Pride, Shame, & Pain:
Methodism’s History with Racism and Efforts to Dismantle It
Heritage Sunday 2021

General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church

1 Logo borrowed from the General Commission on Religion and Race. Kelly Fitzgerald, ed. Racism: The Church’s Unfinished Agenda, a Journal of the National Convocation on Racism (General Commission on Religion and Race, 1987).
"The formidable task of The United Methodist Church is to understand and embrace its Mission as a Spirit-sent body placed in the bowels of racist policies, politics and programs wherever they are found. The Convocation logo attempts to describe this Mission. The Spirit is depicted by the doves and their flaming wings. The colors of the doves represent the colorful peoples of Methodism who have been charged with a continuing mandate to overcome the evils of Racism. The word ‘RACISM’ is rendered in bold, white letters signifying that Racism is still a blatant reality in our society and is overwhelmingly White. The cracked letters symbolize that the specter of Racism has been around a long time and is nothing new! The informal script of the ‘agenda’ is like a memo to the Church. It is a call from the people to the Mission and not a formal, finished program. The doves have penetrated part of the ‘sign’ but only a part. There is much yet to do which is the church's unfinished agenda."
Liturgical Resources
A SERVICE ON THE CHARTER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
The following service was written by United Methodist Women and is reprinted here with their gracious permission.

Call to Worship
Great and rich is the legacy we bring. Many are the gifts we offer to one another. We are a rainbow of colors, a mosaic of cultures. Jointly we are a tower of wisdom and a fellowship of strength. Every gender, we are created in the image of one eternal God!


Hymn
“Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life,” The United Methodist Hymnal #427, verses 1-4

Scripture
Matthew 25:31-46

Prayer of Confession

LITURGIST: O Lord, you created us as equal, yet we have treated one another unjustly.
PEOPLE: Forgive us, O God.
LITURGIST: You created us in your holy image. Yet we have failed to recognize the dignity and sacredness of your image in every person.
PEOPLE: Forgive us, O God.
LITURGIST: Some of the old wounds of injustices are still bleeding, and the callousness of our scars prevent us from being as sensitive to others as we ought to be.
PEOPLE: Heal us, O God.
LITURGIST: Help us listen to those to whom injustices have been done until we hear your cry in theirs and feel your pain in theirs.
PEOPLE: Help us, O God.
LITURGIST: As new, tender skin emerges from under old scars, create in us a new humanity through the brokenness of our experiences.
PEOPLE: Create in us, O God, a new humanity.
LITURGIST: That we may celebrate together the dignity and sacredness of humanity in one another for the sake of your glory.
PEOPLE: For the sake of your glory. Amen.

From Ceremonies III: A Collection of Worship Resources for United Methodist Women (New York: Women’s Division, the General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1996). Out of print
Prayer of Commitment

ALL: We believe …
LEFT: that God is the creator of all people and all are God’s children in one family; RIGHT: that racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ;
LEFT: that racism denies the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus Christ;
RIGHT: that racism robs all human beings of their wholeness and is used as a justification for social, economic and political exploitation;
LEFT: that we must declare before God and before one another that we have sinned against our sisters and brothers of other races in thought, word and deed;
RIGHT: that in our common humanity in creation, all women and men are made in God’s image, and all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God;
LEFT: that our strength lies in our racial and cultural diversity and that we must work toward a world in which each person’s value is respected and nurtured; and
RIGHT: that our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings and new relationships and must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures and practices of both church and state.
ALL: As United Methodist Women members, we commit ourselves as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed and to struggle for the rights and the self-determination of every person and group persons.

Benediction

Go with commitment to do justice and in resistance to racism. Go in the power and freedom of God’s love.
OPENING PRAYER

Written by Alfred T. Day, III, General Secretary, GCAH (retired), April 2021

*Dedicated to the life, ministry, teaching and abiding memory and friendship of Rev. Dr. William B. Bobby McClain
GCAH Commissioner, brother and friend.

Version 1

Love Divine All Loves Excelling
in a time of great need
you raised-up the likes of
John and Charles Wesley,
Harry Hosier, and John Stewart,
Richard Allen and Jarena Lee.
Inspired by your Spirit
they were rooted in life-changing experiences of
amazing grace and emancipating, impartial, inexhaustible redemption.
They sought this experience for ALL
living lives of discipline that demonstrated holiness and true Godliness.

In this our time of great need
when racism rages a centuries-old pandemic
ravaging individuals, families and nations,
stir-up your Spirit among people of the Wesleyan tradition
to do your will as fully and effectively on earth as it is heaven.

We confess the overwhelming and harmful effects of racism—
fear of “the other,” intolerance, inequality and inferiority
rooted deeply in systems that govern us
and influencing life and breath every day.
Police brutality, anger and violence born of deep frustration,
judicial inequity, mass incarceration, redlining,
health care, educational and employment disparities
and voter suppression
hold us in cycles of persistent wrong and abiding damage.

Methodist history indicates pride, shame and the pain of unfair discrimination
in relationship with its Black, Indigenous and People of color members:
the ideals of inclusion and practice of eviction, omission and segregation,
the recognition of wrongs and rationalizing their persisting,
repeated repentance and failure to adopt and adapt lasting change
the lingering hurts and anguish of injustice after injustice.

We repent these painful realities.
Lead us in turning from them.
Forgive our failures, overt or unintentional.
Strengthen us to recognize and face our compilcities and indifference. Move us from thoughts and prayers to action and accountability.

