

Section Ten: Unique Methodist Beliefs

32. WE ARE HELPED TO BE LIKE CHRIST (SALVATION)

Salvation is not an end, it is a BEGINNING.

A classical affirmation of Wesleyan theology is that the point of justification—the moment at which we accept God’s gift of love and forgiveness—is not an end product. When we trust in God’s grace and have our relationship with God restored, we begin that new relationship with God at the beginning point of our new life in Christ. Like any birth, our new life is merely a beginning and at the point of our justification we begin the process of growth with God’s help.

The traditional Wesleyan understanding of salvation has been based on a thorough understanding of the bondage of sin and the fear of dying without going to Heaven. Even though these are still functional ideas for many persons, they are meaningless concepts for many others. Sin and a sense of guilt about being sinful is a much less functional idea today than it once was. In our society, our worship of violence and our pagan funeral practices help to enforce our generally casual attitude toward death and to minimize our fear of separation from God after death.

Being saved from the bondage of sin and rescued from eternal punishment in Hell was once a meaningful concept for most of Western society and was the focal point of early Methodist preaching. And, even today, the hope of Heaven instead of Hell is frequently lifted up as the primary reason for being saved. However, for many people, the prima-

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WE ARE HELPED TO BE LIKE CHRIST

Salvation is not an end, it is a BEGINNING.

ASSURANCE
We come to know for CERTAIN
that God loves us individually and totally.

SANCTIFICATION
With God's help, we respond to this certainty by intensifying
our personal HOLINESS,
our expression of God's love in ACTION,
our participation in the SACRAMENTS.

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION
Our goal is to become totally loving like Christ.

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WESLEYAN SANCTIFICATION (32)

ry consequence of sin is meaningless existence and separation from God and others making traditional ideas of salvation from death or Hell nonsensical. For many people, being saved “for” a meaningful life is more realistic than being saved “from” Hell.

In classical Wesleyan salvation theory, humans begin in a state of sin, trapped by their own excessive self-interest and in a wrong relationship with God. They suffer loss of meaning and alienation from God, themselves, and others. Their basic need is to be *justified*. When a line of type on a printed page is justified, it is moved or adjusted so that it lines up neatly with the other lines of type on the page. It is put into a “right relationship” with the other lines of type. Such is the need of a person in a state of sin. Their deepest need is to be justified, to be put into a right relationship with God, with other persons, and with themselves.

Methodists agree that a human’s ultimate need is justification and that God has acted decisively in history to make justification possible. Further, Methodists affirm that this act of God was for all persons, not for a select few and that justification is, therefore, a possibility for every human being.

A person caught in the bondage of sin is no more able to justify himself or herself than a crooked line of type on a printed page is able to justify itself. Therefore, in God’s deep and consistent love for us, God made justification possible through the Incarnation and Atonement of Jesus Christ. Because of Christ’s meritorious life and undeserved suffering, a renewed relationship—a justified relationship—is possible for every person. The action necessary for justification to take place is an act of faith (trust) that Christ’s life, death and resurrection does, in fact, make the salvation of every humn possible.

At the point of being justified, Methodists believe a person has had his or her life corrected, reshaped, reborn, set on a new track and that new sense of direction is the beginning of the life of faith.

(ASSURANCE) We come to know for CERTAIN that God loves us individually and totally.

One of the more controversial Methodist doctrines may be one of our most important concepts. John Wesley was intensely religious as a young priest. He spent much of his time in prayer, theological study, sacramental participation, and in aid to the imprisoned and impoverished. And yet, until his famous “Aldersgate experience,” he struggled with the question of whether or not God truly loved him as an individual. All of his intellectual, spiritual, and charitable activity had not brought him any sense of comfort. Then on May 24, his “heart was strangely warmed” and he received the *assurance* that God loved him, specifically him.

From the beginning, Methodist preachers focused on the doctrine

of assurance which said that it is possible for us to know for certain that God loves us and that Christ died for us. We believe that the Holy Spirit comes to each Christian in such a way that he or she has first hand experiential affirmation that he or she is a child of God. Paul said, "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The Spirit certifies, in each Christians' heart, the unmistakable knowledge that his or her salvation is certain.

