

# **Methodist Identity: a six session introductory course**

## **Introduction:**

This course has been designed by a working party seeking to provide the London District with a resource that explains what it means to be a Methodist. Specifically, what is distinctive about Methodism compared to other denominations; how the Methodist Church in Britain compares to Methodist churches worldwide; and what it means to be a Methodist in 21<sup>st</sup> century London.

The six sessions cover different key themes:

- Methodist Worship & Belonging
- What Methodists Believe
- The History of Methodism in Britain and Beyond
- The Organisation of Methodism
- Methodist Social Outreach & Pastoral Care
- Methodism & Me

Each week is grounded in one of John Wesley's sermons, taking 21<sup>st</sup> century Methodism right back to its foundations.

The course has been designed as a flexible resource that can be used in different ways in different contexts, although it is primarily intended for a small group setting in mind, facilitated by a church leader.

## **Who is the course for?**

The working party envisaged that this course would be beneficial for a range of people worshipping in churches across the District.

Examples include:

- Those seeking to become members of the church.
- Members of Methodist Churches overseas, now worshipping in London.
- Members of other denominations who now worship in a Methodist church.

## **Facilitators:**

Each course needs to be led by a facilitator. Ideally, this should be a leader within the congregation (lay or ordained), who has enough familiarity with the themes covered by the course to be confident that they can explain its content. The need for a good level of knowledge and experience must not be underestimated. This course works best when led by someone who has a certain depth of knowledge and experience of Methodism, and who has prepared well.

This pack contains all the information needed by the facilitator. Each session includes certain elements that are crucial to the week's themes and activities to enable the group to explore them. In addition, there is material that would enable individuals the group to go deeper into the topic, should they have the capacity and/or time. There is also a list of resources that the facilitator or members of the group can use to explore the theme more.

There are a number of resources that it would be helpful for facilitators to have on hand throughout the course (other material for specific sessions will be detailed in that week's notes):

- Copies of *Called By Name* for each participant.
- Bibles
- Methodist Worship Book
- Singing the Faith
- John Wesley's Sermons on Several Occasions (Epworth Press, 1944)
- 44 Sermons to Serve the Present Age (Angela Shier-Jones & Kimberly Reisman, Epworth, 2007)

Facilitators should ensure that they have read the whole course guide prior to the course's start, so that they are aware of what resources are needed for each week, and so that they can make decisions about which material fits best in each week for their particular group.

It may also be worth exploring resources that are local to where the course is taking place. For example, is there a Methodist Heritage site nearby with volunteers/staff who may be interested in participating? A Methodist training institution or a local university may also be valuable in terms of helping facilitators prepare for the course.

Facilitation training is also available for those wishing to lead this course. The Eastern Region Training Partnership has prepared a scheme of training that would be suitable: <http://www.ertp.org.uk/index.php/about/ertp-annual-forum/annual-forum-2014/facilitator-training-materials>

## **Flexibility:**

This course can be used over a 6 week period, with one theme assigned to each week, using the order suggested by the resource. However, there is a great deal of scope making the resource as good a fit as possible for the group using it. Points facilitators may want to consider include:

- Not all the activities allotted to each week need to be used within the session (which should ideally last 90 minutes). Facilitators can choose the activities that will suit the needs of the group, and could assign some as preparation for the session, or as follow up.
- Each theme has a 'going deeper' activity designed for those participants who would value exploring a theme in more detail. These

do not need to be done within the course, but could be shared to do in their own time.

- The material for one theme could be spread over two weeks – for example, using the first week as an introduction and the second for deeper exploration of the theme.
- If using the course for a specific purpose (e.g. preparation for Membership), facilitators may want to concentrate more on certain themes than others.
- There is overlap between the themes, and therefore activities could be moved from one week to another.
- There are two potential starting points for the course: theme 1 would suit a group with little Methodist experience/knowledge; while the theology of theme 2 might be a better starting point for those who know a little more and are confident getting into a subject right from the start.

## **Before the course gets underway...**

You are free to organise this course in whatever way would suit your group, but right at the start we would like you to do three things.

### **Introduce the course:**

Share with the group the purpose of the course. Why are you holding it? (Membership classes; getting to know newcomers; house group course...)  
Outline the topics that will be covered over the coming weeks and the involvement that will be required of them.

It is particularly important to mention the preparation required for each week. Depending on your group, this can vary at your discretion, but we would recommend the following:

- Reading the relevant Wesley sermon for the session, or a précised version of it.
- Reading the equivalent modern sermon. (As well as or instead of.)
- Preparing presentations or research on a particular topic, depending on the activities used.

### **Getting to know the participants:**

Ask each participant to introduce themselves to the group, sharing what their motivation was for coming on the course.

You may want to conduct an ice-breaker to help the group bond.

### **What Methodism means to me:**

Give each participant 5 minutes to answer the question "What Methodism means to me?", writing their answer on a piece of paper which will be sealed into an envelope and reopened in the final session.

The aim of this activity is to show the participants how they have progressed through the course and to enable them to evaluate the impact it has had upon them in the final week.

