

FOR A
FAITHFUL
FUTURE

THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH



ESSAYS ON THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH
A BOOK IN HONOR OF KEITH BOYETTE



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CONTENTS

Dedicatory Preface— <i>Cara Nicklas</i>	vii
About the Reverend Keith Boyette	xi
Introduction: Laying the Foundation—A New Day in Methodism— <i>Jessica LaGrone</i>	1

Part One: The Historical Background and Formation of the Global Methodist Church

1. Methodical Fire: The Story of Early Methodism— <i>Ryan N. Danker</i>	7
2. The Making of a Movement— <i>James V. Heidinger II</i>	25
3. The Birth of the Global Methodist Church— <i>Walter B. Fenton</i>	39

Part Two: Becoming a Vital and Healthy Branch of the Church Catholic

4. Feasting on Scripture— <i>Suzanne Nicholson</i>	55
5. The Great Creeds of the Christian Church— <i>David F. Watson</i>	65
6. Organizing a Missional Wesleyan Movement— <i>Bishop Scott J. Jones</i>	75

Part Three: A Truly Global Church

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 7. A Global Church: Our Call, Our Reality— <i>Bishop Mark J. Webb</i> | 89 |
| 8. The Rise of the GMC in Africa— <i>Simon Mafunda</i> | 99 |
| 9. The Rise of the GMC in Europe— <i>Gabriella Kopas</i> | 109 |
| 10. The Rise of the GMC in the Philippines— <i>Luther J. Oconer</i> | 119 |

Part Four: Seeds for Planting and Multiplying

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 11. Planting and Multiplying Local Churches— <i>Steve Cordle</i> | 135 |
| 12. Planting a Kingdom Movement— <i>Bishop Carolyn Moore</i> | 145 |
| 13. An Unexpected Child, Late in Years: New Church Starts in the GMC— <i>Jill Jackson Sears</i> | 153 |

Part Five: A Sure Hope for a Faithful Future

- | | |
|---|-----|
| 14. A Diverse Church— <i>Bishop Emeritus Robert E. Hayes Jr.</i> | 161 |
| 15. New Voices, Shared Dreams: Young Adults in the GMC—
<i>Elizabeth Fink</i> | 167 |
| 16. Supporting and Nurturing Young Clergy— <i>Hunter Bethea
and Emily Mendoza</i> | 175 |
| 17. Next-Generation Ministries— <i>Mark Swayze</i> | 183 |

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Afterword— <i>Mike Schafer</i> | 191 |
| Tributes to Keith Boyette | 195 |
| Contributors | 203 |

DEDICATORY PREFACE

The Global Methodist Church's Transitional Leadership Council and the Reverend Keith Boyette, serving as the transitional connectional officer, were uniquely positioned to guide the denomination through its nascent phase. This transitional period, envisioned to last only several months from the anticipated adoption of the *Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace Through Separation* in May 2020 until the GMC's convening conference anticipated to take place in the fall of the same year, was met with unexpected challenges. The first virtual meeting of the TLC on March 30, 2020, coincided with the onset of a global pandemic that disrupted plans, postponed key events, and extended the transitional phase far beyond initial expectations.

Despite these challenges, the TLC, under Keith's leadership, persevered. Week after week, over four and a half years, the council met to put in place the structures, policies, and procedures necessary for the church's formation and foundation. Keith, who had anticipated retiring after the transitional phase, instead found himself called to an extended season of tireless service. His steadfast dedication to the task at hand combined with his deep faith and servant's heart exemplified the very spirit of the church he was helping to build.

I had the privilege of knowing Keith before serving alongside him on the TLC. Our paths first crossed in 2016 during my tenure on the Wesleyan Covenant Association's Global Council. I was honored to play

ABOUT THE REVEREND KEITH BOYETTE

The Reverend Keith Boyette served as the Global Methodist Church’s transitional connectional officer—its chief administrator and executive—from the church’s official commencement of operations on May 1, 2022, until the adjournment of its convening General Conference on September 26, 2024.

Boyette received his call to ministry after he had already embarked upon a career as an attorney in Richmond, Virginia, working as a partner at the firm Hirschler, Fleischer, Weinberg, Cox, and Allen. He was also an active layman at River Road United Methodist Church. But after a profound call to the pastorate, Boyette left the firm, and he and his wife, Pamela, moved their growing family to Wilmore, Kentucky, so he could attend Asbury Theological Seminary.

