sup>52</sup> Wherever the church finds an affirmation of abundant life for all creatures, wherever the church encounters truth-telling, wherever the church discerns neighborly love and sacrificial care for the other, and wherever the church discovers a genuine longing for spiritual life, there is the Spirit of life at work. Faithful evangelism and witness to Christ is not only consistent with such affirmations but requires that the people of God engage in such “discerning of the spirits”: speaking words of prophetic critique in the midst of our cultural settings as well as pointing to incognito signs of God’s grace at work among our communities.

### ***Universal Grace, Difference, and Ecclesial Discernment***

83. No reference to “the church” in the singular should be taken to imply that differences have no place in the Christian community. The fact that the Triune God is the source of our communion should be enough to remind us that we seek a dynamic, relational unity and not a monolithic uniformity. The gifts of the Spirit differ in character (1 Corinthians 12:4-7) and are exercised in different ways for the common good. Also, human beings and their cultures differ from one another in manifold ways, and these differences enrich our fellowship (*koinonia*). Such differences are of the essence of the catholic nature of the church which has been “opened to people of all ages, nations and races.” Particular churches—within and across traditions—have their own ways of being church. They are free to differ, and to some extent they must differ, in order to relate to the situations in which they find themselves and in order to realize their particular gifts.

84. How such Spirit-filled diversity may be distinguished from differences which “strike at the root of Christianity”<sup>53</sup> is a question still seeking a clear answer both in the ecumenical context and within The United Methodist Church. We recognize that celebrating diversity, inclusivity and local distinctiveness should not engender an ecclesiology that lacks

conviction on the essentials of faith. We are bound together by a shared faith and global covenant for mission (2016 *BOD*, ¶¶125, 132). Nevertheless, we know all too well that discerning those things which are of the essence of the Christian faith and thus universally applicable, and those things which ought to be open to a variety of usage, expression and local adaptation is often a fraught and challenging process. A church that finds itself in the midst of such challenges may need to ask itself the same question currently being posed in the ecumenical conversation to all the churches together: What positive steps can be taken to make common discernment possible?<sup>54</sup> We will return to this question when we take up the question of the unity of the church.

### **Called to Be Holy – The Saving Love of God is Transformative**

*Q. What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?*

*A. To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land.*

(The “Large” *Minutes* (1763), §4)

85. The pursuit and spread of “scriptural holiness” have been foundational aspects of the Methodist movement from its beginning. Scriptural holiness has been understood to include the renewal of persons in the image of God, having the mind that was in Christ Jesus, and ultimately the perfect love of God and neighbor ruling in the heart. The mission to “spread scriptural holiness” is grounded in the first instance in the experience of God’s transforming grace which alone empowers a faithful human response. From its earliest expression Methodist community life was marked by a common pursuit of holiness as members committed to “watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation” in response to God’s grace (“The General Rules of The Methodist Church,” 2016 *BOD*, ¶104). The Methodist movement and the churches that came into being through it sought to participate in the work of the Spirit in spreading scriptural holiness by drawing people into communities of care, exhortation, and mutual accountability, empowering them to live by the discipline of holy love. In the context of disciplined community Methodists have pursued holiness of heart and life by 1) doing no harm and avoiding evil, 2) doing good “of every possible sort” and 3) attending upon the ordinances of God. These “general rules” for the pursuit of holy life and holy community give concrete shape to the mission and purpose of The United Methodist Church “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

### ***The Nature of Holiness***

86. The life of discipleship which is none other than the life of holiness is only possible by the transforming power of God’s saving love. Christian holiness is ultimately rooted in the very holiness of God (Matthew 5:48, 1 Peter 1:16, cf. Leviticus 11:44), and is realized in this life as persons are given a share in God’s holiness by grace (2 Peter 1:3-4). Apart from this grace, held captive to sinful distortions of human existence, we stand in need of a regeneration of our capacities to order our lives according to the knowledge and love of this holy God. To use the language familiar to Wesley and his contemporaries, as God’s grace is accepted in faith, it brings both “justification,” the restoration of a right relationship with God, and “sanctification,” the renewal of our very being. There is a new birth. Grace leads, as Wesley said, to a “real change” within the recipient. “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Being born anew, receiving faith “filled with the energy of

love” (as Wesley would render Galatians 5:6), means having “God’s love . . . poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5). The love of God *for* us becomes the love of God *in* us. In the words of the apostle Paul, “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1), and being “called to freedom,” we are to “live by the Spirit,” which means living by the love of God that empowers us to put aside “the works of the flesh” and to bear “the fruit of the Spirit . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:13, 16, 19, 22-23). A hallmark of John Wesley’s preaching, and of the preaching and testimony of the people called Methodist through the years, is the declaration that such an experienced, here-and-now sanctification of human life by the power of the Holy Spirit is real.