# **1. Methodist Worship and Belonging**

## **Worship & Sacraments: Lost in Wonder, Love and Praise**

### **Christian Perfection (Philemon 3:12)**

#### **Facilitator's notes:**

For this theme you will need:

- Methodist Worship Book (note the pages containing the baptism, confirmation and Covenant services)
- Copies of the Roots PDF linked to below
- Post-it notes (and a large surface, like a coffee table)
- Copies of the Wesley questions listed below
- Copies of Membership Cards and a Circuit Plan

If you are conducting the course over a longer period, you may want to spend one week on worship and sacraments, and the other on membership and discipleship. In such a context, it may be helpful to encourage participants to observe and reflect upon an act of worship before the next session, giving space for discussion before continuing with the theme.

#### **Pre-session Activity:**

Read the 'Christian Perfection' sermon by John Wesley, and/or the modern equivalent.

Observe and reflect upon a Methodist act of worship.

#### **Methodist Membership:**

Ask the group who is a member of the Methodist Church – where did they become a member? How old were they? What did it mean to them at the time?

Explain what the different stages of 'belonging' means in Methodism.

- Baptism: highlight that the promises are made after the act of baptism, they are not conditional on it.
- Confirmation: make it clear that Methodists do believe in confirmation.
- Membership: the liturgy for accepting members from other denominations, or transferring members between churches.

#### **Covenant Service:**

Explain the role of the Covenant service at the start of the year – when does your church celebrate it? September, January or another time?

Use the Roots PDF on the Covenant Prayer in order to explore what it means to individuals and in the wider context of the church. (25 mins)

[http://www.rootsontheweb.com/content/PDFs/346041/Methodist\\_Covenant\\_Prayer\\_study.pdf](http://www.rootsontheweb.com/content/PDFs/346041/Methodist_Covenant_Prayer_study.pdf)

Return to promises made at Baptism & Membership. Highlight the mirroring of words/meaning between Covenant Prayer and affirmation of faith and the promises made when made a member (service found from p.97 onwards of MWB.)

### **Worship Activity:**

What does worship mean to you? In pairs, share with one another the aspects of worship that mean the most to you. What have you experienced in other churches? (5 mins)

*'Most acts of worship in the Methodist Church are preaching services, consisting mainly of hymns, prayers, scripture readings and a sermon. The early Methodist preaching services were meant to be supplementary to worship in the Parish Church and there was a great emphasis on the sermon. In recent years, more attention has been given to the shape of the Christian Year, the systematic reading of scripture, different types of prayer, a wider variety of musical resources, and greater congregational participation.'*

The Methodist Worship Book, p.26

- Label Post Its with key elements of Methodist worship: Bible readings; prayers; sermon; news/notices; silence; children's input; hymns/songs; communion – and anything else that they suggest.
- Ask the group:  
How do you rank these in terms of importance? (Not in a linear list, can be circular; or on same level.) What do they mean to you, on Sunday & in your week?
- Clarify the role/function of each element. In doing so, emphasise their role within worship and what is distinctive about them. (For example, the Bible readings are usually drawn from the Lectionary.)
- Use *Called By Name* pp.20-21 for the different elements of public worship. Move the post-its into the categories listed. Explain why they're ordered as they are.

### **Bands and Class Membership:**

Membership in the earliest days of Methodism also involved attendance at and accountability to a class meeting (or 'band society'). These were small groups that studied the Bible together during the week, and kept one another accountable to Wesley's teaching on spiritual discipline. [See activity below.]

Those with time or space to go deeper into this topic may want to explore an example of a Methodist Class Meeting put together by the United Church in

Canada (an ecumenical church that has roots in Methodism). Or, take the time to engage in one of the elements contained within it.

[http://www.hamconf.org/Class\\_Meeting.pdf](http://www.hamconf.org/Class_Meeting.pdf)

## **Everyday Discipline Activity:**

Methodism isn't just about what worship looks like on Sundays, it's about methodical, spiritual behaviour and accountability. Prayer and reading the Bible are particularly important.

John Wesley compiled a list of questions for every Methodist to ask themselves, in order to keep themselves spiritually accountable.<sup>1</sup>

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I honest in all my acts and words, or do I exaggerate?
3. Do I confidentially pass onto another what was told me in confidence?
4. Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits?
5. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?
6. Did the Bible live in me today?
7. Do I give it time to speak to me everyday?
8. Am I enjoying prayer?
9. When did I last speak to someone about my faith?
10. Do I pray about the money I spend?
11. Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?
12. Do I disobey God in anything?
13. Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?
14. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
15. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?
16. How do I spend my spare time?
17. Am I proud?
18. Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisee who despised the publican?
19. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard? If so, what am I going to do about it?
20. Do I grumble and complain constantly?
21. Is Christ real to me?

Distribute copies of the above list (which is a modern adaptation of Wesley's original questions) and invite the group to read it independently of each other, making a note of three or four that jump out at them. Invite them to focus upon those specific questions in the coming week and to report back on their impact next week.

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<sup>1</sup> Reference: *John Wesley's Class Meetings: a Model for Making Disciples*, by D. Michael Henderson, Evangel Publishing House, 1997, pp. 118-9

## **Conclusion:**

Close the session in prayer. (If it feels appropriate, perhaps use the Covenant Prayer?)

Introduce next week's topic (Theology) and explain the preparation for the session (Reading the relevant John Wesley sermon & its modern equivalent.)



## 2. What Methodists Believe

### Theology – How Do We Discover More of God?

#### Means of Grace (Malachi 3:7)

#### Facilitator's notes:

You may find it helpful to read the chapter on '*Preaching and Singing the Faith*' in Wilson's *Methodist Theology* (2011) prior to this session, or have it to hand during it.