"By the testimony of the Spirit," said Wesley, "I mean, an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit, that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given Himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."

The doctrine of assurance has always been controversial, however. It unquestionably leads, at times, to presumptuous and mistaken identification of a wide variety of good feelings as assurance of the Spirit. At different times in our history, it has led persons to look for some specific evidence—such as glossolalia, intense social action, or attitudinal change—to objectively prove the certainty of individual salvation. But, most of the controversy has come because of the inability of anyone who has the assurance of the Spirit to define it for others. Even Wesley admitted that "he who hath that witness in himself, cannot explain it to one who hath it not."

(SANCTIFICATION) With God's help, we respond to this certainty by intensifying . . .

**our personal HOLINESS,
our expression of God's love in ACTION,
our participation in the SACRAMENTS.**

Sanctification is the term to identify the process of growth in the Christian life following justification. The experience of Christians through the centuries has shown that problems and struggles remain a part of life even after an initial commitment to Christ has been made.

John Wesley recognized that even though a person may declare his or her faith and, by God's grace, be justified, he or she may still make wrong decisions. Wesley believed that a Christian should "grow in grace" by repenting of his or her sins and giving himself or herself to a life of personal discipline and service to all people.

The Christian faith is a pilgrimage which requires growth, self-examination, repentance, discipline, and compassion for all people. If any of these is neglected, the pilgrimage becomes slow, and misdirected. Methodists understand that this "growth in grace" happens when we focus on three distinct areas of religious life: (1) the *pursuit of personal holiness* through prayer, devotions, Bible reading and study, and the development of holy habits; (2) *involvement in loving action* on

the behalf of others, expressing God's love to others in deeds of social concern, and (3) *participation in worship*, especially in the sacraments. Wesley called abandonment of this journey "falling from grace."

Rather than resulting in insecurity and timidity, the idea that a person may fall away from his or her task serves as a reminder of the tension in which all people of faith live. The Christian pilgrimage, or process of sanctification, is an adventure from "what was" into "what can be."

The *Book of Discipline* states the official position of The United Methodist Church regarding sanctification:

Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement cleanseth from all sin: whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, but are washed from its pollution, saved from its power, and are enabled, through grace, to love God with all our hearts and to walk in his holy commandments blameless.

(CHRISTIAN PERFECTION) Our goal is to become totally loving like Christ.

Wesley often spoke of Christian perfection as the goal toward which all Christians must strive. Indeed, he believed it was for the proclamation of this view that Methodists were raised up. His understanding of such perfection was basically a description of a person's relationships with God and neighbor. Christian perfection implies that:

1. A person is controlled by a love of God;
2. A person is, without reservation, in loving harmony with neighbor;
3. A person loves Christ to the point of emulation.

Christian perfection is often understood as purity of intention and purpose rather than a state of sinlessness.

Throughout the years, the question of the possibility of arriving at perfection for a person in history has been raised. Wesley said that he never knew anyone who actually arrived at Christian perfection even though he regularly affirmed that it had to be a goal which we believed we could attain. Excessive attention given to such speculation can obscure the essential validity of such a goal—that Christians ought to live in a continual process of spiritual growth and development with deeper love of God and neighbor as their basic purpose in life. The emulation of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ as a focus of human life has found expression in many different religious movements, especially in the monastic movements of the Middle Ages. However, in Methodism, for the first time, it became a functional doctrine of a major Protestant denomination.

33. A BALANCED DENOMINATION (METHODIST STRUCTURE)

Methodists are known for a BALANCED emphasis on many issues which divide other Christians.

We inherit much of our balanced approach to religion from John Wesley and the other early Methodist leaders. Wesley could have been called a revivalist because he traveled around England preaching in a manner which frequently stimulated emotional, ecstatic, and histrionic responses in his audiences. At the same time, he was one of the recognized scholars of his time. He emphasized prayer, evangelism, and personal holiness, on one hand, and militant social concern and intense sacramental participation on the other. In a very real way, early Methodism molded the best of the Protestant doctrines of “justification by faith” and the Catholic doctrines of “sanctification by works” into a balanced theological system.