87. The goal of God’s saving purposes for humankind in this life is perfect holiness. Wesley used a range of images to describe Christian perfection or entire sanctification including the circumcision of the heart, purity of intention, having the mind that was in Christ, entire devotion to God, and the full renewal of the soul in the image of God.<sup>55</sup> These images find their ultimate expression in perfect love which is “the sum of Christian sanctification.”<sup>56</sup> It is “pure love filling the heart and governing all the words and actions.”<sup>57</sup> It is the Methodist conviction that this full measure of love reigning in the soul of a believer is to be expected in this life by grace through faith. One place this conviction gains concrete expression is in the historic examination of persons presented for ordination as elders and deacons who are asked the following questions: “(1) Have you faith in Christ? (2) Are you going on to perfection? (3) Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? (4) Are you earnestly striving after perfection in love? (5) Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and God’s work?” (2016 *BOD*, ¶330.5.d.1-5). To such questions the candidates are expected to answer “Yes, by God’s grace.”

88. Wesley wanted his preachers and his people to pursue this comprehensive vision of the full renewal of the image of God in every believer. He did not want Christians to settle for reductionist, one-dimensional accounts of salvation. The realization of the *koinonia* (communion, fellowship) for which we are created, and of which the church is to be both sign and servant, involves being freed from those sinful conditions (both external and internal) that make us miserable, and entering into the harmony of knowledge, love, and joy with the Triune God and with all creation.

### ***The Dimensions of Holiness***

89. The experience of such renewal in the everyday life of Christian community was for the early Methodists, and has been for their spiritual descendants, a central feature of their proclamation, practice and identity. In one of John Wesley’s own short descriptions of the transforming power of God’s saving love, he noted that salvation is much more than just “going to heaven” but includes a “present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity.”<sup>58</sup> The pinnacle of this present “renewal of our souls after the image of God” is the perfect love of God and neighbor “ruling the whole life, animating all our tempers and passions, directing all our thoughts, words and actions.”<sup>59</sup>

90. Holiness is deeply personal and yet has inseparable public and social dimensions. It is as intimate as each person’s inner experience of the pardoning and sanctifying grace of God, and as all-encompassing as God’s will for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. Personal renewal leads to an ongoing commitment to transformation through a life of prayer, devotion, and service, an interior life of the soul formed in community. This life takes the practical shape of holy love. Thus, it cannot help but express itself in social forms, both in continued commitment to Christian community and through concrete concern for the wellbeing of all one’s neighbors. As Wesley would famously write:

The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. “Faith working by love” is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection. “This commandment we have from Christ, that he who loves God, love his brother also;” and that we manifest our love “by doing good unto all men; especially them that are of the family of faith.”<sup>60</sup>

United Methodists are at our best when we realize the integral relationship between the personal and social dimensions of holiness, and at something less than our best when we play them off against each other.

91. Thus, the vivid experiential realities wrought by the saving love of God, lead to new personal and social consequences. As that love is absorbed in personal renewal it is expressed not only in direct and explicit witness to the Gospel but also in community-building (*koinonia* activity, we might say) in a great variety of ways. Such community-building might range from fostering personal relationships to the founding of hospitals and universities, from the outreach ministries of local congregations to participation in large-scale efforts for social amelioration and reform. While John Wesley’s own conviction that “there is no holiness but social holiness” found principal expression in Christian community formation, acts of charity and mercy, and an emphasis on the ethics of love, he also evinced a growing realization that such emphases have important political and societal implications. Wesley was a fierce opponent of the political institution of slavery and would venture an intervention into the shape of the political economy on behalf of the poor in late 18<sup>th</sup> century England.<sup>61</sup>

92. The Methodist tradition has developed these implications further, drawing a direct connection between “social holiness” and the work of social justice in the society and creation at large. This development would lead various Methodist bodies to adopt several forms of a “social creed” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Today this emphasis finds continued expression in the United Methodist heritage in our Social Principles (2016 *BOD*, Part V) and in occasional resolutions of the General Conference gathered together in the *Book of Resolutions*. Such statements call the church to support and advocate for institutions and practices that foster human well-being and to challenge those that do not. In a 2009 pastoral letter United Methodist bishops connected this calling to social holiness with environmental stewardship writing:

Through social holiness we make ourselves channels of God’s blessing in the world. Because God’s blessing, care and promise of renewal extend to all of creation, we can speak today of “environmental holiness” as well. We practice social and environmental holiness by caring for God’s people and God’s planet and by challenging those whose policies and practices neglect the poor, exploit the weak, hasten global warming, and produce more weapons.<sup>62</sup>

United Methodists today understand this promotion of justice, mercy, and truth throughout the social order and on behalf of all creation as one concrete expression of their call to “spread scriptural holiness” across the land.

