

Youth Ministers Guide

OPEN HEARTS. OPEN MINDS. OPEN DOORS.

THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH®



*The mission of
The United Methodist
Church is “to make
disciples
of Jesus Christ for
the transformation of
the world.”*

Who We Are as United Methodists Matters

In an ideal situation, all United Methodist Church youth ministries would be led by persons with extensive United Methodist backgrounds,

rooted in Wesleyan thought and theology. In reality this is not the case. Many persons from differing denominational backgrounds and with varying theological beliefs have answered God’s call to be in ministry with youth (and young adults) within The United Methodist Church.

In an ideal situation, every leader of youth would have a vast array of quality, affordable, United Methodist resources on hand for personal development and for programming. In

reality, youth ministers draw from all kinds of resources to help them design and plan their programs and grow spiritually themselves. In some cases these resources teach principles and theological views that differ greatly from those in our Wesleyan tradition.

This guide is meant to lift up the strengths of our United Methodist beliefs and heritage in order to help leaders plan and organize ministries that lead and disciple young persons in Christian faith and practice in the United Methodist tradition.

This guide also provides specific helps for identifying differing theologies and evaluating available resources based on their compatibility with United Methodist tradition, beliefs, and practices.

This guide will be especially helpful to youth leaders without a strong United Methodist background.

This guide is a call back to our Wesleyan roots and to the basic principles on which John Wesley first began the Methodist Movement.



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United Methodist Beliefs, Tradition, and Practices

1. Biblically Based

John Wesley took the middle ground between two popular religious movements of his day. The Calvinists declared the Bible to be the written Word of God through which the Holy Spirit speaks, but they dealt little with the inner presence of the Spirit. Wesley believed this view resulted in a cold, legalistic fundamentalism.

On the other extreme, the Quakers focused on the Spirit and downplayed the Word. Wesley agreed with their belief that God's Spirit is the source of divine truth, but he also believed that all spiritual revelation must be tested and proven through Scripture.

Wesley believed that the Bible was primarily the way through which God reveals Godself to people.

Wesley understood the Bible as a book of faith—not something meant to teach scientific truth. He allowed for the literal meaning of passages of Scripture to be set aside where results of science were in direct contradiction.

Wesley and the members of the Holy Club at Oxford were so dedicated to the reading of Scripture that their peers called them “Bible Moths.” Wesley believed that individuals could only understand the Bible through the goodness of God giving them the knowledge and ability through the Holy Spirit. In his sermon on “An Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” Wesley said,

“I am a spirit come from God and returning to God.... I want to know one thing, the way to heaven.... God Himself has condescended to teach me the way.... He has written it down in a book. O, give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri [a man of one book]. Here then I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone. Only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to Heaven.”



Narrowing down our founder John Wesley's teachings and theology into a simple guide is not easy. These six areas will help focus our discussion in terms of youth ministry and also provide a guide for evaluating and adapting non-UM resources:

- 1) *Biblically Based*
- 2) *Theologically Sound*
- 3) *Socially Conscious*
- 4) *Ecumenically Open*
- 5) *Connectional and Corporate*
- 6) *Grounded in Practice*

Wesley's periods of Bible study were always accompanied by intense prayer. He prayed before reading Scripture to invite the Holy Spirit to move and speak through the Scriptures. He also prayed after reading Scripture in order that what he read might be written on his heart and lead to action.

So regular and lengthy was Wesley's prayer time, that in his prayer room, the floor boards where he knelt have grooves in them.

UM's and the Bible Today

Bible to Life, Life to Bible: Wesley believed in a practical application of the Bible to life—action was essential to faith. Wesley said “Beware you be not swallowed up in books! An ounce of love is worth a pound of knowledge.” Although Wesley valued education and knowledge of Scripture, he believed more important than simply knowing the Bible was allowing Scripture to mold and shape your life in such a way that you lived out its lessons and teachings. The name Methodist, according to Wesley, was “one that lives according to the method laid down in the Bible.”

Book of Faith: The Bible is a book of faith, not a textbook. According to our United Methodist beliefs, “In thinking about our faith, we put primary reliance on the Bible. It's the unique testimony to God's self-disclosure in the life of Israel; in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ; and in the Spirit's work in the early church. It's our sacred canon and, thus, the decisive source of our Christian witness and the authoritative measure of the truth in our beliefs.” (www.umc.org)

2. Theologically Sound

John Wesley did not leave us with lots of rules or doctrines to memorize for a sound theology. Rather through his own practices, he gave us a methodology for doing sound theology:

Revealed in Scripture: Sound theology is anchored in Scripture. As youth leaders, we should strive to continually grow in our understanding of Scripture. We should not only be reading Scripture to plan our next lesson, but also for our own spiritual growth. In considering resource material, we need to pay close attention to how the resource compares with our understanding of Scripture. We should seek to study the Bible in community to be guided—and even corrected—through dialogue with other believers.

