

Homework for Lesson 9: The Growth of Methodism

This lesson will focus on the growth and development of the Methodist movement and the founding of the United Methodist Church. It will explore the history of the church in the United States from the time immediately after Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury through the Civil War and 20th century until the beginning of the modern church. It will focus on important moments in church history and important social changes in the church during that time.

The United States has stories about the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the moon landing; stories that tell the story about who we are as a nation. The Church has these stories too. We've talked in past few weeks about Constantine, the Reformation and John Wesley's Aldersgate experience.

This week we're going to focus specifically on the stories that have shaped the United Methodist Church into what it is today. And as we tell these stories today, remember that they aren't just the stories of the United Methodist Church; they are our stories as well. They are part of our history.

There are a lot of stories and events that went into the formation of the United Methodist Church. Just like you, some of these stories are powerful moments that the church wants to remember and some of them are moments that we would rather forget. It is important that we remember the good and the bad so that we can keep doing good and remember the consequences of when we do something bad.

We're going to tell the story of The United Methodist Church in order so let's start with "Methodists on the Frontier". See how many you know or can guess. The answers are at the end.

1. Methodists on the Frontier

As the frontier went west, so did Methodism. Preachers who rode on horseback to many churches and towns went with the pioneers. They preached, held revivals, started classes, and planted new churches in almost every new town. Methodist pastors and Methodist churches seemed to be everywhere. Francis Asbury was among the first of these preachers, but he was far from the last.

Question: What was the name given to these preachers who rode around from church to church and town to town?

2. African-American Methodist Churches

In the 1800s, as our country struggled with slavery, numerous African American Methodists experienced discrimination in The Methodist Episcopal Church. Many broke off and started their own Methodist denominations. These churches still exist. They are separate denominations but still part of our Methodist family. In numerous ways, these denominations and The United Methodist Church work together. Together they are called Pan-Methodists.

Question: What are the names of the three denominations created by African American Methodists in the 1800s?

3. German Methodists

During the early years, as Methodism was getting organized, there were numerous German-speaking people who were Methodists. Mainly due to language reasons, they did not join The Methodist Episcopal Church. Instead, they formed their own churches: The Evangelical Association and the United Brethren in Christ. Later these churches united and formed a new church. In 1968, this new church united with The Methodist Church, creating The United Methodist Church.

Question: What was the name of the new church created by The Evangelical Association and the United Brethren in Christ?

4. The Church Splits

In the years leading up to the Civil War, the church split into three major denominations. First, The Methodist Protestant Church broke off over several issues, including the role of lay persons and bishops. Then, several years before the Civil War, the church split over slavery, becoming a northern church (The Methodist Episcopal Church) and a southern church (The Methodist Episcopal Church, South).

Question: In what year did the church split into a northern church and a southern church?

5. The Church Reunites

After the end of the Civil War it took a long time for the three branches of Methodism that had split apart before the war to come back together. When they did, they formed The Methodist Church. Then, in 1968, The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church united to form The United Methodist Church.

Question: In what year did the three branches of Methodism reunite to form The Methodist Church?

6. Segregation in the Church

After the three branches of Methodism reunited to form The Methodist Church in 1939 they arranged the annual conferences into five jurisdictions based on geography. However, they also segregated the black churches into a separate jurisdiction totally unrelated to the geographical location of the church. Black Methodists rightly saw the creation of this segregated jurisdiction as a betrayal and contrary to the mission of The Methodist Church and movement. But change did not come quickly. In 1956 the Church softened their policy, but the segregated jurisdiction was not eliminated entirely until the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968.

Question: What was the name of the jurisdiction created by The Methodist Church to keep black churches segregated?

7. Women

Women played a vital role in the Methodist movement from the very beginning. Susanna Wesley, John and Charles' mother, was the primary religious influence in their early life. John Wesley even permitted women as lay preachers, a move that was both uncharacteristic and controversial for his time. In 1889, the United Brethren in Christ ordained a woman as a pastor. Years later, in 1956, The Methodist Church became the first large denomination to ordain women as clergy. Women were also vitally important in missions and social justice work in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Question: Who was the first woman to be ordained as clergy in The Methodist Church?

8. Social Justice

From the very beginning, the Wesleys and the other early Methodists were involved in the social issues of their day. They visited in prisons and jails, they cared for the sick, they opposed slavery and fought to keep children from working in the coal mines. As society changes, new issues emerge and The United Methodist Church continues to respond to these changing issues. For a church to take stands on controversial issues was surprising in 1908, when our church wrote its first Social Creed. But that is our tradition. We have always tackled controversial issues.

Question: What is the name of the document that outlines The United Methodist Church's position on different social issues?

9. Lay Leadership

From the beginning, laypersons were key to the Methodist movement. Wesley was an ordained priest in the Church of England, but he could get few other pastors to join him in the movement. What he did find were lots of eager lay people. Lay preachers and lay leaders gave the movement its momentum. Today, General Conference, the governing body of our denomination, is 50 percent laypersons and 50 percent ordained clergy in membership. Laypersons have as much right as clergy to submit legislation and ideas to General Conference. In The United Methodist Church, all baptized persons are ministers. Some are ordained; but all are ministers of the gospel. You are a minister of the gospel.

Question: What does the word “lay” mean in this context? What does someone need to do to become a layperson in The United Methodist Church?

10. Education

John Wesley was a scholar. He believed in education, in books, and in learning. From the beginning, Methodists started schools everywhere they went. Methodism was active in the Sunday school movement in the 1700s, originally started to teach impoverished children to read. Today The United Methodist Church supports a number of colleges, universities, special schools, and seminaries.

Question: How many educational institutions does the does The United Methodist Church currently support? Name three of them.

ANSWERS FOR UNITED METHODIST HISTORY CARDS:

- 1) Circuit Riders
- 2) The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion, and The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church
- 3) The Evangelical United Brethren
- 4) 1844
- 5) 1939
- 6) The Central Jurisdiction (For more information on The Central Jurisdiction and the story of race relations in the Methodist Church visit youthministrypartners.com/confirm)
- 7) Maud Keister Jensen
(More information can be found here: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/timeline-of-women-in-methodism>)
- 8) The Social Principles
- 9) “Lay” means that someone is not ordained. To become a layperson in The United Methodist Church someone must be baptized and confirmed.
- 10) 122 (current as of July 2016)