Today, United Methodism continues to reflect the balance which helped to make it the characteristically American denomination; United Methodism has more ethnic, geographic, and theological diversity amongst its members and clergy than any other American denomination.

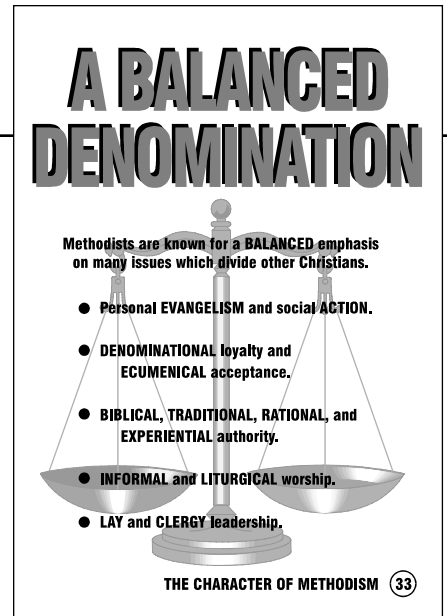
- **Personal EVANGELISM and social ACTION.**

In modern Christendom, it is common to divide denominations and individual Christians along lines depending upon whether they are “evangelical” or “social activists.” It is normally assumed that if you are in one of these camps you are not in the other. However, the balanced stance of United Methodism defies this. In fact, it is common for us to function as leaders in both areas at the same time.

Through the Evangelism Department of the national Board of Discipleship, conference Boards of Evangelism, and local church Work Areas on Evangelism, the classic Methodist emphasis on sharing the gospel with others is continued today as a primary thrust of the church. Evangelism is often lifted up by various institutions of the church as the primary work of the church.

Even though all social concerns are both universal and personal, some of them are issues faced by nearly every Christian with regularity. The official stance of United Methodists is explained in detail in the *Statement of Social Principles* and further illuminated in the *Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church* produced by each General Conference.

The *Book of Resolutions* begins with our Statement of Social Principles which gives the official stance of The United Methodist



Church in these specific areas:

I. The Natural World

- A. Water, Air, Soil, Air, Minerals, Plants
- B. Energy Resources Utilization
- C. Animal Life
- D. Space
- E. Science and Technology

II. The Nurturing Community

- A. The Family
- B. Other Christian Communities
- C. Marriage
- D. Divorce
- E. Single Persons
- F. Human Sexuality
- G. Rights of Homosexual Persons
- H. Abortion
- I. Adoption
- J. Death With Dignity

III. The Social Community

- A. Rights of Racial and Ethnic Persons
- B. Rights of Religious Minorities
- C. Rights of Children
- D. Rights of Youth and Young Adults
- E. Rights of the Aging
- F. Rights of Women
- G. Rights of Persons With Handicapping Conditions
- H. Population
- I. Alcohol and Other Drugs
- J. Tobacco
- K. Medical Experimentation
- L. Genetic Technology
- M. Rural Life
- N. Urban-Suburban Life
- O. Media Violence and Christian Values

IV. The Economic Community

- A. Property
- B. Collective Bargaining
- C. Work and Leisure
- D. Consumption
- E. Poverty
- F. Migrant Workers
- G. Gambling

V. The Political Community

- A. Basic Freedoms
- B. Political Responsibility
- C. Freedom of Information
- D. Education
- E. Civil Obedience and Civil Disobedience
- F. Criminal Justice
- G. Military Service

VI. The World Community

- A. Nations and Cultures
- B. National Power and Responsibility
- C. War and Peace
- D. Justice and Law

The Statement of Social Principles is followed by the *Social Creed*, a statement which United Methodists are urged to use from time to time in worship settings:

The United Methodist Social Creed

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive, for ourselves and others, the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and those with handicapping conditions; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others, and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights of property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs, and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. *Amen.*

The United Methodist Church has a long history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on con-

troversial issues involving Christian principles. Early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners.

A social creed was adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) in 1908. Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and by The Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a statement of social principles in 1946 at the time of the uniting of The United Brethren in Christ and The Evangelical Church. In 1972, four years after the uniting in 1968 of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a new Statement of Social Principles.

