



United Methodist Church (UMC)

InfoServ provided by United Methodist Communications
 P.O. Box 320
 Nashville, TN 37202-0320
 800-251-8140 (In Nashville 615-742-5420)
 Websites: infoserv.umc.org, www.umc.org

Statistics 2002

Source: *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches 2005*

In the United States

8,251,175 Members
 35,102 Congregations
 519 Districts
 66 Annual Conferences
 5 Regions

Ministry

44,987 Clergy
 24,269 Serving Parishes
 50 Bishops

Financial Data

Total Contributions
 \$5,242,691,299
 Benevolences
 \$1,006,455,455

Women in Ministry

Women are active in ministry in the UMC. One of the predecessor denominations first ordained women in 1889, although from 1939-1956 this right was lost. Today approximately 17% of ordained clergy are women.

Brief History—The Methodist movement began during the 1730s as a reform movement to the **Church of England** led by **John Wesley** and his brother **Charles**. Colonists brought their ideas to America, and several lay Methodist Societies were formed during the 1760s. To support these associations, the Wesleys sent several lay preachers from England, the most influential of whom was Francis Asbury. After the Revolutionary War, the American Methodists became independent of Wesley and in 1784 the **Methodist Episcopal Church in America** was born. During the 19th century, issues of racism, slavery, and lay representation caused several splits. But in 1939 three of these strands reunited to form the **Methodist Church**.

Two separate but related lay movements began in 1800 and 1803. These became the **Church of the United Brethren in Christ** and the **Evangelical Association**. In 1946, the United Brethren and the Evangelical Churches united to become the **Evangelical United Brethren in Christ Church**. In 1968, they united with the Methodist Church to form the **United Methodist Church**.

Organization—The primary unit of governance of the UMC is the **Annual Conference**, which is both a geographical region and an annual meeting. These are subdivided into **Districts**, which are in turn composed of individual churches. The UMC as a whole is governed by the **General Conference**, which meets quadrennially. Delegates include both laity and ordained clergy who are elected by the Annual Conferences. Its decisions are published as the *Book of Discipline*.

Lay members are responsible for the primary leadership in a congregation. The ordained clergy includes **elders** and **deacons**. **Elders** act as ministers of Word and Sacrament. They are appointed by the Annual Conference to individual churches and specialized ministries for periods of a few years, after which they receive a new appointment. This is known as the **itinerant system**. **Deacons** are hired by individual churches and have special responsibilities such as teaching, music, youth leadership, and assisting elders with the Sacraments. Specialized elders include **Bishops**, who are responsible for ordination and appointments within the Annual Conferences, and **District Superintendents**, who supervise each district.

1730s John and Charles Wesley begin a reform movement of the Church of England that becomes known as Methodism

1760s Lay Methodist movements arise in the colonies. The Wesleys send preachers Joseph Pillmore, Richard Wright and Francis Asbury to support the **American Methodist Societies**.

1773 First Conference of Methodist Preachers in the Colonies is held.

1784 Christmas Conference of Preachers is held, officially creating **The Methodist Episcopal Church**.

1800s Issues of racism and slavery cause several groups to leave the church, creating the **African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME)**, the **African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ)** and the **Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MEC South)**.

1830 The Methodist Protestant Church (MPC) breaks away over issues of lay representation.

1816 AME

1820 AMEZ

1845 MEC South

1800 Phillip William Otterbein, a German Reformed Pastor and Martin Boehm, a Mennonite, organize the **Church of the United Brethren in Christ**.

1803 Jacob Albright, a Lutheran farmer, begins **The Evangelical Association**.

Major Doctrines/Theology

The doctrine and theology of the UMC is firmly based on the theology of **John Wesley**, with its emphasis on practical divinity and personal piety. For Wesley, the core of the Christian faith was revealed in **Scripture**, illumined by **tradition**, vivified in personal **experience**, and confirmed by **reason**. An important aspect of this theology is the idea of God's **prevenient grace**, that is, the divine love that surrounds us and exists prior to any of our conscious impulses. Methodists, like most other Christians, believe in justification through grace of God alone. They also believe that God's pardon **sanctifies** and nurtures growth, which should lead to a response of **discipline** and **good works**. Wesley insisted that Christian faith should lead to Christian living:

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation: First, by doing no harm, by avoiding personal evil of every kind... Second, by ... doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all... Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. (John Wesley, *General Rules*, 1743, excerpted in the *Book of Discipline*, p. 78)

In addition to Wesley's *General Rules*, the UMC relies on four other important documents for understanding and living their faith: the sermons of John Wesley; the *25 Articles of Religion* which were chosen by Wesley from the *39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England*, Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, and early minutes of the British Wesleyan Conference.

Another hallmark of Methodism is its emphasis on social justice and dialogue on social issues. A **social creed** was first adopted in 1908 and continues to provide guidance on social, economic, and political issues.

Ecumenical Involvement

The United Methodist Church is a member of the **World Council of Churches (WCC)** and the **National Council of Churches of Christ (NCCC)**.

The UMC is currently seeking observer status in the **National Association of Evangelicals** and the **World Evangelical Fellowship**.

The UMC is also active on the **World Methodist Council**, a body that seeks to bring together Methodist and Wesleyan churches around the world. They are also engaged in ongoing dialogues with the **African Methodist Episcopal Church**, the **African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church**, the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church**, and the **Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)**.

Worship and Sacrament

Historically, Methodist worship has evolved from free-flowing, often spontaneous revivals into a more structured format. However, the sermon continues to be central to worship. The hymns of **Charles Wesley** continue to be influential in the worship life of the church.

The UMC celebrates two Sacraments: **Baptism** of infants and adults, and the **Lord's Supper** (Communion). The Lord's Supper is open to all who seek to respond to Christ. Most congregations celebrate monthly and encourage children to participate.

Important Resources

The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004).

The United Methodist Hymnal, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