You will also need:

- Copies of *Singing the Faith* and possibly earlier Methodist Hymn Books as examples for theology in our hymnody.
- You may want to print copies of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral diagram (see separate PDF) and the 'Directions for Singing' found later in this week's session.
- Copies of *Called by Name*.
- You may want a CD of hymns, or prime someone in the group who is musical to come ready to play a few hymns for the group to sing.

If running this theme over two sessions, the section on singing our theology would work well as a session on its own.

#### How Wesley discovered more of God:

Methodist theology has its roots in the beliefs and experiences of John Wesley. The most significant experience being the evening of May 24<sup>th</sup> 1738, when he attended a meeting in Aldersgate. As someone read from Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to Romans, Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed".

John described it in his journal: "*while he [Luther's writing] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*"

Depending on your group, either read together the story of Wesley's conversion on pages 26-7 of *Called by Name*, or use this link and **go deeper** into exploring the influence of the Moravians upon Wesley's spirituality:

<http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/john-wesleys-heart-strangely-warmed-11630227.html>

#### Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Refer to pages 26-7 of *Called by Name*, and explain the four aspects of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. You may also want to distribute copies of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral diagram available as a separate PDF.

Ask the group:

Which of the quadrilateral has been the most important in your faith journey? Have they been balanced; inter-connected with each other; or does one in particular stand out? Discuss...

### **Going deeper:**

Invite the group to think about what they might include in their own quadrilateral? What are the four things that help them to know God more?

You may want to use as an example a section of Gill Dascombe's (Vice President 2014-15) address to the 2014 Methodist Conference. In this speech, she came up with a quadrilateral for the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

<http://www.methodistconference.org.uk/news/newly-elected-vice-president-lays-out-four-new-building-blocks-for-methodism>

### **Singing our theology**

Quote from *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780):

*'It is large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yes, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason. And this is done in a regular order. The hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians.*

*In what other publication of the kind have you so distinct and full account of scriptural Christianity? Such a declaration of the heights and depths of religion, speculative and practical? So strong cautions against the most plausible errors, particularly those that are now so prevalent? And so clear direction for making our calling and election sure, for perfecting in holiness in the fear of God?'*

From the very first of John Wesley's hymnbooks – published in Charleston, South Carolina in 1737 – singing theology was at the heart of Methodist life. Pick up a copy of *Singing the Faith* or *Hymns and Psalms* and you'll see that the hymns and songs are still arranged in the same way. Methodists, unlike members of other denominations, have a hymnody authorised by the church – the contents of the books are chosen because they reflect Methodist theology.

Hymn singing was so important to Wesley, that he drew up rules for how they should be sung, and included them in his book of *'Select Hymns'*, published in 1761:

## WESLEY'S DIRECTIONS FOR SINGING

*"That this Part of Divine Worship may be the more acceptable to God, as well as the more profitable to yourself and others, be careful to observe the following Directions." (1761)*

- I. Learn these tunes before you learn any others, afterwards learn as many as you please.
- II. Sing them exactly as they are printed here, without altering or mending them at all, and if you have come to sing them otherwise, unlearn it as soon as you can.
- III. Sing all. See that you join with the congregation as frequently as you can.
- IV. Sing lustily and with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength. Be no more afraid of your voice now, nor more ashamed of its being heard, than when you sung the songs of Satan.
- V. Sing modestly. Do not bawl; so as to be heard above or distinct from the rest of the congregation, that you may not destroy the harmony; but strive to unite your voices together, so as to make one clear melodious sound.
- VI. Sing in time, whatever time is sung, be sure to keep with it. Do not run before nor stay behind it; but attend close to the leading voices, and move therewith as exactly as you can. And take care you sing not too slow. This drawling way naturally steals on all who are lazy and it is high time to drive it out from among us, and sing all our tunes just as quick as we did at first.
- VII. Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound; but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

Ask the group:

- How important is hymn singing to them? (Think back to last week's activity on the components of worship.)
- How does the singing/importance of singing in their current church compare to previous churches they've attended – is there a difference between denominations or countries?

## The Four Alls

1. All need to be saved - the doctrine of original sin
2. All can be saved - Universal Salvation
3. All can know they are saved - Assurance
4. All can be saved completely - Christian perfection

These beliefs underpinned Wesley's emphasis upon grace – specifically, prevenient grace, a grace that enables all to believe. Charles Wesley wrote a hymn in order to enable those singing it to understand this theology. Look up *Singing the Faith* 401: *Come, Sinners to the gospel feast*. Prevenient grace is emphasised in the lines:

*"Ye need not one be left behind,  
for God hath bid all humankind...  
the invitation is to all..."*

Get into pairs and choose a hymn from the following list. What are some of the key theological themes within them? Share with the rest of the group.