### ***Holiness and the Means of Grace in Methodism***

93. The encounter with the transforming love of God leads United Methodists to believe that the holiness of the church should be reflected in the character of its communion, practice, and witness to the world. Just as God’s grace transforms the very being of the individual through sanctification, this grace calls into being a transformed community whose intrinsic character is to be oriented toward the love of God and neighbor through its worship, disciplined living, mission and witness. As a community of persons dedicated to watching

over one another in love and disposed toward the world with hearts that “burn with love to all [humankind], to friends and enemies, neighbors and strangers...to every soul which God hath made”<sup>63</sup> the church exists as a means of grace, a channel by which the love of God in Christ is made tangible in the world. Thus, for United Methodists there is a kind of sacramental quality to the life of the church. Through its life the mysterious and invisible grace of God is made known through tangible, historical and embodied acts of love and witness.

94. John Wesley defined the means of grace as “outward signs, words or actions ordained of God...to be the *ordinary* channels whereby [God] might convey to [persons] preventing, justifying or sanctifying grace.”<sup>64</sup> While God’s grace cannot be limited by such visible means, as we have discussed above, nevertheless God has promised to be present in the life of the gathered community (Matthew 18:20) and to meet the faithful in a variety of tangible means or practices. Among these means are prayer, searching the scriptures whether by reading or hearing the proclaimed word, public worship and the sacraments, fasting, Christian fellowship, acts of compassion and mercy toward those who suffer or are in need, and acts of public witness to Christ. The church is a means of grace in part because it has been empowered by the Spirit to be the guardian and shepherd of these practices through which God has promised to meet human kind with the transforming power of grace. By “faithfully attending upon these ordinances of God” the church embodies in its own life that “continuing environment of grace in and by which all Christians live, God’s self-giving love in Jesus Christ” (2016 *BOD*, ¶105).

95. If these are the means, the end is the transformation of persons by God’s grace and the knitting together of a new fellowship of persons oriented toward the pure love of God and neighbor. As each person is made a new creature in Christ and joined together in the community of the new creation, they witness in their very being God’s design for the renewal of the entire created order (Romans 8:22; Revelation 21:1). The holiness of the church is a sign of this final work of transformation for which we wait in hope. As the holiness of the church is intrinsically tied to the dynamic and unfolding journey of sanctification among its members, and as the church is but a pilgrim community that awaits the final consummation of God’s redemption, the church as a community is not yet free from sin. It stands in need of continued critical self-reflection, humility, and regular repentance.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the church remains confident in the promises of God that in the midst of our weakness God’s grace is sufficient (2 Corinthians 12:9), that the work of holiness begun in the life of the church will be carried to completion in the end (Philippians 1:6), and that God will not cease to be present in its life and work (Matthew 28:20).<sup>66</sup>

### **Called to Be One – God’s Saving Love Creates Community**

*“By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet table.”*  
(“A Service of Word and Table I,” *BOW*, p. 38)

96. There is an intimate connection between holiness in the church, the shedding abroad of the Spirit in our hearts (Romans 5:5), and the unity of the church. The transformation described above is by its very nature a transformation of our relationships with others. It is through others that we experience the love of God; it is with others that the pattern of new life that God gives is both learned and lived out. Much of the language in the New Testament descriptive of the church originates in the early Christian experience of the community-forming power of the Spirit. The church does not come into being because isolated individuals experience God’s saving love and then take the initiative to seek out other individuals with

whom to form a group. The church comes into being because the Spirit of God leads us into community—perhaps with persons with whom we would least expect to associate—as the very matrix of our salvation. That Spirit-formed community becomes the context within which we enter into the new life God offers us, and it is a community whose reach is constantly being extended as its members, in the power of the Spirit, offer the gift of community to others, and likewise receive it from them.