Illuminated by tradition: Between the writing of the original biblical texts and today, countless witnesses and have offered insight that helps shape our understanding of God and Scripture. John Wesley's sermons and writings offer many lessons on Christian living, justice, and more that are very relevant to our lives and ministry today. As you serve as a staff person in a United Methodist church, it is important to know the tradition of the UMC and

the teachings of John Wesley in order to carry forward the lessons learned and rich story of our denomination.

Vivified in experience: Our personal and corporate life experiences play an important role in our theology. Our understanding of the Bible and our faith is shaped by life's hurts and joys as well as our shared life with others. We need to process our experiences and recognize God working in and through our daily lives—and help youth to do the same.

Confirmed by reason: As United Methodists, we are invited to use our God-given reason to think for ourselves, raise questions, and debate answers. Applying reason allows us to connect our study of Scripture and tradition to our life experience. It helps us to live our faith in authentic and clear ways. For example, reason helps us recognize injustices or ways in which we may be missing the mark with our worship or use of church resources.

Thinking theologically is Wesleyan.

Practical Theology

Although “theology” may seem like something best left to theologians, in truth it is both important and practical for each of us. How we think about God—our theology—influences how we view and respond to others, as well as how we organize and engage in ministry.

For example, if your theology says that God is not present with non-Christians, evangelism to you will be about bringing God to a place and person where God is not present. If your theology includes the Wesleyan concept of prevenient grace—God present with all people whether they recognize it or not—evangelism will be focused on awakening them to God, who is already present with them.

Wesley's Description of Grace:

Grace Upon Grace

- **Prevenient Grace:** *God's grace is there for us before we accept it or even recognize it.*
- **Justifying Grace:** *We accept God's grace for ourselves. We come into a new life and are changed.*
- **Sanctifying Grace:** *We increasingly experience God's sustaining grace as we grow in our discipleship, or in Methodist terms, as we are “going on to perfection.”*

Me, a Theologian?

Viewing yourself as a theologian is important for two reasons. First, working with young people and choosing resources in order to teach and direct them in their spiritual journey is a major responsibility. Differing theologies lead to differing views of how to minister and to the differing perspectives and teachings in the wide variety of youth ministry resources available. For these reasons, it is important to think theologically as you teach and as you select or adapt a curriculum resource (see page 8). Wesley's methodology for sound theology is an important tool for you and your youth.

Second, young people are thinking theologically, even if they do not realize it. When they return from a mission trip wondering why they were born into wealth while other innocent children are born to poverty without basic necessities, they are asking theological questions. They are wondering what God's role is in this, as well as what their role is. As youth leaders, we are not to give pat answers or brush these important questions under the proverbial rug. Instead, we can use Wesley's methodology to walk alongside young people as they form their identity in Christ, seek purpose in life, and shape their personal theology. In doing so, we move beyond distributing information about God and faith into discipling and shepherding young people in the Christ way.

3. Socially Conscious

John Wesley continually preached for Methodists to be in loving service, doing Works of Mercy. “Loving your neighbor” was to him a call to practical action—an emphasis of the church today.

“Engaging in ministry with [not for] the poor” is a focus that comes straight out of our Wesleyan heritage.

Wesley urged Methodists to deliver help, not just send it. The poor and the organizations that serve the poor need financial support. Giving money is vital in the quest to bring justice to the world. Wesley taught that this act was not enough, however. He believed those who gave money must also give of their time.

Wesley wanted the “haves” to enter into relationship with the “have-nots.” He believed through these relationships, God’s love would prompt us to continue to stay involved in justice and service.

Wesley taught that economic problems are ethical problems. Personally, Wesley did everything he could to care for the poor. He knew people were in no condition to listen to the gospel if they were hungry, cold, or without clothing, or shelter. Wesley met the immediate material and physical needs first.

Wesley also attacked economic injustices and proposed specific remedies. One was his campaign for the education of the poor. During this time in England, only the rich could afford school. Poor children were left to work or run the streets. Wesley believed all children were of equal worth and worthy of education. In the 1740’s Wesley began building a school for children of the coal miner families of the area. Other schools followed where students were taught to read, write, and about the Christian faith. Today, nearly 250,000 students attend the 122 colleges, universities, and theological schools related to The United Methodist Church.

“Combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally” is also Wesleyan.

Wesley set up free medical clinics to serve the poor. He also wrote a book called *Primitive Physick*, which offered hundreds of remedies for various ailments and sicknesses for the benefit of the poor, who could not afford to go to a doctor or who did not have access to one of the free clinics.

“There is no holiness, but social holiness.”

—John Wesley

Four Areas of Focus of The United Methodist Church

- ***Combating the diseases of poverty by improving health globally.***
- ***Engaging in ministry with the poor.***
- ***Creating new places for new people and revitalizing existing congregations.***
- ***Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.***

Our Social Principles

Rooted in our tradition, The United Methodist Church Social Principles are a “prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation.... They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit....”

(The United Methodist Book of Discipline, ¶ 509)

Wesley and Money

“Earn all you can, save all you can, so you can give all you can.”

This was Wesley’s financial motto and the three points in his sermon “The Use of Money.” Wesley lived his preaching. He earned much of his money from his various publications. He never spent money on frivolous things. Instead, he saved and invested his money in many worthwhile social ventures, including building schools and orphanages. Wesley was generous with his money; during his lifetime he gave away to those in need an estimated \$4 million in current U.S. dollars.

Over the last few years many micro-loan programs have sprung up. These programs pair investors and borrowers to loan money to disadvantaged people to help them start a business or another worthwhile venture; the goal is to enable them to build a sustainable and healthy life. It is interesting to note that Wesley instituted micro-loan programs over 200 years ago, donating his own money to launch them. Wesley’s micro-loan programs allowed people to get out of debt to high-interest lenders. The entire principal was put back into the fund to help others and continue the program.

4. Ecumenically Open

A brief look at the history of The United Methodist Church related to being a part of Christ's universal church of believers:

Article IV of the Articles of Religion of The United Methodist Church reads: "The United Methodist Church is a **part of the church universal**, which is one body in Christ."

Article VI states: As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the Church is calling Christians everywhere to **strive toward unity**; and therefore it will seek and work for unity at all levels of church life.

United Methodist churches around the world recite the Apostles Creed, affirming our belief in the "holy catholic church," meaning the universal church of believers. This belief is essential to who we are.

When the **Federal Council of Churches (FCC)** was founded in 1908, The Methodist Church was a founding member. When the FCC merged with another ecumenical organization to form the National Council of Churches in 1950,

Methodists joined the 35 other denominations.

When **The World Council of Churches** was founded in 1948, Methodists joined. The WCC is "a worldwide fellowship of 349 churches seeking unity, a common witness, and Christian service" in 120 countries around the world.

At General Conference in 2008, the body voted to adopt an implementing resolution that will establish **full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)**. "Full communion" means the churches will work for visible unity in Jesus Christ, recognize each other's ministries, work together on a variety of ministry initiatives, and, under certain circumstances, provide for the interchangeability of ordained clergy.

Methodists are a part of the **Churches Uniting in Christ** organization. "Churches Uniting in Christ is a relationship among ten Christian communions that have pledged to live more closely together in expressing their unity in Christ and to combat racism together."

That God's people may be one.

From *The Preamble to the Constitution of The United Methodist Church*

"The Church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world.

"The prayers and intentions of The United Methodist Church and its predecessors, The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, have been and are for obedience to the will of our Lord that his people be one."

Our Denomination

Much like the \$1, \$5, and \$10 bill are all different denominations of bills, they are all, at their foundation, money. A denomination is a piece of a larger puzzle. That is what The United Methodist Church is. We are a piece of the universal church. Although we have a unique identity, we do not live separated or in opposition to the rest of the church.



Wesley and the Church

"There are many doctrines of a less essential nature In these we may think and let think; we may agree to disagree. But, meantime, let us hold fast the essentials...." —John Wesley

Wesley never set out to form an exclusive religion or new denomination when he began his movement. He remained within the Church of England and insisted his movement was within its bounds. Wesley, however, was also deeply moved by the Moravian people and church. On his voyage to America, a large storm shook and damaged the ship. While most aboard panicked, the Moravians calmly sang hymns and prayed. Upon his return to England it was at a Moravian meeting on Aldersgate Street that John Wesley had an encounter with God. He wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed." That experience inspired and encouraged him. His openness to other traditions has carried on as part of our United Methodist heritage, including our early connection with the Evangelical and United Brethren churches.