Following his graduation, Boyette returned to Virginia, where he was ordained a deacon and then an elder in the UMC’s Virginia Annual Conference. He served one appointment before planting a new church in Spotsylvania, Virginia, known as Wilderness Community Church. Beginning with only his immediate family as attendees, over the course of nineteen years, he led an ever-growing number of members in building a spirit-filled congregation.

Clergy colleagues in Virginia and around the country quickly recognized Boyette’s faithfulness, hard work, and his many talents. Given

INTRODUCTION

Laying the Foundation: A New Day in Methodism

JESSICA LAGRONE

On April 21, 1777, John Wesley stood on the future site of what would become known as Wesley's Chapel in London. An elderly man by this point, Wesley stood in the rain while someone held an umbrella over him, delivering a sermon he titled, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, Near City-Road, London." It was crafted as a spiritual milestone, marking the laying of the literal cornerstone of the edifice that would become the headquarters of the Methodist movement.

Wesley knew what was happening that day was more than the construction of a new building. He was standing (literally and figuratively) at a turning point in Methodism. It had been around forty years since his Aldersgate experience of a heart "strangely warmed."¹ He had seen the burgeoning movement through early growth pains, experimental methods, ecclesial opposition, institutional suspicion, and explosive growth.

1. John Wesley, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (Oxford University Press, 1964), 66.

This sermon, like the chapel being built on the same spot, would stand as a marker of Wesley's legacy that would reach down through the generations, all the way to us in the present day. Today as we find ourselves at another turning point of our Methodist movement, this sermon speaks to our unique moment in profound ways. The instinct to reflect while building something is one that serves to both preserve the lessons of the past and to bring the hopes of the future within grasp. The same drive has compelled the writing of this volume, the collected reflections of more than twenty authors who have participated in and witnessed history being made in the founding of the Global Methodist Church.

Wesley shaped his cornerstone sermon around the past, present, and future of Methodism: Where have we come from (our history)? What do we stand for (our identity)? And where do we go from here (our future direction)?² As we've crafted this volume of essays, we have shaped our considerations in much the same way. The writings here are intended to record not only the path through which the Global Methodist Church has emerged but also the hopes on which it is staking its future.

In our day, as well as in the days of the Wesleys, many have wrestled with what it means to be the church. Many have grieved the ways in which the church can lose its way. Wesley himself confessed that he had once been full of what he called a "zeal for the Church"³—a kind of institutional loyalty that, left unchecked, can eclipse the very gospel it was meant to serve. God delivered him from that, and in doing so, opened the door to the movement that would become Methodism. That same deliverance is still needed today; not a rejection of the church, but a release from the

2. Carolyn Moore, host, "Joe Dongell," *Art of Holiness*, podcast, October 28, 2024.

3. John Wesley, Sermon 132, "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, Near the City-Road, London." <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-132-on-laying-the-foundation-of-the-new-chapel-near-the-city-road-london/>.

idolatry of its form, a recentering on its mission, and a return to the God who calls it into being.

Wesley was very clear that the faith he spoke of was not a novel religion but a return to an old one. The turning point that we mark today is born of the same impulse. It is not a rupture from our past but a recovery of our soul. If this is a new day, it is the kind of day John Wesley longed for—not innovation, but revival; not institutional expansion, but the reclaiming of what he called “scriptural, primitive religion.”⁴ That religion, as he so clearly proclaimed in his sermon at the laying of the New Chapel’s foundation, is “no other than love, the love of God and of all mankind; the loving God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, as having first loved us.”⁵

The establishment of the Global Methodist Church is not the product of one controversy or one generation. It is the fruit of a long and painful labor, born by the Spirit through followers of Christ who longed for the church to return to her first love. It is a recovery of the religion that Wesley preached, lived, and died proclaiming—the faith whose source is the very heart of God. This revival, like the one Wesley described, has been both deep and wide. It has cost much. It has required courage. And it has brought forth something beautiful; not just a new denomination, but a new opportunity to spread scriptural holiness throughout the globe.

To trace the story of this movement is to trace the story of people. Not abstractions or institutions, but actual people—called and faithful women and men who laid foundations, shouldered burdens, risked much, and persevered through trial. There is no understanding of the birth of the GMC without honoring the saints who birthed it. Any history worth

4. John Wesley, Sermon 132. <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-132-on-laying-the-foundation-of-the-new-chapel-near-the-city-road-london/>.