97. This community-forming power of the Spirit calls all Christians to live together in unity. The unity of the church is not of our own making, but is a gift we receive as we are joined together in one body, united by our mutual sharing (one of the several meanings of *koinonia*) in the one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (Ephesians 4:4-6, c.f. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). At our best United Methodists have learned to celebrate the multifaceted ways God establishes and enlivens the communion of the church through proclamation, personal experience of the Spirit, and sacramental worship.

98. Empowered and sent in love by the Spirit, the Methodist movement has its roots in the evangelical proclamation of traveling preachers. These preachers invited hearers into Christian community through personal conversion of heart and life and faith in Jesus Christ. As “faith comes by hearing” (Romans 10:17) so Christian fellowship in that faith begins with the Spirit-empowered human response to the proclamation of the Gospel. Worship and communal life in the Methodist tradition has often been characterized by extraordinary outpourings of the Holy Spirit. A crucial experience of Methodist community has been shared testimony to the experiential power of the “witness of the Spirit”: to the gifts, renewal of life, and assurance of faith the Spirit imparts as a “common privilege of all Christians” (Acts 1:8, 2:1-35; Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5:22-23).<sup>67</sup>

99. Finally, United Methodists affirm that the saving love of God draws us into communion as we are corporately united with Christ by the power of the Spirit through sacramental worship. By the waters of baptism, through the agency of the Spirit, we are “incorporated...into God’s new creation” and made “one in Christ Jesus” (“The Baptismal Covenant I,” *BOW*, p.92). “Baptism brings us into union with Christ, with each other, and with the church in every time and place” (*BWS*, 29). In baptism “our equality in Christ is made manifest (Galatians 3:27-28)” and we celebrate together the “basic bond of unity in the many communions that make up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-6)” (*BWS*, 29; cf. Romans 6:3-4, 1 Corinthians 12:13).

100. United to Christ and to one another in baptism, Christian communion is sustained by the gift of Christ’s abiding presence in the Eucharist. Feasting on Christ’s eucharistic body by the power of the Spirit, Christians themselves become the body of Christ in the world (“A Service of Word and Table I,” *BOW*, p. 38). As we approach the table United Methodists claim the promises of scripture: “Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ” (*BOW*, p. 39; 1 Corinthians 10:17). Everywhere the supper of the Lord is celebrated there the one Body of Christ is made manifest. “Communing with others in our congregations is a sign of community and mutual love between Christians throughout the Church Universal” (*THM*, p. 36). As the Spirit makes “us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world” by this meal, our table fellowship becomes an eschatological sign of that final unity of all God’s people who will join together in perfect *koinonia* (fellowship, mutual sharing, communion) when we feast at Christ’s heavenly banquet table (*UMH*, p. 10).

### ***Unity, Division, and Ecumenical Commitment***

101. In a world torn apart by sinful divisions of many kinds, unity among Christian believers is a powerful witness to the work of the reconciling God who tears down dividing

walls of hostility and entrusts the church with a ministry of reconciliation (Ephesians 2: 14; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; c.f. Galatians 3:28). Together with other Christians, United Methodists “declare the essential oneness of the Church in Christ Jesus” (2016 *BOD*, ¶102) even as we lament the sinful divisions which continue to mark its pilgrimage through history. Trusting in the community-creating power of God’s love, United Methodists have expressed a constitutional commitment to overcome these divisions by praying, seeking and working for unity “at all levels of church life” (2016 *BOD*, ¶6), both within our own denomination and the church universal.

102. The search for Christian unity is a prayerful quest to realize Jesus’ own prayer when he asks the Father that those to whom “eternal life” is given “may all be one . . . that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17:20-23). Here mission and unity are inextricably connected. “The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world,” states the preamble to the constitution of The United Methodist Church, “and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world” (Preamble to Constitution, 2016 *BOD*). At stake, then, in the search for Christian unity is the integrity of the mission of the body of Christ as a whole. At stake, by implication, is the integrity of our United Methodist mission as part of the church universal.

103. Thus, The United Methodist Church remains committed to seeking the unity of Christ’s body within its own life and within the one universal church. We do this by continuing our longstanding commitment to ecumenical dialogue and through our participation in and support of ecumenical bodies. We seek to join our hearts and hands with fellow Christians in acts of service and justice, witness and worship that strengthen the mission of Christ’s one body. Our commitment to this work reflects our theological conviction that Christ’s church is by its very nature one, that our ongoing divisions reflect a situation of human sinfulness, and that such divisions are a stumbling block to our mission and witness in the world.