- **DENOMINATIONAL loyalty and ECUMENICAL acceptance.**

We are products of our Wesleyan heritage and are enthusiastically United Methodists. And yet, we affirm the brotherhood of all persons who call Jesus Christ Lord!

The United Methodist Church is an ecumenical church. Members of the church are loyal to their heritage and institutions. They believe, however, that the church of Christ is a “catholic,” or universal church.

John Wesley insisted that the scripture provided no particular form of church organization. The Methodist movement was not an effort at renewing the mission of the established church. Wesley never intended to separate from the Church of England and he died an Anglican priest. Albright sought not to organize a church, but to minister to German-speaking Americans. Otterbein and Boehm hoped simply to proclaim a heartwarming gospel to German-speaking Americans.

In recent years there has been a trend for denominations to identify themselves as either evangelical or ecumenical. In general, when persons use these labels for churches or denominations, they mean something different from what the terms have meant historically.

“Evangelical” historically identifies those churches that take seriously the biblical mandate to “go forth, therefore, and make disciples,” and was normally applied to those denominations which separated from Roman Catholicism in the Reformation (Lutherans, Calvinists, etc.). However, common usage of the term “evangelical” more often implies rigid biblicism and a conservative approach to theology and social concerns.

“Ecumenical” historically refers to churches or denominations committed to the universality of the Church and to cooperative and supportive relationships among Christians of various denominations. However, common usage of the term “ecumenical” often implies biblical and theological unconcern and a liberal approach to social confrontation.

In the best sense of the terms “evangelical” and “ecumenical,” The United Methodist Church is both. A highly pluralistic denomination, we have churches and persons ranging over most of the extremes and all the middle positions of Christendom; but one of our historic unifying factors is our ability to fit with integrity and enthusiasm in both the evangelical and ecumenical movements in modern Christendom. We are not of “the middle way” like our Anglican predecessors. We are a unique “both way” that comfortably encompasses the best of the personal, biblical and spiritual “evangelical” faith and the social, cooperative and aggressive “ecumenical” faith.

The United Methodist Church is an evangelical church. It is evangelical because it is identified with what God has done and is doing for the world through Jesus Christ. The action of God is the gospel which the church proclaims, and in which it seeks to participate.

The New Testament insists that Jesus Christ, by his existence, his ministry, and his resurrection is God’s message of salvation for all persons. He is also the way of salvation for us as he confronts us with the invitation to a new life in response to God’s will. Because the church is in tune with this “evangel” or “good news,” it seeks to proclaim this message.

Evangelical proclamation is accomplished both by word and deed. Persons who identify themselves with the good news of the gospel are compelled to share their experience with others by word of mouth. The witness of the evangelical Christian is shared even more effectively by deeds of Christian love. Evangelical proclamation is essentially a reaching out to establish relationships with those outside the church.

Today, as in the past, United Methodism seeks a harmonious relationship with other denominations. Recognizing the need for cooperation among Christian, ecclesiastical bodies, The United Methodist Church is involved in The National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., The World Council of Churches, The Consultation on Church Union, and dozens of other cooperative Christian organizations. Because we are the largest of the “ecumenical” denominations, United Methodist participation is highly visible in virtually every ecumenical organization.

- **BIBLICAL, TRADITIONAL, RATIONAL, and EXPERIENTIAL authority.**

The range of beliefs in The United Methodist Church ranges all over the current mainstream options and a variety of special interest theologies as well. Historically, Christians of the various Wesleyan traditions have tended toward theological pluralism. John Wesley wrote of a “catholic spirit,” and the various doctrinal statements that form the basic foundations of United Methodist belief reflect this attitude of

ecumenical theology. Wesley, and most of the leaders that have come after him, have borrowed doctrine rather liberally from both Protestant and Catholic arenas.

Today, each United Methodist is encouraged to reflect and develop his or her own creedal statement within the boundaries defined by four main sources and guidelines for Christian theology: *Scripture, tradition, experience, and reason*. These four guidelines are interdependent; none can stand separate from the others.

