

## Discernment Communication (#1)

### A History of Methodism

- Methodism and Methodist practices originated as a revival movement within the 18<sup>th</sup> century Church of England.
- It became a separate denomination of Protestant Christianity based on the doctrine and teachings of John Wesley.
- As Methodism developed, it underwent a number of splits and mergers. The splits were almost always occasioned by one of three issues:
  - Governance-how involved are laity in leadership? ; should there be Bishops? (and similar issues).
  - Race-can northern churches and southern churches (U.S.) exist as the same denomination?; should African American churches exist separately?
  - Holiness- what did Wesley mean by "Christian Perfection and is it achieved gradually or all at once?
- The American church split from Wesley's Methodism (Anglicanism) after his death so that clergy in America would not have to be ordained by the Church of England.
- Methodism is steeped in revivalism, evangelism and missional theology.
- American Methodism grew into an Episcopal model (Bishops) versus the Presbyterian model (Elders) of English Methodism.
- Bishops have clergy appointment authority (itinerant) and the Christian Church grew out of some Methodist's dissatisfaction with the Bishops' power.
- Other examples:
  - In early 1800s, African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion churches formed due to slavery issues.
  - In mid 1840s, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection formed in New England.
  - In mid 1840s, the Methodist Episcopal Church formed in the south over slavery
  - In 1852 in Georgia, the new Congregational Methodist movement rejected Episcopal governance.
  - In the 1920s, the Methodist Protestant Church formed.
  - As emphasis on holiness waned, the Church of the Nazarene was formed in 1908 by Methodists and Wesleyans to reclaim the pursuit of holiness,
  - In the 1930s, integration and slavery mergers and separations.
  - In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Protestant, and Methodist Episcopal South merged into the Methodist Church
  - In 1968, the Methodist Church and Evangelical United Brethren churches merged to form the United Methodist Church.

As you can see, throughout its history in America, the Methodist Church has been marked by differing thoughts which have resulted in separations as well as unifications more frequently than probably most of us realize. This has been the result of well-intentioned peoples seeking to govern a church body that is vibrant and growing. Over the years, some of the differing opinions have been in regards to slavery, women's' rights, morality, spirituality, and church governance. Differences have existed before and will in the future. Each person and congregation must work to seek God and pursue His Word and Truth to make their way through these changes. What we as Methodists are navigating now is not unlike things we have encountered before.