### ***Polity, Connectionalism, and Unity***

104. The way the church orders its own life is itself an aspect of its witness to the world. When its polity enables and manifests an openness to the community-forming power of the Holy Spirit, when it serves the church’s mandate “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3) with such power and clarity as to bring to humankind a new understanding of the possibilities for fruitful life together, then it has fulfilled its purpose.

105. One crucial way United Methodists seek to embody the community-creating power of God’s love in our own denominational polity goes by the name of “*connectionalism*.” Our itinerant ministry, the superintendency (bishops and district superintendents), and the system of conferences are instruments of connectionalism. By these means United Methodists are linked together through a network of personal and pastoral relationships, and shared participation in district, annual, central, jurisdictional and general conferences. Likewise, apportioned giving from local churches to support ministries across the connection through churchwide boards and agencies expresses our conviction that the mission and ministry of the church is enhanced when our efforts and resources are joined together. All of these are intended to foster an ethos and practice of mutual support and mutual accountability, of shared oversight and of the strengthening of all by the gifts of all. As such, our connectional polity recognizes our interdependence and embodies our unity in practical ways. “Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust,” joining United Methodists together in “a vital web of interactive relationships” (2016 *BOD*, ¶132). The underlying principles of connectionalism are rooted in some of the deepest insights of ancient

Christian tradition regarding the sustaining of communion in and among Christian communities.

### ***Community and Conference***

106. In United Methodism the community formed by God's saving love is lived out in a series of practices we have called conference. Conference, in this usage, refers first of all to a practice that Christians are to be engaged in. The class meeting and other small groups have been an important practice in helping Christians experience the transforming power of God's love. In one instance, John Wesley referred to Christian conference as a "means of grace," that is, as a practice incumbent upon Christians and meant to foster our growth in "holiness of heart and life."<sup>68</sup> It is one of the ways God helps us to help one another toward maturity in faith, hope, and love. It involves elements of prayerful, honest self-examination, of "speaking the truth in love" to one another, of mutual accountability and support, and of careful deliberation as to how we are to conduct ourselves in the future. Charles Wesley's hymn "Jesus, United by Thy Grace" refers to the unity of God's people and caring for each other with the same mind that was in Christ (*UMH*, 561). The practice of Christian conference goes on under many forms, including one-on-one conversations between Christians, small group meetings of various kinds and for various purposes, and even larger events such as those gatherings officially designated as "Conferences" in United Methodist governance.

107. United Methodist polity is characterized by a network of such governing conferences, from local churches to districts to annual conference, jurisdictional and central conferences and the General Conference. Clergy and laity gather in these meetings and all are marked by multiple purposes. They are often composed of a combination of powerful worship, important teaching, significant fellowship, and crucial decision-making about how best to fulfill United Methodism's mission. The practice of Christian conferencing that includes mutual support, watching over one another in love, speaking the truth in love, worship and prayer, and common discernment should be evident at all levels of church life, including our system of governing conferences. When our time together in conference becomes a means of grace in these ways our polity bears significant witness to the community-forming power of God's saving love.

### ***Unity, Diversity and Conflict***

108. It is God who brings us to the church, or who brings the church to us, creating church in our midst by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God is the very source of Christian community. As God meets humanity with saving grace in a variety of times and places, diversity in the church is wholly consistent with its unity and is in fact an intrinsic and necessary feature of its life. Unity in the Body of Christ does not mean a blanket uniformity in all things. The church is both one and catholic, as it includes people from the wide variety of this world's cultures, nations, and peoples. We are brought together in the first instance by grace, not because we share the same views, customs, cultural practices, or even moral convictions. Through our encounters with others in Christian community, we may of course discover or come to agreement on many things over time. But overcoming or erasing differences is not necessarily the best outcome. Some differences are part of the good diversity of creation, the diversity that is "a gift from the Lord" and should be honored as such. Furthermore, some differences within the church aid the church in its mission to a diverse and rapidly changing world. When such differences are held in the midst of a deeper and richer unity, they do not threaten the fellowship God intends, but instead enhance it.

109. At the same time, such differences often give rise to conflicts related to the appropriate boundaries of faithful Christian belief and practice. Modern denominational conflicts, including the current travails within The United Methodist Church itself, surrounding the place and role of LGBTQ persons in the life of the church demonstrate this challenge with particular force in the contemporary setting. In such cases the problem is not conflict itself. Problems arise in the way we sometimes deal with conflict. Conflict is a given in the church. A church without conflict is very likely to be a church that is failing to be the church. Conflict is to be expected as diverse groups of Christians seek to make judgements together about (to use the Wesleyan language) “what to teach, how to teach, and what to do.”<sup>69</sup> When a conflict surrounding crucial matters can be resolved through discussion or negotiation, through a process in which all involved are treated with respect, the whole process can be a powerful witness to the gospel. As the church, we are not called to avoid conflict, nor to banish it, but rather to deal with it redemptively.