SCRIPTURE

United Methodists share with all other Christians the conviction that scripture is the primary source and guideline for doctrine.

As we immerse ourselves in the biblical testimony, as we open our minds and hearts to the Word of God through the words of persons inspired by the Holy Spirit, faith is born and nourished, our understanding deepens and develops, and both the core of faith and the range of our theological opinions are expanded and enriched.

As the constitutive witness to God's self-revelation, Scripture is rightly read and understood within the believing community, and its interpretation is informed by the traditions of that community.

TRADITION

Traditions are the residue of corporate experience of earlier Christian communities. A critical appreciation of them can enlarge our vision and enrich faith in God's provident love. An uncritical acceptance of tradition amounts to traditional-ism, which can become narrow and restrictive. However, appreciation, study, and celebration of the diverse and dynamic traditions of all of Christendom can help us to bridge the chasms that have so often divided the Body of Christ.

EXPERIENCE

Experience is to the individual as tradition is to the Church as a whole: the personal appropriation of God's unmeasured mercy in life and interpersonal relations. There is a radical distinction between intellectual assent to the message of the Bible and doctrinal propositions set forth in creeds, and the personal experience of God's pardoning and healing love. Traditionally, personal faith and assurance have been described as "a sure trust and confidence of the mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and a steadfast hope of all good things at God's hand."

"New life in Christ" is the product of Christian experience. Such experience opens faith's eyes to living truth in Scripture, informs and

guides the Christian conscience in ethical decisions, and illumines the Christian understanding of God and creation.

REASON

Christian doctrines which are developed from scripture, tradition, and “experience” must be submitted to critical analysis so that they may commend themselves to thoughtful persons as valid. This means that they must avoid self-contradiction and take due account of scientific and empirical knowledge, and yet recognize that revelation and “experience” may transcend the scope of reason. Since all truth is from God, efforts to discern the connections between revelation and reason, faith and science, grace and nature are useful endeavors in developing credible and communicable doctrine.

- **INFORMAL and LITURGICAL worship.**

Across the country, members of The United Methodist Church worship in many different ways. Our approach to worship reflects the same balance as in other areas of our corporate life. We affirm the historic value of the classical liturgies and utilize most of the historic worship forms. At the same time, our interest in Christian experience and evangelism leads us to a variety of informal and experimental worship styles.

United Methodists consider corporate worship a valid response to God’s love. United Methodists join together in worship to celebrate what God has done for humanity in Jesus Christ.

Some essentials of Christian worship are remembrance of what God has done, thanksgiving for what we have received, and dedication and response to God’s mission in the world. In worship, the written and preached Word of God is central, as are the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

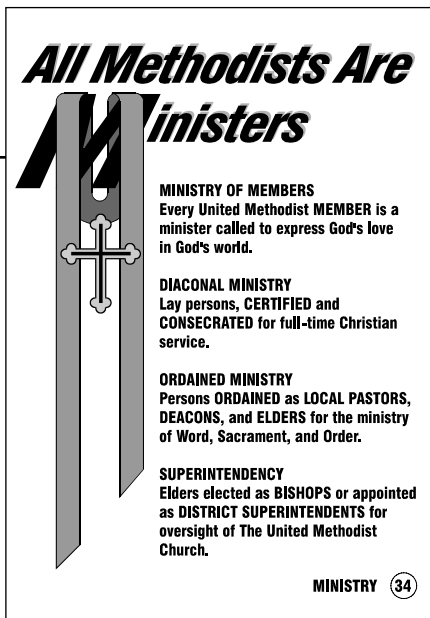
Worship includes such diverse activities as family devotions, preaching services, funerals, marriages, and prayer.

John Wesley provided instructions for worship in Methodist Churches, and most United Methodist worship services are somewhat in keeping with those historic forms. However, a variety of liturgical forms is possible in United Methodist Churches and many new, experimental approaches to liturgy are popular today.

- **LAY and CLERGY leadership.**

Although it was not an early emphasis of Methodism, a balance of lay and clergy leadership has evolved as an important principle in recent years. Virtually all organizations of The United Methodist

Church (with the exception of the episcopacy and the district superintendency) are either half laity and half clergy or, in some cases, two-thirds laity.