5. Connectional...

As the gospel spread, John Wesley recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability to nurture the believers; he developed what he called the “connexion.”

The way Wesley organized converts and congregations contributed greatly to Methodism’s success:

Societies met regularly for prayer, to receive God’s Word, and to watch over one another as they sought to work out their salvation.

Classes: Every member of a society was required to be in a sub-group of twelve members called a class, which met regularly, usually weekly, to discuss their experiences, encourage one another in their progress towards a sinless life, and to hold one another accountable.

Bands were voluntary groups that were segregated by gender, age, and spiritual maturity to encourage and promote spiritual development.

Annual Conferences: Wesley also brought together the leaders of the congregations each year for worship, prayer, and discernment of how God would have the church be in ministry.

The United Methodist Church has grown into one of the most carefully organized and largest denominations in the world. It is intentionally decentralized and democratic. Clergy and laity alike from across the globe help determine the ministry and workings of The United Methodist Church through their actions in their local churches, annual conferences, general agencies, and through petitions and resolutions they send to General Conference, and through the voting delegates who go to **General Conference**, which is the only body that can set official policy for the church. Our connection moves us to cooperation on many levels, including working together globally, as well as locally.

The connection is one of the distinguishing features of The United Methodist Church.



UM youth prepare in prayer to distribute potatoes to the hungry.

The Power of Many Together in Christ

What are you doing to help your youth experience the connection? Are your youth active in district and conference sponsored events and opportunities?

Are your youth aware of UMCOR, for example, or The General Boards of Church and Society or Global Ministries? What opportunities do they have to see the church—and themselves—at work in the world?

... and Corporate

Wesley said, “The New Testament knows no solitary religion.” He believed loving God meant loving our neighbors and banding together as a community of faith to help one another put that love into action.



The Body of Christ

Too often in youth ministries, an individualistic “Jesus and me” notion of spirituality prevails. But focusing on Christianity as something that happens to us as individuals does not challenge believers to grow spiritually, to pursue justice, or to love one’s neighbors. While personal salvation is an important element of our faith tradition, Paul reminds us in **1 Corinthians 12:12-27** that accepting Christ as Lord and Savior also binds us together with every other Christian. It is within the nurturing community of faith that we continue to grow in faith and action.

As the Body of Christ—as part of the faith community—we are a visible presence in the world, and we have incredible resources for ministry. No one member need feel despair at the challenge of addressing the world’s problems. Any one of us can be crushed by the size of that task. But together, with God’s help, we are unbreakable.

To be Christian is to be part of the Body of Christ: to be one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to the world.

6. Grounded in Practice

Wesley lived a disciplined life. He taught his followers to do the same. For Wesley, it was of utmost importance to participate in exercises for practicing our love for God and for others.

“Works of Piety”

These Wesleyan practices of the faith include both private acts of devotion and public acts of worship. They are ways to stay in tune with—in love with—God:

Prayer. Whether private or public, prayer was considered by Wesley an essential part of Christian living.

Bible Study. Searching the Scriptures, reading, hearing, meditating on them individually and corporately were what Wesley preached *and practiced*.

Holy Communion. Receiving the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ is one of the two sacraments, along with baptism, ordained by Jesus and observed in Wesleyan tradition.

Fasting and Participating in the Faith Community are two other practices Wesley both observed and proclaimed.

“Works of Mercy”

“Works of Mercy” are about how to treat our neighbor. They are focused on attitudes and behaviors that are to be avoided and on others that are to be cultivated as part of our Christian life.

Do No Harm. In Wesley's General Rules for the church this was first. He gave a list of examples of things to be avoided because they harmed neighbor, community, family, self, or one's relationship with God. Although he wrote the list in 1739, it still guides United Methodists today.

Do Good. This General Rule points to the intentional acts and mindset of loving our neighbor. We seek to meet the needs of others, to heal the wounds of others. Our words unite instead of divide. We participate in movements that empower and unite.



Wesley's Definition: Means of Grace

“...outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby [God] might convey to [humankind], [prevenient], justifying, or sanctifying grace.”

Three Simple Rules 24/7

Help your youth adopt a do-no-harm, do-good, love-God attitude in all they do. This Abingdon Press six-session study of Wesley's guide for living is available from Cokesbury.