110. Aspects of our United Methodist heritage might encourage us to ponder features of a redemptive approach to conflict. Wesley’s sermon “Catholic Spirit” reminds its readers that everyone can be sure they are mistaken in some of what they think they know. Such a realization should prevent us from seeking too readily to resolve our deeper divisions through the winner-take-all instrument of a simple majority vote.

111. In the Preface to his “Standard Sermons” John Wesley describes a situation in which he and a hypothetical conversation partner do not see eye to eye. He implores his conversation partner to “treat me as you would desire to be treated yourself upon a change of circumstances” by showing patience, by not using harsh methods or insults to seek to change his mind, and to avoid anger. Harsh words and anger only serve to push the conversation partner away and provoke anger in them which “dim(s) the eyes” of the soul and makes it impossible for anyone to see clearly. He goes on to say, “Let us not kindle in each other this fire of hell, much less blow it up into a flame. If we could discern truth by that dreadful light, would it not be loss rather than gain? For how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love?”<sup>70</sup>

112. Wesley is addressing situations in which we may become vulnerable to a spirit of fear, and thus of hostility and divisiveness; a spirit destructive of the communion that is God’s will for us. In face of this temptation to yield to fear and hostility, it is important for Christians not to succumb to the familiar rhetoric of polarization, but to recognize it (whether in our own discourse, or in that of others), to refuse it, and to counter it constructively. An abiding confidence that God’s intention is to gather up all things together in Christ (Ephesians 1:10) undergirds whatever we do. To this confidence we must add our earnest prayer that we do not stand in the way of that intention.

113. The relevance of these resources to questions of United Methodist ecclesiology are clear. We need forms of polity and collective discernment that are consistent with all of the core convictions we have explored to this point: that is, forms that empower a community sent in love for mission and witness, forms that honor the radically inclusive scope of God’s saving grace, forms that recognize and build upon the transformative character of that grace, and forms that will serve, rather than subvert, the growth of genuine community. We must work diligently to embody more fully a truly catholic spirit.

## **Part Four: Sent In Love**

114. The very purpose of the church as the body of Christ is to be a community sent in love in accordance with Jesus Christ’s mission in this world. From the beginning of the

Methodist movement, Methodist preachers, pastors, and lay people have been devoted to mission. As a community sent in love The United Methodist Church endeavors by the power of the Spirit to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (2016 *BOD*, ¶120). We understand ourselves as a community participating in God’s redemption and renewal of all creation. Therefore, matters of faith and order in The United Methodist Church are not primarily concerned with ecclesial consolidation or institutional survival but instead with the transformation of the world in accordance with the will of God. Being sent in love for the transformation of the world implies also attention to and care for those who are not part of the church’s community, and it includes stewardship of creation.

115. The ancient marks of the church form the doctrinal core of United Methodist ecclesiology. At the same time we are committed to embodying that identity in the contemporary world. As Charles Wesley wrote in “A Charge to Keep I Have:” “To serve the present age, my calling to fulfill...” (*UMH*, 413). United Methodists have practiced a form of “practical divinity”, seeking to embody the truths of the gospel in ways that are relevant to an ever-changing world. A central task of the church is to creatively correlate the commitment to the marks of the church with the contextual challenges at hand.

116. May the God of the Apostles continually enliven in the church a readiness to be sent in love with the gospel message to a world in need of redemption! May the God of all ages, races and nations inspire in the church a radical openness to God’s universal saving will, which reaches across all dividing lines to empower the fullness of divine and human fellowship in every time and place! May the God of holiness transform the church and each of its members to creatively embody a new life of love, peace, and justice! May the God who is One create among us, again and again, communities of mutual trust, solidarity, and a spirit of unity in reconciled diversity! May it be so. Thanks be to God!

