



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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Wesleyan (United Methodist) Theology Our Theological Task (Part 1)

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

*'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'* "

⁵ *Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'* "

⁷ *Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'* "

⁸ *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,
'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'* "

¹¹ *Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. Matthew 4:1-11 NRSV*

You have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. Now what? What does it mean to be a Christian in the 21st Century? On the one hand we have doctrines that have been developed over 2000 years of theological reflection. On the other hand we have a rapidly changing world that no one seems to fully understand; a world that, from time to time, can become very threatening and frightening.

We've been looking at Wesleyan Theology over the past months; those beliefs that make us distinctly Methodist. As I've noted from time to time throughout this series, Wesley was a very pragmatic theologian. He was intensely interested in how our beliefs shaped our lives and the world. He believed that accepting Christ should change our lives for, if it did not, how could accepting Christ ever change the world? This pragmatic theological focus is reflected in the Discipline of the United Methodist Church. All United Methodists are called upon to consider the meaning of their faith in the world around them; to apply their understanding of the will of God to their lives and our world. That process is referred to in the Discipline as *Our Theological Task*.

“But,” some will object, “I’m not a theologian.” However, the word ‘theology’ means ‘God words’ or ‘God talk.’ Each of us is engaging in theology whenever we speak about God or express our beliefs about God. Even an atheist is engaging in theology when he states that there is no God. Every Christian is a theologian and is required to remain a theologian as they struggle to express their beliefs about the nature of God in their everyday lives.

Although I could paraphrase the Discipline in this regard, I believe that the Discipline’s statement of the nature of our theological task is succinct and readily understandable. Here is what the Discipline has to say about our theological task.

Our theological task is both critical and constructive. It is *critical* in that we test various expressions of faith by asking: Are they true? Appropriate? Clear? Cogent? Credible? Are they based on love? Do they provide the Church and its members with a witness that is faithful to the gospel as reflected in our living heritage and that is authentic and convincing in the light of human experience and the present state of human knowledge?

Our theological task is *constructive* in that every generation must appropriate creatively the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in order to think afresh about God, revelation, sin, redemption, worship, the church, freedom, justice, moral responsibility, and other significant theological concerns. Our summons is to understand and receive the gospel promises in our troubled and uncertain times.

Our theological task is both individual and communal. It is a feature in the ministry of *individual* Christians. It requires the participation of all who are in our Church, lay and ordained, because the mission of the Church is to be carried out by everyone who is called to discipleship. To be persons of faith is to hunger to understand the truth given to us in Jesus Christ. Theological inquiry is by no means a casual undertaking. It requires sustained disciplines of study, reflection, and prayer. Yet the discernment of “plain truth for plain people” is not limited to theological specialists. Scholars have their role to play in assisting the people of God to fulfill this calling, but all Christians are called to theological reflection.

Our theological task is *communal*. It unfolds in conversations open to the experiences, insights, and traditions of all constituencies that make up United Methodism. This dialogue belongs to the life of every congregation. It is fostered by laity and clergy, by the bishops, by the boards, agencies, and theological schools of the Church. Conferences speak and act for United Methodists in their official decisions at appropriate levels. Our conciliar and representative forms of decision-making do not release United Methodists as individuals from the responsibility to develop sound theological judgment.

Our theological task is contextual and incarnational. It is grounded upon God's supreme mode of self-revelation—the incarnation in Jesus Christ. God's eternal Word comes to us in flesh and blood in a given time and place, and in full identification with humanity. Therefore, theological reflection is energized by our incarnational involvement in the daily life of the Church and the world, as we participate in God's liberating and saving action.

Our theological task is essentially practical. It informs the individual's daily decisions and serves the Church's life and work. While highly theoretical constructions of Christian thought make important contributions to theological understanding, we finally measure the truth of such statements in relation to their practical significance. Our interest is to incorporate the promises and demands of the gospel into our daily lives. Theological inquiry can clarify our thinking about what we are to say and do. It presses us to pay attention to

the world around us. Realities of intense human suffering, threats to the survival of life, and challenges to human dignity confront us afresh with fundamental theological issues: the nature and purposes of God, the relations of human beings to one another, the nature of human freedom and responsibility, and the care and proper use of all creation.

No Author (2009-05-01). The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008 (p. 75-76). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Still, the Wesleyan tradition does provide some guidelines for undertaking our theological task. In next week's newsletter I will discuss what has come to be known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.

General Conference 2016

The following Summary of the General Conference was written by Bishop William T. McAlilly, Bishop for the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences.

With Paul, I write, *"I give thanks for my every remembrance of you."* These last 23 days in Portland have reminded me again of the joy of the work of ministry among the people of the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences. Already I am hearing wonderful reports of what God is doing on the Sunday after General Conference. Baptisms, professions of faith, celebrations of graduations, mission teams planning for ministry. Thank you for your faithfulness over the work to which God is calling us.