5. John Wesley, Sermon 132. <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-132-on-laying-the-foundation-of-the-new-chapel-near-the-city-road-london/>.

telling is first and foremost a history of those who gave themselves away for its sake. This volume has been dedicated to the Reverend Keith Boyette, whose life and legacy are written between the lines of the Global Methodist Church's story. His love for Christ and heartbeat for the church is matched only by his courageous stand again and again for what was right.

But he never stood alone. Those whose names you will find among the history here have much the same desire as Wesley did all those years ago, standing under an umbrella and recounting the foundations of the past as laborers built the future around him. That's the heartbeat behind this book. It's not just a chronology. It's a testimony. The chapters that follow have been written by scholars, pastors, and leaders who lived this history and who are still shaping it today. They offer their part of a story that's far from over but already worthy of thanksgiving. Our hope is that as you read, you'll join in the praise and astonishment at "what God hath wrought" but also be inspired to the future, to "magnify the Lord together, and labor to promote his kingdom upon earth."⁶

6. Wesley, Sermon 132. <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-132-on-laying-the-foundation-of-the-new-chapel-near-the-city-road-london/>.



PART ONE

The Historical Background
and Formation of the Global
Methodist Church



1

Methodical Fire: The Story of Early Methodism

RYAN N. DANKER

The story of Methodism is actually one of international scope, of war-fatigued nations and peoples, of historical memories both good and bad, and of men and women swept up by the Holy Spirit in seemingly random outbursts of revival over the course of decades. Those who encountered this dynamic work often spent the rest of their lives in wonder, just trying to describe what happened. It is not often told that way.

But the turbulent seventeenth century in England led to a deep-seated desire in the English heart to restore what had been lost. The English embraced a vision of progress justly described as restoring the best of the past in the present. In the political realm, this meant restoring the monarchy after the mid-century civil war and interregnum with the safeguards of parliament. In the religious realm, this meant restoring the order of the Church of England, both its liturgy and its structure, and

taking cues from the good and great of church history. Even their architecture reflected this view, taking its direction from ancient Greece and Rome. Restoration was the order of the day.

Growing Up in Epworth

This restoration-focused society is the one in which John and Charles Wesley were born. They were not the only Wesley children born to Samuel and Susanna Wesley; there were, in total, eighteen or nineteen according to Susanna. Nine of these children grew into adulthood, three boys and six girls. The children were raised with sound teaching and devotion, baptized by their father as infants in St. Andrew's Church, Epworth, in northeastern England. At an early age both the boys *and the girls*—unusual for the time—were taught to read, and they memorized the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed. But only the boys went off to school; Samuel Jr. and Charles to Westminster School in London adjacent to the famous Abbey, and John to London's historic Charterhouse in the shadow of Christopher Wren's newly completed St. Paul's Cathedral. All of the boys "went up" to Oxford University.

Life at Oxford

It was at Oxford that John Wesley began to feel a call to ordained ministry; where he excelled in academic study, particularly Greek and logic; and where he read the early church fathers and many other Christian writers, particularly William Law and Jeremy Taylor. In 1725, Bishop John Potter ordained him a deacon in Christ Church Cathedral in the heart of Oxford. He received his priestly ordination in 1728. But 1725 was pivotal. Wesley not only entered holy orders, but was also made a fellow of Lincoln College. In the words of the time, he also "took a turn toward seriousness."

Both John and Charles Wesley were raised with high church principles. Charles barely budged from them for the rest of his life, John a bit more.

The high churchmen stressed continuity with the past in both the church's message *and* its order, to apostolic succession, and to a renewal of sacramental life. Within high church thought there was also a great emphasis on a holy life, one driven by a dynamic and relational grace. It is from these formative principles that the first rise of Methodism takes place.

The First Rise of Methodism: Oxford

Later in life, John Wesley would refer to the three rises of Methodism: Oxford, Georgia, and London. Each of these episodes would impact the Wesleyan movement in unique ways, adding depth to the search for a restored primitive Christianity. Wesley's vision for Methodism was always driven by a search to restore the purity and passion of the earliest followers of Jesus.

The Oxford episode was where the Wesleyan form of Methodism began with the creation of a small group in 1729. The initial vision was to gather a group of students to help one another, both as students and as Christians. This is where Methodism took root as *a method* emerged among them of accountability, good works, and sacramental devotion. Figures such as George Whitefield and John Clayton also emerged as leading figures alongside the Wesley brothers. The members of the group were picked on, which is likely the source of the term "Methodist" and definitely the source of another name, the Holy Club. The Oxford rise provided Methodism with a vision for holiness that took seriously the way one's walk with Christ changes a follower, step-by-step.