*Wesley (H&P):*

Where shall my wondering soul begin (706)  
And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood (216)  
All praise to our redeeming Lord, who joins us by his grace (753)  
Love Divine, all loves excelling (267)  
O Thou who camest from above (745)  
Hark the herald-angels sing (106).  
Because thou hast said (598)  
Jesus we thus obey (614)

*Fred Pratt-Green – one of Methodism's leading hymn writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. (StF)*

292 – After darkness, light  
415 – The Church of Christ in every age  
595 – Lord, we have come at your own invitation  
644 – When our confidence is shaken  
691 – What shall our greeting be?  
727 – God, in his love for us

*Female hymn writers found in Singing the Faith:*

Marjorie Dobson - God, hold us, enfold us, through desolate loss (733)  
Ruth Duck - When we are tested and wrestle alone (240)  
Jacqueline Jones - Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred? (662)  
Shirley Erena Murray - God weeps at love withheld (700)  
Clare Stainsby - Come, my table is a meeting place (581)  
Rosemary Wakelin - One human family God has made (687)  
Michaela Youngson - When deep despair casts out all light (StF 399)

Spend some time exploring hymns that are favourites amongst the group. Had they noticed the theology within them, or had they not fully appreciated it before?

## **Modern hymn writing**

Methodism's hymnody is constantly evolving – as is evident in the progression of hymnbooks published for Methodist congregations. Both Hymns & Psalms (1985) and Singing the Faith (2010) include recent hymns written by modern day hymn writers.

Using the index, invite the group to seek out newer hymns that they may not have come across before. Or, you could introduce a new hymn from the Singing the Faith website and learn it together.

<http://www.singingthefaitplus.org.uk/>

### **Going Deeper:**

It is easier than you might think to write a new hymn! Encourage the group to take up the challenge – perhaps starting it during the session and bringing it back next week?

Participants can choose a hymn tune and then spend some time coming up with words to go with it. The really ambitious could even write a new tune too!

### **Conclusion:**

Close the session in prayer. Perhaps read together a verse from a hymn and use that as a prayer.

Introduce next week's topic (History of British & World Methodism) and explain the preparation for the session (Preparing a short presentation on an area of British/World Methodism.)

### 3. The History of Methodism in Britain and Beyond Where did Methodism Come From? Catholic Spirit (2 Kings 10:15)

#### Facilitator's Notes:

It is important to note that this session has a more significant workload than other weeks. You will need to have familiarised yourself with basic facts and dates in the history of the Methodist Church and will also need to brief your group the week before about their contributions to the session.

This is a session in which there is significant scope to go deeper into the material. You may want to shape the session according to your group – draw upon their gifts and experiences. If you have a number of participants who have experience of Methodist Churches outside Britain, do encourage them to share.

You will need:

- A means of playing videos to the group (and a wifi connection if you choose to use videos available online).
- Copies of the Methodist Heritage family tree diagram to distribute.  
<http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/history-familytree.htm>
- Copies of Wesley's London heritage map to distribute.  
<http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/london-walking-map-0511.pdf>
- Roll of brown paper/flip chart pad, pens and copies of the Methodist Heritage timeline:  
<http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/missionaryhistory-whathappenedwhen.htm>
- World map
- Copies of the Prayer Handbook and other World Church publications.
- You may find it helpful to have the Methodist Heritage website open for fact checking (and more information regarding the Wesleys) during the session.
- Instead of the Mark Topping video mentioned below, you may want to play an extract of the DVD *John Wesley: The Faith that Sparked the Methodist Movement*.
- You may also want to play the group the Applecart video about Thomas Coke's voyage to Sri Lanka.

It would also be worth checking if a Heritage Site is within easy reach of your church and possibly organising a visit to it as part of the course. Volunteers or staff from the site may also be willing to come and share some of its history with you at one of your sessions.

If your group would like to visit Wesley's Chapel as a result (or as part of ) this session, do contact the chapel in good time and space could be found for you to worship there.

## Pre-session activities for group members:

Divide the group in two, one half taking the history of British Methodism and the other World Methodism.

- British group to present a short presentation on one of the groups that formed part of the Methodist Church, or emerged from it. (e.g. Primitive Methodists or Salvation Army.)
- World group to choose two or three countries to present on (divide into smaller groups to prepare this). Bear in mind that you may have members of the group who are from Methodist churches in other countries and who may also be happy to share.

## Methodist History Quiz:

A quick activity to discover certain facts of Methodist history. Give out pens & paper, and perhaps have prizes on hand. You might want to divide the group into teams and make it competitive, or allow people to play on their own. You might also want to give a range of points depending upon how close the team's answer is to the correct answer.

When you go through the answers, explain a little of the history around the question.

1. In what year was John Wesley born?

**Answer:** 1703 (June 17<sup>th</sup>, for an extra point!)

2. How many Wesleys can you name? [Including John's parents, siblings ...]

**Answer:** Samuel & Susanna (parents); Samuel, Emilia, Annesley, Jedediah, Susanna, Mary, Mehetabel, John, Benjamin, Anne, Martha, Charles, Kezzia (siblings); Mary (wife); Samuel Sebastian (Charles' grandson)

3. Why was John Wesley known as 'the brand plucked from the burning'?

**Answer:** In 1709, a fire broke out at the Epworth Rectory where the Wesleys lived. John was rescued by a parishioner who stood on a man's shoulders to lift him down from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor window. John himself used the phrase (quoting Zechariah 3:2) in his ministry.

4. Where in America did John & Charles Wesley travel to in October 1735?

**Answer:** Savannah, Georgia

They returned to Britain at the end of 1737. John regarded the experience as something of a failure, although many of the first distinctly Methodist hymns were written during this period.

5. In 1786, the first Methodist Missionary – Thomas Coke – set off to Nova Scotia. In which country did he end up instead?