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are utilized throughout the document: *BWS* (*By Water and the Spirit*), *THM* (*This Holy Mystery*), *TCV* (WCC Statement, *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*), *TDL* (UMC-USCCB statement *Through Divine Love*), *HEFG* (UMC-USCCB statement *Heaven and Earth are Full of your Glory*), *UMH* for *United Methodist Hymnal*, *BOD* for *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, *MV* for *Mil voces para celebrar* (*United Methodist Hymnal* in Spanish). Place names will be used for documents from the International Methodist-Catholic Dialogues (e.g. Seoul 2006, for the report presented at the WMC which gathered in Seoul in 2006) followed by the paragraph number. International Methodist-Catholic Dialogue documents, with corresponding place names, can be found online here: <http://worldmethodistcouncil.org/resources/ecumenical-dialogues/>. WCC documents can be found at [www.oikoumene.org](http://www.oikoumene.org).

<sup>2</sup> The writings of John Wesley hold a significant place in the official doctrine and teaching office of United Methodism. Both the *Standard Sermons* and his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* are listed among the doctrinal standards of The United Methodist Church (2016 *BOD*, ¶104).

<sup>3</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 1968* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1968), pp. 16-18. (With slight alterations in typography, these statements were retained in the 2012 *Book of Discipline*. An amendment adopted in 2012 and ratified subsequently has made explicit a crucial commitment, namely, a sharing in Christ's prayer for the unity of the church. The line now reads ". . . and therefore it will pray, seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life.")

<sup>4</sup> John Wesley, "The 'Large' Minutes," *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, edited by Henry D. Rack, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), p. 845.

<sup>5</sup> Seoul (2006), 53.

<sup>6</sup> John Wesley, "The New Creation," *Sermons II*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 510.

<sup>7</sup> *MV*, p.70.

<sup>8</sup> John Wesley, "God's Approbation of His Works," *Sermons II*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 397.

<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, 24, 1, cited in Boris Bobrinsky, *Le mystère de l'Église: Cours de théologie dogmatique* (Paris: Cerf, 2003), p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Seoul (2006), 59.

<sup>11</sup> *TCV*, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *TCV*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *TCV*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Seoul (2006), 57.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Houston (2016), Prologue.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Seoul (2006), 53.

<sup>17</sup> John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *Sermons II*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 156.

<sup>18</sup> John Wesley, "God's Approbation of His Works," *Sermons II*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 397. In a wonderful line from one of Charles Wesley's hymns, we are "ordained to be / transcripts of the Trinity" ("Sinners, Turn: Why Will You Die," *The United Methodist Hymnal* [Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989], #346).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *TCV*, 1.

<sup>20</sup> John Wesley, "Preface" *Sermons I*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 105.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Paris (1991), 31.

<sup>22</sup> *TDL*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> *HEFG*, 28.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>25</sup> Seoul (2006), 47.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Seoul (2006), 49.

<sup>27</sup> *TCV*, 22 (pp. 13-14).

<sup>28</sup> This phrase was formulated in an ecumenical context in *The Uppsala Report 1968: Official Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* and has been widely utilized by the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church.

<sup>29</sup> Seoul (2006), 17.

<sup>30</sup> On the ecumenical convergence see *BEM*, 34. For United Methodist affirmations on the apostolicity of its teaching, maintenance of worship, orderly transmission of ministries and episcopacy see 2016 *BOD*, ¶¶102, 104; ¶104, Article V of "The Confession of Faith"; ¶¶ 302-303, ¶¶401-403 respectively.