Many, many of you have followed General Conference day by day, vote by vote, via the internet. While the headlines captured much of the drama around the surface of the Conference, the real work occurred in legislative sessions led by lay and clergy men and women from across the world.

The faithfulness and tenacity of the delegates from the Nashville Area was inspiring to me. In addition to the delegates, there were those serving behind the scenes, doing whatever was needed to facilitate the work of General Conference. When the benediction was pronounced Friday, May 20, much had been accomplished. Below are some of the highlights.

For the sake of the Mission

To be clear, the General Conference chose to **stand united for the sake of staying in mission**. As a global church made up of people with differing viewpoints, we affirm a commitment to maintain and strengthen the unity of the church. We had serious discussions about the global growth of the church and the state of the church in the U.S. and passed a \$604 million dollar budget for 2017-2020 which includes \$5 million for theological education in the Central Conferences. This a slight increase over the \$603.1 million dollar budget approved at the 2012 General Conference. It is also an increase over the \$599 million budget proposed to the 2016 General Conference delegates, which would have been The United Methodist Church's lowest in 16 years.

Offering a Way Forward:

We acknowledge that deep divisions exist in the church about human sexuality, but we believe there are options other than restructuring. We do not desire to split the church, and we seek unity for the sake of our mission and witness. **For the first time, a General Conference appealed to the Council of Bishops to lead legislatively as well as spiritually, a responsibility that has been reserved for the body.** Your bishops humbly accepted

this challenge. The Council will lead a process to help the church move forward. This process has not yet been fully developed, but the Council will report to the church as we continue our conversations. If we discover it is necessary to have a special session of General Conference, the Council would be charged with the responsibility of making such a decision for the sake of the Church.

Because the General Conference requested leadership from the Council of Bishops to find a way forward, any changes in our positions on human sexuality were postponed. The Council will create a Commission to examine and possibly revise sections of church law regarding human sexuality. The Commission will include representation from every region of the UMC and from different perspectives. We will not be able to build trust unless these conversations are candid and do not carry incrimination. We are committed to a different kind of conversation that invites people to imagine where God wants the church to go.

No changes have been made to the Book of Discipline regarding our official positions on matters of human sexuality. The prohibitions outlined in church law still exist, but we have committed to explore options to help avoid further complaints, trials and harm while upholding the Discipline.

Additional conference highlights:

- A variety of worship experiences provided spiritual nourishment as well as an opportunity to unite with each other as a diverse, international body of Christ; while the Episcopal address, Laity address, and Young People's address provided inspiration.
- We felt the Holy Spirit among us as we engaged in conversation and our work.
- As we near the end of our Imagine No Malaria campaign, we celebrated our success in raising \$68.5 million in the fight against malaria, an effort that has served to help revitalize and engage churches in mission outreach.
- We continued in our Acts of Repentance with a presentation from the Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes about the Methodist involvement in the 1864 Sand Creek massacre.
- We shared in the consecration of deaconesses and home missionaries and the commissioning of 29 missionaries.
- We acknowledged our heritage by observing a number of anniversaries: the 250th anniversary of John Street Church; the 200th anniversary of the death of Francis Asbury, the 150th anniversary of United Methodist Women, the 60th anniversary of the Methodist Church granting full clergy rights to women, the 40th anniversary of voting rights for the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference, the 30th anniversary of DISCIPLE Bible Study, and the 25th anniversary of Africa University.
- The Council of Bishops welcomed a new leadership team, with Bishop Bruce Ough assuming the presidency of the Council. New members of the Judicial Council were elected and for the first time, a member from outside the U.S. was elected president. Gary Graves was elected secretary of the General Conference.
- We celebrated our ecumenical partnerships as we move in to full Communion with the Uniting Church in Sweden and toward full Communion with the Moravian church.

Legislation:

- Defeated a proposal to remove "*for the transformation of the world*" from our mission statement.
- Approved a resolution calling on United Methodist agencies to raise awareness about the harm caused by sports teams that use mascots or symbols that disrespect Native Americans.
- Voted to withdraw United Methodist membership from the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
- Approved a new cloud-based hymnal.

- Approved a petition to create a new provisional conference in Southeast Asia and Mongolia.
- Created a new formula for the Central Conference theological education fund, allowing all Central Conference apportionment funding in excess of \$750,000 to go to the education fund.
- Favored a recommendation of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters to add five bishops after General Conference 2020.
- Allowed the General Conference to set provisions in regard to bishops' accountability and alter the complaint process against bishops.
- Created two new special Sundays: Women's Ministry Sunday and Volunteers in Mission Awareness Sunday. One Great Hour of Sharing will now be known as UMCOR Sunday.
- Defeated an effort to remove the constitutional ban to end guaranteed appointments.
- Passed a \$604 million budget.