**Answer:** Antigua

6. In which country would you find the only Methodist royal family?

**Answer:** Tonga

Methodist missionaries arrived in Tonga in 1822. Chief Taufa'ahau created the Kingdom of Tonga, naming himself 'King George', having taken the name George at his baptism in 1831. The Tongan royal family are still Methodist today, along with approximately 40% of the population.

7. Which was the first country in the Asian continent to receive Methodist missionaries?

**Answer:** Sri Lanka – in 1811 a group of missionaries travelled to what was then Ceylon, via India.

8. In what year did the different strands of British Methodism join together to form The Methodist Church?

**Answer:** 1932 saw the joining together of the Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodists and United Methodists.

9. How many US Presidents have been members of the United Methodist Church (UMC)? (And who were they – for extra points!)

**Answer:** Three

Rutherford B. Hayes (1877-81)

William McKinley (1897-1901)

George W. Bush (2001-09)

An indication that the UMC contains a wide range of views is the fact that George W. Bush and Hillary Clinton are both members.

10. In what year were women first ordained as presbyters in the British Methodist Church?

**Answer:** 1974

Women were able to be ordained deacon in 1890.

## **John Wesley and the world:**

*“Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.”* [John Wesley Sermons, pp.443-4]

Has Methodism stayed the same throughout history? Are all Methodists the same? This week we'll explore the history of Methodism both in Britain and the rest of the world.

## **Life of John Wesley:**

Video of Mark Topping as Wesley. [DVD, or this video available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFqFtDgal5E>]



Distribute copy of the John Wesley heritage map – explore together the various London connections to Wesley’s life.  
Ask if anyone has visited any of these sites? Could a visit be organised to one of them?

## **Methodism in Britain:**

Explore the development of Methodism using the Methodist Heritage ‘family tree’ diagram: <http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/history-familytree.htm>

Invite those that have prepared a presentation on British Methodism to share it with the group.

Ask the group:

- Did anything in the Heritage diagram surprise them?
- Had they heard of any of these groups before?

Explain where they can find more information. ([Methodist Heritage website.](#))

## **World Methodism:**

*‘These [British and United Methodist – American] traditions, of course, have much in common. Both trace their origins to the British Isles and to the life and work of John Wesley (1703-91) and his younger brother Charles (1707-88). Both traditions look to the Wesleys’ pastoral-theological writings and hymns as sources of doctrinal, ethical, spiritual, and liturgical reflection. But even before the death of John Wesley, indeed as early as 1784, a separation of Methodism into a British and American stream had already taken place, and the two streams had begun to flow in decidedly different directions.’*

Cracknell, p.vii

## **Timeline Activity:**

- Using the Heritage diagram of the British church, mark significant dates along a piece of flip chart/brown paper to act as a timeline.
- Challenge the group to plot various world Methodist events on the timeline. Pick a number from the Methodist Heritage timelines for specific regions:  
<http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/missionaryhistory-whathappenedwhen.htm>
- Keep a world map to hand to help visualise the movement of the church.

Invite those who have prepared something on a specific country to share it with the group, or for anyone to share their experience of Methodism outside Britain.

## **Going Deeper – the MMS History Project:**

Since 2002, there has been a project to collate knowledge and research regarding the history of the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS). Annually, a conference has been held at which papers have been given on themes across the work of MMS or specific regions. These papers are now being collated online and provide a wealth of information about the history of world Methodism.

<http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/missionaryhistory-historyproject.htm>

## **Getting Involved:**

Encourage the group to take an interest in what is happening across the world today. Spend some time exploring the following sites, or encourage them to do this at home.

- Work support by the World Mission Fund – the partner churches of the British Methodist Church and specific appeals:  
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/world-church>
- Join in with the work and mission of Methodist Women in Britain, and the role they play in the World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women: <http://www.mwib.org.uk/>
- Map of the United Methodist Church's (UMC) global work:  
<http://www.umcmision.org/Explore-Our-Work/mission-map>
- Map of Mission Partners working overseas:  
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/world-church/mission-partners-map>
- Sign up for the World Church Relationships bulletin:  
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/world-church/world-church-bulletin>
- World Methodist Council: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/world-church/world-methodist-council>
- Prayer Handbook: <http://www.methodist.org.uk/prayer-and-worship/methodist-prayer-handbook>

## **Conclusion:**

Close the session in prayer, either using a prayer from another part of the world or using the prayers in that day's Prayer Handbook.

Introduce next week's topic (Governance, Leadership & Structure) and explain the preparation for the session (reading the latest report from the General Secretary to the Methodist Conference).

# The Organisation of Methodism

## Governance, leadership and structure.

### Caution Against Bigotry (Mark 9:38-39)

#### Facilitator's Notes:

This session deals with the structures and organisation of Methodism in Britain. You will need to be familiar with the systems in your church, circuit and district as well as those on a national level. It has the potential to turn dry, so do make sure that you include activities as well as just information.

You will need:

- Brown paper/Flip Chart, pens and Post-its.
- Copies of structural diagrams. [Found in an additional PDF to this document.]
- Copies of church AGM or annual meeting minutes.
- Copies of the local Circuit Plan.
- Copies of the *Issues of Connexionalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* report to the 2015 Methodist Conference.  
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1673977/conf-2015-14-Issues-of-Connexionalism.pdf> (This may work as an extra 'going deeper' activity for the group, or as an alternative preparation exercise.)
- You may also want to find out the statistics for your District or Circuit (e.g. the number of churches and presbyters). This can be found via your portal to the Statistics for Mission site:  
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/mission/statistics-for-mission>

#### Pre-session Activity:

Read the 'Caution Against Bigotry' sermon by John Wesley, and/or the modern equivalent.