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- <sup>31</sup> *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012), 58. Hereafter *TTL*.
- <sup>32</sup> *United Methodist Doctrine and Teaching On the Nature, Mission, and Faithfulness of the Church*, p. 35. available at [http://www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/DOM\\_Nature\\_Mission\\_Faithfulness\\_of\\_Church.pdf](http://www.gbhem.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/DOM_Nature_Mission_Faithfulness_of_Church.pdf).
- <sup>33</sup> Russell E. Richey, with Dennis M. Campbell and William B. Lawrence, *Marks of Methodism: Theology In Ecclesial Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), pp. 31-32.
- <sup>34</sup> *Grace Upon Grace: The Mission Statement of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1990), 36. A link to an electronic version of this document may be found on the blog site UM & Global, <http://www.umglobal.org/>.
- <sup>35</sup> Brighton (2001), 36-36. On this point see also *TCV*, 19 and Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium*, 31.
- <sup>36</sup> *Book of Discipline 1968*, ¶302 (p. 107). Cf. *TCV*, 19.
- <sup>37</sup> Cf. *BEM*, 25; *TCV*, 47.
- <sup>38</sup> Cf. *LAW*, 69-74; *TCV*, 46.
- <sup>39</sup> See Wesley's letter to "Our Brethren in America" (1784), in *John Wesley* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1964), ed. Albert Outler, pp. 82-84.
- <sup>40</sup> Asbury/Coke, *Discipline* (1798), pp. 35-36.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>43</sup> John Wesley, "On Working Out your Own Salvation," *Sermons III*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 207.
- <sup>44</sup> John Wesley, "The Catholic Spirit," *Sermons II*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 94.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
- <sup>47</sup> See for instance Resolution 3323, "Healing Relationships with Indigenous Persons," *Book of Resolutions 2012*, pp. 419-420; Resolution 3324, "Trail of Repentance and Healing," *Book of Resolutions 2016*, pp. 332-334; and Resolution 3372, "Act of Repentance for Racism," *Book of Resolutions 2008*, pp. 464-465.
- <sup>48</sup> Oddly enough, this model still presumes in a certain sense that the U.S. context is the "normative" one, from which non-U.S. bodies may deviate if they wish. Despite this current imperfection, The United Methodist Church remains committed to ongoing reform in its global polity in recognition of the genuinely catholic character of Christ's church.
- <sup>49</sup> *TCV*, 25.
- <sup>50</sup> See "On Living Without God," *Sermons IV*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), pp. 174-175. See also his comment on Acts 10:34-35, *Notes on the New Testament*.
- <sup>51</sup> Cf. "Called to be Neighbors and Witnesses: Guidelines for Interreligious Relationships," *Book of Resolutions 2016*, pp. 293-297.
- <sup>52</sup> See for instance the "Theology of Mission" statement of GBGM (<https://www.umcmission.org/Learn-About-Us/About-Global-Ministries/Theology-of-Mission>, last accessed July 30, 2019) and *TTL*, ¶¶12-18.
- <sup>53</sup> John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, edited by Rupert E. Davies, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 9 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 34.
- <sup>54</sup> *TCV*, 30.
- <sup>55</sup> John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766), in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, ed. by Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 13 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), p. 190.
- <sup>56</sup> John Wesley, "On Patience," *Sermons III*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 175.
- <sup>57</sup> John Wesley, *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1760), in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, ed. by Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 13 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), p. 73.
- <sup>58</sup> John Wesley, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part I*, in *Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion and Certain Related Open Letters*, ed. by Gerald R. Cragg, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 11 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 106.
- <sup>59</sup> John Wesley, "The Important Question," *Sermons III*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 189; cf. "Scripture Way of Salvation, I.9 and *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, Q. 33.

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<sup>60</sup> John Wesley, The Preface to “*Hymns and Sacred Poems*” (1739), in *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises II*, ed. by Paul Wesley Chilcote and Kenneth J. Collins, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 13 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> See for instance his *Thoughts Upon Slavery* and “Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions.”

<sup>62</sup> “God’s Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action, The Pastoral Letter,” p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> John Wesley, “A Word to a Protestant,” *Works* (Jackson) 11:191, quoted in Field, *Bid Our Jarring Conflicts Cease*, p. 9.

<sup>64</sup> John Wesley, “The Means of Grace,” *Sermons I*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 381.

<sup>65</sup> See for instance the various “Acts of Repentance” undertaken by the General Conference for past participation of the institutional church in acts of racism and violence against indigenous persons (see note 46). Here the General Conference assumes the need for the institutional church itself to repent, and thus confesses the ongoing presence of sin in the life of the church itself.

<sup>66</sup> For a helpful discussion of the relationship between Methodist conviction and the “indefectibility” of the Church in Roman Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiology see the ecclesiological statement of the Methodist Church in Britain *Called to Love and Praise* (1999), 2.4.12. For a further rich conversation on sin in the life of the church across Protestant and Roman Catholic lines see *Declaration on the Way: Church, Ministry, and Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), pp. 78-81.

<sup>67</sup> John Wesley, “Awake, Thou That Sleepest,” *Sermons I*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 155; cf. “The Witness of the Spirit I” and “The Witness of the Spirit II.”

<sup>68</sup> See the “Large Minutes” of 1763, in *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, edited by Henry D. Rack, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), pp. 855-858.

<sup>69</sup> *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, edited by Henry D. Rack, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 10 [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011], p. 778.

<sup>70</sup> John Wesley, “The Preface” to *Sermons on Several Occasions*, volume 1 (1746), in *Sermons I*, edited by Albert C. Outler, *The Works of John Wesley*, volume 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), p. 107. The Greek for “like a puff of smoke” has been transliterated here.