Small groups in the eighteenth century were oddly both celebrated and taboo. The period saw the rise of the religious societies, an effort within the church to encourage devotion and good works. At the same time, a war-weary society looked with suspicion on alternative groups because of the trouble they caused in the previous century.

In his heart, Wesley would have loved to spend his entire life in Oxford. He may have tactlessly railed against nominal Christianity from

the university pulpit, but he loved the life of the mind. However, his search for primitive Christianity and desire to spread it led him away from his beloved university. The vision that had taken hold of him was larger than Oxford.

He first headed for Georgia, a colony in the New World, and he dragged his brother Charles along for the voyage. Both crossed the Atlantic unprepared and overly idealistic about America. Charles would not last long—only six months—while John remained for a year and a half.

The Second Rise of Methodism: Georgia

The Wesleys had swallowed whole the concept of the “noble savage,” the idea that people groups untouched by what was called “civilization” would be found in a purer or more natural state. For them, this meant an opportunity to bring the pure gospel to a purer people unencumbered by the vices of society. However, this idea died very quickly, and their time in Georgia would disabuse them of their naivete.

But it was also because of the Georgia episode that John Wesley encountered a group known as the Moravians. He met them first on the ship during the crossing and was struck by the resolve of their faith. As the English passengers were terrified by the storms they encountered en route, the Moravians sat calmly singing their hymns. Wesley wanted what they had.

The Moravians were a pietistic group of believers from Central Europe often on the move to find peace. The pietists carried their faith in their hearts, so when they moved, they brought their faith with them. So Georgia is important to the story for a number of reasons: it was an attempt to re-create “primitive Christianity” in a new place and where the Wesley brothers encountered a truly experiential form of Christianity. The combination would prove vital to Methodism.

When John Wesley returned to London, he came back bruised. His vision of planting primitive Christianity in the unspoiled outpost of

colonial Georgia had come into contact with reality. And although the vision itself was not lost, this is one moment in his life where he faced a heavy dose of realism. As confident as he liked to present himself, he was a new clergyman, still a young man, and still learning what it meant to put great ideals into practice.

The Third Rise of Methodism: London

The third rise of Methodism centered in London. In 1738, the Wesley brothers once again encountered pietists. And in their chastened state they faced questions from them that struck at the heart leading to key encounters in their lives.

Charles Wesley experienced an evangelical “Pentecost” a few days before his brother. Questioning his faith and now sick in bed, one of the maids came to him and spoke words over him that he heard, not as from the maid, but as from Christ. Upon recovering, he experienced the assurance of faith that he so desperately desired.

John Wesley’s encounter is more widely known, even if misunderstood. It is called his Aldersgate experience. On May 24, 1738, he experienced signposts of assurance. These began in the morning when he opened his Bible to the words of Peter: “There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature” (see 2 Peter 1:4). He later attended Evening Prayer at St. Paul’s Cathedral and the choir anthem touched him. The words, again from Scripture, spoke to his heart: “Out of the deep have I cried unto thee, O LORD: Lord, hear my voice” (see Ps. 130:1–2).¹

But his day was not yet over. For as he wrote in his *Journal*:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to

1. John Wesley, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (Oxford University Press, 1964), 66.

the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.²

This was not his conversion to Christianity. In fact, if we read his words carefully, it is an experience of assurance. This was when he came to know, not just as an idea but as an experienced reality, that Christ died for him and saved him. It was his entrance into the Evangelical Revival; he was swept up like so many others.

Caught Up in the Sweep

With their evangelical conversions, the Wesley brothers were changed. They were caught up in an international movement of the Spirit that was sweeping up people from all walks of life, from Calvinist hymn writers to influential aristocrats. But the average participants were not noteworthy or powerful figures, but everyday people, often women, who experienced a life-changing encounter with Christ.

What we see in the Wesley brothers is a deep yearning to share the good news. In fact, in the earliest years of the eighteenth-century revival, they were so passionate in their desire to share their experiences that they offended many clergy and congregations. They were kicked out, or even blocked out, of pulpits for it! This was not simply because of their lack of tact, but in many cases because their behavior was reminiscent of previous mavericks, some of whom upended the very peace of Britain, igniting the civil wars of the previous century.

2. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Journals and Diaries I (1735–1738)*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Abingdon Press, 1988), 18:249–50.