All Methodists Are Ministers

MINISTRY OF MEMBERS
Every United Methodist MEMBER is a minister called to express God's love in God's world.

DIACONAL MINISTRY
Lay persons, **CERTIFIED** and **CONSECRATED** for full-time Christian service.

ORDAINED MINISTRY
Persons **ORDAINED** as **LOCAL PASTORS, DEACONS, and ELDERS** for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order.

SUPERINTENDENCY
Elders elected as **BISHOPS** or appointed as **DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS** for oversight of The United Methodist Church.

MINISTRY 34

34. ALL CHRISTIANS ARE MINISTERS (MINISTRY OF MEMBERS)

MINISTRY OF MEMBERS:
Every United Methodist MEMBER is a minister called to express God's love in God's world.

All members of The United Methodist Church are commissioned to be ministers of Jesus Christ both in their local congregations and in their communities outside of their local congregations and in their communities outside of the local church. Every Christian is a member of the universal Body of Christ and, therefore, every believer is called to be in ministry as part of the revitalized Body. Even though we affirm that some people are called and consecrated or ordained into specialized “professional” ministries, the important fact is that every member, every believer is, first of all, *a minister of Jesus Christ*.

DIACONAL MINISTRY:
Lay persons, CERTIFIED and CONSECRATED for full-time Christian service.

The ministry of laypersons who feel called to full-time Christian service has always been an important part of the total ministry of United Methodism. In the beginning, John Wesley consecrated hundreds of laymen to be traveling preachers for the Methodist movement in England. In America, ordination soon replaced the concept of lay preachers for the traveling ministry, but local churches were frequently pastored from week to week by lay preachers in between visits by the circuit riding clergy. Also, The United Methodist Church has always employed large numbers of teachers, social workers, editors, nurses, administrators, secretaries, and hundreds of other lay ministers in its many institutions.

Today, we affirm and consecrate certain lay persons for professional positions in church leadership. These persons are consecrated by a bishop as diaconal ministers and employed by local churches or agencies of The United Methodist Church. The Discipline defines a diaconal minister as persons who are “called to specialized ministries of

service, justice, and love within local congregations and in the wider world. . . . Diaconal ministers focus their service through a variety of ministries, such as, administration, education, evangelism, music, health ministries, and community development—to the local congregation and the wider community. Christ's service to humankind and the Church's responsibility for continuing that service in the world are both symbolized and enabled especially, but not exclusively, in diaconal ministry. Diaconal ministry exists to intensify and make more effective the well understanding of the whole people of God as servants in Christ's name."

In general, diaconal ministers must:

1. Dedicate themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life,
2. Have been a member of a United Methodist congregation for one year and have the recommendation of their Charge Conference,
3. Have been employed in a position approved by their conference Board of Diaconal Ministry and received the recommendation of the board, and,
5. Have completed a bachelor's degree and the necessary professional post-graduate studies for their profession as well as the foundation studies for diaconal ministry.

Diaconal ministers are consecrated by the bishop of their Annual Conference and become lay members of the Annual Conference. However, they are hired into their positions through negotiation between themselves and their employing congregations or church agencies and their employment can be terminated at any time by themselves or their employing agency.

ORDAINED MINISTRY:

Persons ORDAINED as LOCAL PASTORS, DEACONS, and ELDERS for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order.

The ordained ministry of The United Methodist Church consists of two orders: *deacons* and *elders*. Elders are persons who have completed their formal preparation (usually at least seven years of formal higher education) and have been elected full members of an Annual Conference. Deacons are persons who have progressed sufficiently in their preparation toward full ordination to become probationary or associate members of an Annual Conference.

Deacons and elders are itinerant members of the Annual Conference which means that they are appointed to their positions by the bishop and are responsible to the bishop and the Annual Conference. They are guaranteed an appointment in the conference and

can be moved at any time. The itinerant system is the framework in which United Methodist ministers are appointed to charges by the presiding bishop. The itinerant ministry has been successful because of several factors present in The United Methodist Church:

1. The ministers are willing to forego the establishment of deep roots in any one place in the hope that they can best serve God by periodically moving to new congregations.
2. The congregations support each pastor sent to serve them and seek to let the work of one pastor compliment the work of another.
3. The congregations and the ministers trust the judgment of their bishop as he or she makes the appointments.