On a Personal Note:

As many of you know, part of the task of presiding over the debate regarding the Bishops' Response: "A Way Forward" to lead the church through the institutional quagmire around human sexuality fell to me on Wednesday afternoon. Tensions were high and many things were articulated that were very disturbing. I was falsely accused by two delegates of manipulating the voting process. Whenever and wherever a bishop presides, it is done so with impartiality and without bias. I take that responsibility seriously as do my colleague bishops. By the grace of God and the prayers of many, many people, I was able to lead the conference through the remainder of that session. I am humbled by the love and grace extended to me by so many across the denomination.

In just a few weeks, the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences will gather to celebrate the mission and ministry across the Nashville Area. Our theme is: "*Offering Christ to A Hurting World One Neighborhood at a Time.*" It promises to be a time of renewal and celebration. I invite your prayers for all who will be leading.

Your Servant for Christ's Sake,

Bill McAlilly

New Disciple Bible Study

Disciple Bible Study is a powerful experience that can open the bible up for the participants. I would be willing to begin a new class this September if at least seven people desired to undertake the 34 week study. I could do this study on Monday or Tuesday nights between 7 and 9. If participants would prefer to meet on a week day that could also be arranged. In years past I have also taught Disciple Bible Study between 7 and 9 AM Sunday mornings. If you are interested please contact me at the Church. If you desire additional information for yourself or to give to a friend I have some explanatory booklets available.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

Our Thursday morning Bible Study meets between 10:00 and 11:30. Everyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. We have completed our study of the Gospels, including the Book of Acts and are beginning a study of Paul's Epistles. We have concluded our study of Galatians and have begun a study of Ephesians.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Rachel Newman	Sam Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Leslie Eastwood	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God's Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

June 5th: Who Are You to Preach the Gospel? What are the minimum qualifications to preach the Gospel? That is a question Paul touches on in his letter to the Galatians. My texts are Psalm 146 and Galatians 1:11–24.

June 12th: Sermon: I Want It. My nominee for the most dangerous phrase in the English language. My texts are Luke 7:36–50 and 1 Kings 21:1–21a.

Worship Leader's Schedule

June 5

Hal Newman, **Liturgist**

Dorise and Bill LeCates, **Greeters**

Dawn and Richard Stevens, **Ushers**

June 12

Renita Hartsock, **Liturgist**

Mike and Renee Fetting, **Greeters**

Maurice and Joyce Edwards, **Ushers**

Announcements

Parent's Night Out:

"The Parents Night Out team is looking for volunteers to help launch this family ministry! We need **6 volunteers for each of the following dates/times**. The launch party will be held [on Sunday July 10th from 12:30-3:30](#) after the service. The initial two PNO evenings will be [July 15th](#) and [July 29th from 5:30-9](#) and **we need volunteers to serve from 5-9:30**. Volunteers will serve by staffing the various stations for the children attending and by serving a pizza dinner to the children. No experience necessary- just a heart to serve! All are welcome and we need many hands in order to ensure the success of this ministry. We are asking that volunteers complete a background check prior to [July 10th](#) and the PNO ministry will support with the cost and directions on how to do this. Once you sign up, a member of the PNO team will contact you with details. Please sign up to share your gifts!"

Volunteers are needed to help with this year's VBS. There is a sign-up sheet on the bulletin board by the side door. If you have questions, please contact Dawn Stevens at (615)-638-8827 or dawnstevens1961@gmail.com. A meeting will be scheduled soon to discuss the theme and all the activity details. VBS is an exciting, fun time for all, come join in!

Hosts and Hostesses for First Sunday Lunch: Please see the sign-up sheet on the bulletin board. Please add your name to host this occasion for the coming months.

Trinity UMC Directory: We are updating our directory. If you are not listed in the current directory, if you have changed address, phone numbers, email address, we would like to make these changes in the directory. **Please see the document on the table at the back door. Please make your changes on this document.**

The **Nanette Crowell Companions in Christ Sunday School class** is both learning and enjoying a series of videos, narrated by Ray Vanderlann. The videos as well as the narration take place in ancient lands described in the Old Testament. We enjoy discussion about what we are learning and the application of the lessons to our lives.

We enjoy fellowship beginning at 9:45 with our study beginning at 10:00. All are welcome to join us as we pursue Biblical truths and the application for our lives.

Birthdays in June

Lynn McGill, Jo Cotton, Mike Fetting, Richard Stevens, Nancy Conway, Kenneth Stevens, Larry Eastwood

Happy Birthday to each of you!