The Wesley brothers, Whitefield, and Boehler established a new religious society on Fetter Lane in London in response to their experiences of the Spirit. Fetter Lane attracted all sorts of people, from high church Anglicans like the Wesley brothers to Central European pietists and even those called the French Prophets, a highly controversial group.

In the case of Fetter Lane, deep divides lay under the surface. The question was not, “Do you have an assurance of God’s love and mercy?” but how to “wait upon the Lord” in the meantime. English Moravianism insisted that one had to wait for this assurance by doing almost nothing. Anglicanism taught the exact opposite. If one was to wait on the Lord, it must be done in openness to God’s grace, meaning that those who want to experience this transforming encounter need to be actively engaged in the means that God has given to us. Division within the revival was not far off.

The Wesley brothers had gleaned from their upbringing and their formation at Oxford a keen appreciation for the historic patterns of Christian discipleship. They took seriously the lessons learned throughout history of what it means to walk with Christ. Everything begins and ends with God’s initiative; people are called to cooperate with his work. It would take some time for the Wesleys to work out how their traditional Christian beliefs and practices corresponded to the experience-driven reality of the revival, but what would emerge was a form of evangelical Catholicism. The Wesleyan tradition would emerge from the deep wells of the Christian faith.

The Emergence of the United Societies

As the revival unfolded, Howell Harris, a Welsh layman, began to field preach to great effect and he taught this practice to Whitefield. The practice became a hallmark of Methodism for more than a century to speak wherever necessary in circumstances good and bad.

When Wesley first learned Whitefield was preaching out-of-doors near Bristol, in southwest England, he was scandalized. Yet having witnessed

Whitefield's success and being reminded of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, "one pretty remarkable precedent of field preaching," he relented to "be more vile."³ It was on the outskirts of Bristol that Wesley preached his first outdoor sermon, an experience that surprised him. He saw the fruit of the work in the way people responded.

In many locations throughout Britain, the Wesleys were not planting new groups but shoring up older ones. Wesley planted some, as did many others throughout the eighteenth century, but he organized these varied groups in a more connected and disciplined way. This was a pattern seen over and over again in early Methodism. Like the revival itself, Wesley did not start it; in fact, he was often trying to catch up with it. There is a method to Methodism, but Methodism itself was often more wild than tame.

In the city of Bristol, Wesley built the first Methodist building, the New Room. In Newcastle, in the country's northeast, he built an orphanage and a meetinghouse. London eventually emerged as the new movement's headquarters, where Wesley established the Foundry, the first place of worship and meeting space for Methodists in the city. But much of the Wesleyan work would be in regions like Yorkshire and Cornwall. It would not be found in places of power or where the Church of England had a strong presence. Where Methodism often found root was on the outskirts of large parishes where ancient boundaries had not been updated to meet the needs of shifting populations.

But Methodism, with its growing number of societies and army of lay preachers, needed greater oversight. And so in 1744 in Bristol, Wesley organized his first conference. And in the first Minutes of Conference we see what the Methodists set out to do:

3. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Journals and Diaries II (1738–1743)*, eds. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Abingdon Press, 1990), 19:46.

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We are deeply thankful to the contributors to this volume.

And we are very appreciative of the Seedbed team for its excellent editorial work and patience along the way.

—Jessica LaGrone and Walter Fenton

FOR A **FAITHFUL** FUTURE

THE GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH

This book is a remarkable collection of essays, reflections, and tributes relating to the founding of the Global Methodist Church. Each contributing writer has been an eyewitness to the years-long formation process that ultimately led to the establishment of this great new denomination.

The writers of these essays are worthy commentators on the history, vision, and mission of the church. They have done a great service to future historians—as well as present-day lovers of the church—by sharing the back story of how the church arrived at this moment in Christian history. More significantly, these essays challenge us by casting a compelling vision and mission for the denomination as it ministers to present and future generations.

For a Faithful Future has been written in honor of attorney-turned-pastor Keith Boyette, who helped form the Wesleyan Covenant Association and assumed leadership of the organization as it became the central force in gathering the disparate leaders across the connection into a dynamic force for Methodist renewal and direct antecedent to today's GMC. He then served as the chief connectional officer of the new church from its inception until his retirement at the convening General Conference in San Jose, Costa Rica, in September of 2024.

This is a must-read for present and future Methodists as it preserves the movemental history while casting a compelling vision for this powerful stream of protestant Christianity. It is fitting that Keith Boyette be recognized for his instrumental role in bringing all this to pass.



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