The success of the itinerant ministry may well be traced to the flexibility that it provides the bishop of an area for dealing with the needs of churches and pastors under the bishop's jurisdiction.

LOCAL PASTORS

Many lay people in The United Methodist Church feel called by God to serve as local pastors. A local pastor is a person who is licensed to preach and, upon recommendation of the Board of the Ministry in his or her Annual Conference, approved by the Annual Conference for appointment to a charge.

The local pastor may perform the duties of pastor in the charge to which he or she is appointed with the exception of the administration of the Sacraments. The local pastor attends and is responsible to the Annual Conference.

The local pastor pursues a strenuous course of study by which he or she becomes better able to perform the pastoral duties. The introductory course is followed by a four-year course of study directed by the Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

SUPERINTENDENCY:

Elders elected as BISHOPS or appointed as DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS for oversight of The United Methodist Church.

Bishops in The United Methodist Church are elected by the delegates of the Jurisdictional Conferences. The *Book of Discipline* recommends that at least three fifths of those present and voting be necessary to elect a bishop.

United Methodist bishops are elected from the ranks of the itinerant ministry to life terms of office. Bishops serve as spiritual leaders

and administrative officers in the church.

Each bishop elected by a Jurisdictional Conference is assigned by the Jurisdictional Conference's Committee on Episcopacy to a geographical area which is called an episcopal area. The total work of the church in this area is his or her responsibility. The bishop ordains and assigns pastors to churches, appoints district superintendents, presides at Annual Conference sessions, and directs the work of the church within the boundaries of the Annual Conferences under his or her jurisdiction.

Bishops' responsibilities reach far beyond their immediate episcopal areas. They are required to travel through the church at large and are involved in the work of various boards and agencies of the general church.

Each bishop is a member of the Council of Bishops which meets at least annually to plan for the spiritual and temporal oversight of the general church. All bishops are also members of the College of Bishops of the jurisdiction in which they serve. This organization is particularly concerned with the work of the church within the jurisdiction.

District Superintendents are appointed by the bishop to minister to the needs of pastors and churches in designated geographical sub-districts of Annual Conferences. The district superintendent travels throughout the district to oversee the spiritual and temporal affairs of the church.

The superintendent of a district presides at each Charge Conference or Annual Church Conference in the district. The superintendents administer the program of the general church within their districts. They counsel with pastors and Committees on Pastor-Parish Relations concerning pastoral assignments. They consult with the bishop regarding such assignments.

The district superintendents encourage ministerial recruitment and education. They advise and encourage candidates for the professional ministry. In cooperation with the District Committee on Ministry or the Board of the Ministry they issue and renew licenses to preach. In these and other duties, the superintendents are responsible to the Annual Conference.

District Superintendents usually attempt in every possible way to be pastors to the pastors and parsonage families in their districts.

SECTION TEN: UNIQUE METHODIST BELIEFS

DISCUSSION SUGGESTIONS

1. What does it mean to be evangelistic? To be cooperative with other churches?

2. Is it possible to be both evangelistic and ecumenical without sacrificing either enthusiasm or integrity?
3. Discuss the changing attitudes toward drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and human sexuality. Can moral values change as society changes and still remain Christian?
4. Discuss the Wesleyan concept of “falling from grace.” Consider the idea of “holiness” as a goal for Christians. Compare the concepts of sanctification, Christian perfection, and holiness. Discuss Christian perfection in terms of becoming fully human.
5. Do you feel that the itinerant system uproots a minister just when he or she is becoming most effective?
6. Does the ministerial move challenge the congregation to renewed activity?
7. How many years may a bishop serve in his episcopal office?
8. How long does a bishop serve in his episcopal office?
9. What are the most important tasks of a bishop?
10. Since bishops do not take part in the historic chain of apostolic succession, they could just as easily be called superintendents, moderators, or something else. Discuss whether or not “bishop” implies something more or less than what this officer of The United Methodist Church actually is.