#### Connexionalism:

Brian Beck identified two key elements of what 'connexionalism' means to Methodists:

1. No local church is a complete unit in itself - '*Circuit, district, connexion are circles of belonging which may take (and have taken) different forms in different circumstances, but the essential thing is the belonging.*'
2. The church, as a whole, needs to be structured for mission. It needs to be adaptable as the 'missionary task' changes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> BECK, Brian E., Some Reflections on Connexionalism (2), Epworth Review, Vol.18, September 1991, pp.45-6 (Part Two is in the May edition)

[Those who want to go deeper may find the two part article by Beck in the Epworth Review interesting reading.]

In fact, it's more than just these two elements. Being connected is at the centre of how the Methodist Church works:

- It's how authority is conferred – at circuit, district and national levels.
- It's how the stationing process (placing presbyters and deacons in appointments) benefits the whole church. For example, a minister is stationed to a circuit, not a church, meaning that they are always a resource for the whole circuit, rather than one congregation.
- It's why local congregations pay the assessment (an annual financial contribution to the church's work) – it helps finance the whole connexion, rather than just their own local area.
- It's the way the church confers – the Methodist Conference that meets every summer is made up of representatives elected from every district, lay and ordained.

### **Structural activity:**

The aim of this activity is to explore how the structures of Methodism work together – it is not to come up with a hard and fast diagram. It is difficult to visualise connexionalism, because it is non-hierarchical and most diagrams end up not reflecting that. Ensure that the group understands the lack of hierarchy, but give them the freedom to explore the relationships between each element.

It may be useful to encourage the group to look at it from local church upwards, but this may depend upon your group.

Cover a large table/floor in brown paper. Label Post-it notes with all the elements of the British Methodist Church: church, circuit, district, Connexional Team, Methodist Council, Methodist Conference, Vice President, President, General Secretary... (Use different colours for lay, ordained and groups/bodies.)

- Explain the role of each of these elements and how they connect with each other.
- Encourage the group to work together to connect them all in a way that reflects the church's connexional, not hierarchical, nature. Use marker pens to draw links between the different components.
- Spend some discussing their choices and clarifying the precise nature of the church's structure.
- Invite people to share any involvement they have had at these different levels.
- Distribute diagrams of connexional structures. [Separate PDF.]

### **Local Church Leadership:**

What does governance and leadership look like within your own congregation? Using a document that lists the role holders within your church

(such as the minutes from an AGM or Annual Meeting), and use them to explain the workings of your particular church.

- Who are the church stewards & what do they do? (You might want to explore the role of 'stewardship'.)
- Who makes up the membership of the Church Council & what is their role?
- Who sends reports to the AGM? What does this say about the make up of your church?
- How is the whole congregation enabled to participate in the leadership of the church?

Take this to circuit and district level too. Who are your representatives to synod and Conference, for example?

### **Ordained and Lay:**

Wesley strongly believed in the principal of 'the priesthood of all believers'. In other words, he believed that every member of the church should have an active ministry. The only difference between lay and ordained was that the ordained were 'set apart' for 'Word, Sacrament and Order'.

That balance is still seen today, for example in the Presidency and Vice-Presidency of the church. Week by week, local preachers are responsible for a large amount of the worship that takes place in Methodist churches. Much of the day-to-day running of the church is undertaken by lay people, both paid and volunteers.

Provide each member of the group with a copy of the circuit plan or directory. Take some time to go through the list of presbyters, deacons, local preachers and worship leaders. Who's who? What are their roles?

- If the facilitator of the group holds one of these offices, take some time to share what led you to it; what training was involved; and how it fits into the wider work of the church, circuit, district etc.
- Invite one or two people who hold an office to be interviewed by the group.

### **Conclusion:**

Close the session in prayer, praying for specific individuals in your church, circuit or district who hold positions of responsibility.

Introduce next week's topic (Social Outreach & Pastoral Care) and explain the preparation for the session (a short presentation on a Methodist social-action related organisation – can be done in small groups).

## **5. Methodist Social Outreach and Pastoral Care The World is Our Parish? Use of Money (Luke 16:9)**

### **Facilitator's Notes:**

There is a lot of material that could be used in this session. The activities relating to finance and pastoral care may work better in other sessions, depending upon how you are running your course. If it is a longer course, these themes may work as their own session, or could be added to theme four.

Ensure that you have briefed your group well the preceding week so that they are able to contribute to the session.

You will need:

- The means to watch *The Extra Mile* video.
- Copies of *The Extra Mile* study guide (relevant section only).
- Copies of your church's pastoral care policy (if you have one).
- A financial report from your church.
- Copies of a recent issue of *Mission Matters*, illustrating how money given is spent.
- Promotional materials from various Methodist connected organisations.
- You may want to invite representatives from some of the organisations mentioned to speak at the session.
- JPIT have also produced a resource on the 'truth and lies about poverty' which includes activities and a video that may prove useful to the session.

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/truthandliesaboutpoverty/>

### **Pre-session Activity:**

Choose a Methodist social-action based organisation to do a 5 minute presentation on for the rest of the group.

Cover their origins; connection with Methodism; and work today.  
Methodist Schools; JPIT; All We Can (Methodist Relief and Development);  
Action for Children; MHA; Mission in Britain Fund...