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An Authentic Christian Life

For Wesley, “works of piety” and “works of mercy” were equally necessary to an authentic Christian life. Spiritual practices, such as prayer, Bible study, worship, and the Lord's Supper, were to lead us into action—“doing good” for our neighbors. Wesley lived what he preached; he

- Lived as a good steward and gave away most of his money to help people who were poor and to build schools and orphanages
- Visited people in prison and provided food and clothing to them, as well as spiritual guidance
- Stood up against social injustices, including slavery
- Founded schools for the education—and religious education—of persons, including those who were poor
- Published prolifically to help readers and preachers grow spiritually
- Taught and wrote about good health practices and even gave out medicine
- Took the gospel to the people, preaching outside in fields to people who were not welcome in the churches of the day

Materials from other publishers, the Internet, or pop culture may appeal to you or speak to a specific need in your youth ministry. Here are tips for evaluating and adapting them:

Step 1: Explore

Learn about the author and publisher.

- What religious background if any do they come from?
- Is this a religious piece of work or secular?

Survey the resource. Ideally you would be able to purchase or borrow a copy of the resource and view or read the entire thing. When this is impossible, learn what you can. Sites such as www.amazon.com offer overviews of many resources including the ability to view chapter titles and read sample pages.

- What is the message?
- What is the worldview of the piece?

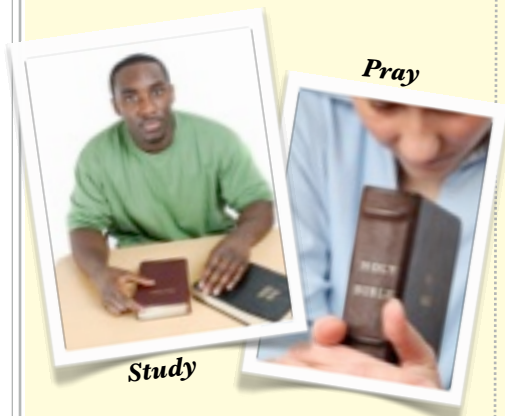
Listen to what others are saying. A simple Internet search can reveal many reviews and opinions of a given resource. Find a blog or two that reviews the resource; read reviews on www.amazon.com or other websites. Check youth ministry websites to see what reviews are offered there.

- What is the overall sense of the reviewers?
- Have other people used this resource in youth ministry?

Step 2: Consume

Actively read the resource. Pay attention to the vocabulary. Think deeply about what the author is saying or trying to convince you to believe or do.

- Where does it align with and where does it differ from your understanding of God's truth and the message of the Bible?



Your Sources for United Methodist Resources



The **United Methodist Publishing House** publishes material for the various settings of youth ministry—Sunday school, youth group, Bible study groups, vacation Bible school, mission and service opportunities and trips, and more. These biblically-based resources are developed in light of our Wesleyan heritage and United Methodist tradition by persons who work with youth.

These resources carry an **Abingdon Youth!** or **Abingdon Press** imprint, indicating the United Methodist publisher.

These resources, as well as others, are available through **Cokesbury**. Visit cokesbury.com, any of the stores, or call 1-800-672-1789 to order or to request a catalog.

Call **Curric-U-Phone** (1-800-251-8591) to talk with a Christian education consultant, who can also give you personal help.

Online, check out **abingdonyouth.com** and **The Hub—Resource Catalog** www.gbod.org/youngpeople/hub. For information, events, and resources related to Young People's Ministries visit www.globalyoungpeople.org.

Step 3: Filter

Compare the resource to the six United Methodist principles above.

- How does this resource compare with Wesley's and UMC view, beliefs, and principles?
- Can those differences open discussion to explore UMC principles more deeply?
- Where do I need to avoid using parts of the resource that are too different or inappropriate.

Step 4: Decide

Do I use this resource in my youth ministry or not? Consider these:

- Do I have the time and expertise to adapt the piece to make it more Wesleyan?
- Can I use differences as a springboard to meaningful discussion and exploration?
- What in this resource challenges my beliefs: what do I do with that?

- What inspires me or angers me and why?
- Does this resource fit into the overall vision of the youth ministry? Does it fit in our ministry calendar?

Step 5: Present

Use your creativity to adapt the resource to fit your youth ministry. Do not feel boxed in to teaching it in a certain way, in order, or as a whole.

- Describe the resource in 150 words or less, touching on the main theme and how it relates to your goals of discipling your teenagers.
- List possible topics it addresses or discussions it could spur.
- Break up the resource into small digestible pieces.
- Find accompanying resources where needed to make the presentation more engaging and relevant for your youth.