### **Gain all you can; give all you can**

*"But, in the present state of mankind, it is an excellent gift of God, answering the noblest ends. In the hands of His children, it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, raiment for the naked: it gives to the traveller and the stranger where to lay his head."* [John Wesley Sermons p.578]

- Gain all you can – without hurting ourselves or others in body or mind. Using common sense!
- Save all you can – do not waste money; or talent.

- Give all you can – steward God’s gifts; pray over what you should give.

## Social Responsibility

Watch *The Extra Mile* film produced by Applecourt for the London District.

<http://www.methodistlondon.org.uk/node/2808>

Use Section 6 of *The Extra Mile Study Guide* (Group Discussion) to discuss which areas of Wesley’s teaching the group thinks is most important today and which is most challenging.

<http://www.methodistlondon.org.uk/sites/default/files/news/Extra%20Mile%20Study%20guide.pdf>

What initiatives and organisations are people in the group involved with, or this particular congregation/church?

## Public Issues Q&A:

The Methodist Church is well-known for its commitment to social justice issues, ranging from alcohol and gambling, the economy, peace making and politics. The connexional public issues team is part of the ‘Joint Public Issues Team’ that includes the United Reformed Church and the Baptist Union, as well as the Methodist Church.

Split your group into pairs and allocate them a theme each. Give them 5-10 minutes to explore the relevant section of the JPIT website (if you will not have internet access in the location of the session, you may want to print the information out in advance).

<http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/>

Invite each pair to present JPIT’s view on their specific issue and then engage in a group discussion about the Methodist Church’s stance on public issues.

Alcohol  
 Gambling  
 Environment  
 Drones, Trident & Nuclear Arms  
 Poverty & Inequality  
 Political Extremism

## Going Deeper - Ethical Investment

*“Around £1 billion of Methodist money is invested in stocks, shares, bonds and other schemes. This money comes from individual churches and circuits, as well as national funds. All the money is invested in line with ethical principles.”*

- <http://www.methodist.org.uk/JACEI>

Each year, the Methodist Conference receives a report from the Joint Advisory Committee on the Ethics of Investment (JACEI), which is responsible

for ensuring that Methodist investments (via the Central Finance Board, CFB) meet its high ethical standards.

Recently, the Church of England has hit the headlines for having investments in businesses that promote 'pay day loans' – an investment which in a Methodist context would not have been approved by JACEI. It is a uniquely Methodist institution, demonstrating the church's continued commitment to Wesley's vision of social responsibility.

Invite your group to read the latest JACEI report to conference (found via the above link). What are their opinions of the committee's decisions? What are the challenges facing those wanting to invest ethically?

### **Pastoral Care:**

Wesley's emphasis upon social responsibility is part of the reason why the Methodist Church is known for having an emphasis upon pastoral care – the care of individual members of the church.

Discuss with the group your church's model of pastoral care and how it works. What has good pastoral care looked like in other contexts they have worshipped in?

Are they involved in providing pastoral care? What skills do they feel are needed?

How else might pastoral care work?

*[Note: be careful not to go into detail regarding specific situations or scenarios owing to confidentiality and the possibility of triggering issues amongst participants.]*

### **Connexional Involvement and National Charities**

Wesley's teaching on social responsibility is embodied both locally, as already explored, and nationally. Many charities that exist in Britain today have their roots in Methodism and the Methodist Church continues to work on a national level to support those in need.

Invite participants to share their research into specific charities/areas of connexional work.

### **Stewardship:**

How do we give and where does the money go?

- Explain the process for giving in your church (envelopes; gift aid; standing orders; special offerings/collections). And how the church spends the money – is a specific amount given away?
- How can we decide what our own personal giving should be – to the church and to other charities?



- How is our giving spent by the connexion? See copies of *Mission Matters* for details:  
<http://www.methodist.org.uk/media/1206345/mission-matters-summer-2014.pdf>

## **Conclusion:**

Close the session in prayer. Pray especially for those whose lives are touched by Methodist organisations and giving.

Introduce next week's topic (Methodism & Me) and explain the preparation for the session (Reading the relevant John Wesley sermon & its modern equivalent.)

## **6. Methodism & Me**

### **Sermon on the Mount: Discourse Four (Matt 5:13-6)**

#### **Facilitator's Notes:**

The aim of this session is to provide some space for the group to reflect upon the previous 5 weeks and to think about their next steps. Don't try to fill the session up with content, but give space for reflection and conversation.

You will need:

- The envelopes participants used in session 1.
- Paper and pens
- Copies of the Wesley's Chapel DVD
- Information regarding next steps – baptism, membership etc.

#### **Pre-session Activity:**

Read discourse 4 on the Sermon on the Mount sermon by John Wesley, and/or the modern equivalent.

#### **How do we talk of God?**

Quote from John Wesley's sermon:

*"From the hour men begin to emerge out of the darkness which covers the giddy, unthinking world, they cannot but perceive how desirable a thing it is to be thus transformed into the likeness of Him that created us."*

Look at the John Wesley sermon for this week. Spend some time discussing the following questions:

- What struck you about his writing on how we can be transformed and see others transformed too?
- We are transformed by and through our relationship with God. How can we see something of this transformation in others?
- How does Methodism shape the way in which you choose to share the Gospel with others? [Does it?]

[Use this discussion as an opportunity to share any initiatives your church is involved with – or could be – that enables others to share their faith. e.g. Back to Church Sunday, Fresh Expressions, Alpha, Christianity Explored etc.]

#### **Our Calling:**

*Called by Name* pp. 18-19

Read Our Calling together. This is the mission statement of the Methodist Church in Britain and is at the heart of all it does.

Take some time to explore together how what you've heard, learned and experienced over the previous weeks of this course fits into these statements.

## **What Methodism Means to Me:**

Show one or two testimonies from the Wesley's Chapel DVD.

Hand out a piece of paper to each member of the group and invite them to answer the question "what does Methodism mean to me?". [As in the first week.] Then distribute the envelopes from week one and give the group some time to compare their two answers.

Invite the group to share with one another whether their answers are significantly different between weeks 1 and 6. What has caused this change? What is the most significant lesson, idea or fact that they are taking away with them?

What will you tell people now when they ask you why you attend a Methodist Church?

Is there a next step you might take?

- Membership
- Role within the church – steward; church council; volunteer with youth...
- Local Preacher
- Involvement in Circuit/District

What has really resonated with you on this course?

## **Conclusion:**

Close the session in prayer. Take the time to pray for each participant in the group, especially if they have shared a desire to make a particular commitment to the church.

**Bibliography of resources that may be helpful**  
(This is in addition to the resources already referred to during the material for each session.)

A comprehensive list of resources can also be downloaded via the **Methodist website:**

[http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/re\\_methbooks1204.doc](http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/re_methbooks1204.doc)

**BATES, Jim, The Methodist Church, Pergamon Press, 1977**

*Brief book chronicling history & development of Methodism. Out of date, but very helpful for early history – cheap copies available online.*

**BECK, Brian E., Some Reflections on Connexionalism, Epworth Review, Vol.18, May and September 1991**

*Academic reflections on the concept of connexionalism.*

**BEST, Gary, Charles Wesley: A Biography, Epworth Press, 2006**

*Accessible biography of Charles Wesley, c.300 pages.*

**DIXON, Neil, Wonder Love and Praise: A Companion to The Methodist Worship Book, Epworth Press, 2003**

*How the Methodist Worship Book came about. Goes deeper into the whys & wherefores of Methodist liturgy.*

**FROST, Brian & JORDAN, Stuart, Pioneers of Social Passion: London's Cosmopolitan Methodism, Epworth Press, 2006**

*Characteristics, individuals and projects that emerged from Methodism in London – the Missions etc. 20 individual stories. Story of Methodism responding to a century of London life.*

**CRACKNELL, Kenneth & WHITE, Susan J., An Introduction to World Methodism, CUP, 2005**

*Academic study on origins of Methodism.*

**DAVIE, Rupert & RUPP, Gordon (Eds), A History of The Methodist Church in Great Britain [Volumes 1-4], Epworth Press**

*Significant historical work, first published in the 1960's.*

**HALEY, John M, & FRANCIS, Leslie J., British Methodism: What Circuit Ministers Really Think, Epworth Press, 2006**

*Research exercise into attitudes/theology of ministers.*

**HATTERLEY, Roy, John Wesley: A Brand Plucked from the Burning, Little Brown, 2002**

*A sizeable biography (c.400 pages) of Wesley, published for his tercentenary.*

**HEITZENRATER, Richard P., Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Abingdon Press, 1995**

*An academic survey of the Wesleyan movement in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.*

**HILDEBRANDT, Franz, Christianity According to the Wesleys, Baker Books, 1996**

Originally published by Epworth Press in 1956, this is a collection of lectures on the theology of the Wesleys. Four short articles cover the themes of 'Scriptural', 'Practical', 'Missionary' and 'Catholic' tenets of Wesleyan theology.

**NEWPORT, Kenneth & CAMPBELL, Ted, Charles Wesley: Life, Literature & Legacy, Epworth Press, 2007**

*Academic text on the work of Charles Wesley.*

**SHIER-JONES, Angela & REISMAN, Kimberly D. (Eds), 44 Sermons to Serve the Present Age, Epworth, 2007**

*Modern-day re-interpretations of John Wesley's 44 sermons.*

**TABRAHAM, Barrie, The Making of Methodism, Epworth Press, 2010 (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition)**

*Accessible resource exploring the key elements in the emergence of Methodism.*

**TOMKINS, Stephen, John Wesley: A Biography, Lion Publishing, 2003**

*One of several Wesley biographies published around the tercentenary of his birth, this is a shorter (200 page) edition which may be more accessible to less academic readers.*

**TURNER, John Munsey, John Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and the Rise of Methodism in England, Epworth Press, 2002**

*At under 200 pages, this is a fairly accessible book that sets out the context in which Methodism emerged, and the impact it had upon religion, politics and society in Britain.*

**WAREING, Helen, SHIER-JONES, Angela & BECK, Brian, Unmasking Methodist Theology, Continuum, 2004**

*A selection of short essays on key Methodist areas of Methodist theology.*

**WESLEY, John, Sermons on Several Occasions, Epworth Press, 1944**

*The collection of 44 sermons.*

**WESLEY, John, The Journal of John Wesley**

*Available very cheaply (39p at the time of writing!) on Kindle.*

**WILSON, Kenneth, Methodist Theology, T&T Clark, 2011**

*Academic theology. Up to date.*

**The Wesley Historical Society:**

<http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/>