Infuse us with the Spirit’s gifts of
deep, abiding wisdom,
clear, fresh, open understanding,
simple trust,
speaking difficult truth in love
keen discernment and interpretation
and miracles we hardly imagine.

Add to these gifts a portion of perseverance
relentless as your love for all your people.

“Finish then your new creation”
until we see your great salvation perfectly at work in and through us.
Order our steps to
root-out, dismantle and eradicate racism wherever we find it.
Mold and shape us to become the fullness of beloved community
that is the world of your imagination.
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Version 2

Call to Prayer
Sisters and brothers in the Wesleyan tradition:
the sweep of Methodist history indicates the pride, shame and pain of racism
throughout its life and witness
in relationship with its Black, Indigenous and People of Color members:
the egalitarian ideals of inclusion and practice of eviction, omission and segregation,
the recognition of wrongs and rationalizing their persistence,
repeated confession and repentance and failure to adopt and adapt lasting change
the lingering hurts and anguish of injustice after injustice.

Grounded in this tradition and its best hopes for holiness,
and employing every means of grace and practical divinity,
let us pray to the Lord.

Opening Prayer

Love Divine All Loves Excelling
in a time of great need
you raised-up the likes of
John and Charles Wesley,
Harry Hosier and John Stewart,
Richard Allen and Jarena Lee,
and inspired and rooted in life-changing experiences of
amazing grace, emancipating, impartial, inexhaustible redemption.
We follow in their footsteps.

As racism rages a centuries-old pandemic
ravaging individuals, families and nations,
stir-up your Spirit among “the people called Methodist”
to do your will, fully and effectively on earth as it is in heaven.

We confess the overwhelming and harmful effects of racism—
fear of “the other,” intolerance, inequality and inferiority
rooted deeply in systems that govern us
and influencing life and breath every day.
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Mold and shape us to become the fullness of beloved community
that is the world of your imagination.
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
General Commission on Archives and History
2021 Heritage Sunday

"PRIDE, SHAME, AND PAIN:
METHODISM'S HISTORY WITH RACISM AND EFFORTS TO DISMANTLE IT."

WORSHIP RESOURCES
One learning from the monumental and necessary task of dismantling racism is how interwoven through the structures and systems and experiences of the church and the world the social sin of racism truly is. Worship, therefore, that participates in dismantling racism is worship that pays attention to the wider world and the “pride, shame and pain” inherent in a range of needs and hopes. We cannot, for example, look at healthcare and the pandemic response without an eye to how race plays into our structures and systems. We cannot call for truth telling in our leadership or relationships without attention to the lies we continue to tell to and about the marginalized. These resources are provided to help your local congregation reflect and wrestle with what God is doing through the church as we seek to dismantle racism.
On this Heritage Sunday, you are encouraged to reflect on where we have been as a denomination and where we are today even as we reflect on where we are heading by God’s grace. And may we do it all with eyes wide open to the difficult truth even as we seek a new metanoia, a new repentance and commitment to all people.

Resources provided by Discipleship Ministries, Worship Resources Team (5/5/2021)
INVOCATION

God of faith and science, we turn to you in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, because we trust you. We trust you because you listen to our prayers. We trust you because you act in our lives and our history for our welfare. We trust you because we know you as a God of revelation in faith and science.

God of knowledge and wisdom, we ask that you would dwell with all the scientists who are working daily to develop an effective and safe vaccine to combat this virus. Help them to collate current knowledge and be conduits of new knowledge regarding the secrets of the COVID-19 virus. Grant them the wisdom to unlock the keys that will provide helpful COVID-19 therapies and vaccines.

God of curiosity and wonder, grant the scientists the inquisitiveness of George Washington Carver who combined his love of God and his love of science in his quest to unlock hidden agricultural secrets. As the God of the sweet potato, the peanut and the soybean, you enabled Carver to discover their secrets as he united faith and science, wisdom and knowledge, curiosity and wonder.

God of all creation, in this Eastertide we pray for all coronavirus patients, their doctors and their nurses. We ask that you be a fence around all healthcare workers, first responders, and their families. Expand our faith and buoy our hope as we shelter in place. Lord, teach us how to wait, for you are an on-time God!
Amen!

*Bishop Ernest S. Lyght is a retired bishop of The United Methodist Church. Crystal Caviness, the UMC.org contact, can be reached by email or by calling 615-742-5138.

This prayer was published May 13, 2020.
PRAYER for HEALING

O Holy One,
On this historic day, we come before you with hope, relief, and disquiet.
We celebrate our human-made institutions and a new opportunity.
We long to breathe and be the Beloved Community.
You call us to love one another, to reject violence, and to listen.

*Our hope is in you, our rock and refuge,*
*the Source of all that is good and never-ending.*
*Your Truth makes us free.*

And yet, we mourn division with sisters and brothers.
We have made media, coin, and systems our gods and sing *My Country ‘tis of Thee.*
Forgive us.
For so long, we have lived in our normal routines at less than our best and we can no longer recognize our need for your healing.
Puncture our delusions of privilege and status and deliver us from greed and favoritism.
O God, awaken us to the life-taking fear and lies that separate us from one another.
Disturb our self-righteousness and reveal your grace where it is needed and not wanted.
Remind us to be life-giving, to wish the best for one another, to have compassion for one another, and to acknowledge our own brokenness.

*Our hope is in you, our rock and refuge,*
*the Source of all that is good and never-ending.*
*Your Truth makes us free.*

Today we gather together – at a distance – over the screens of our TVs and devices,
Longing to be shoulder to shoulder, touching one another, 350 million strong.
Feeling that we are all turning the page together.
Feeling our hope passed from one to another.
God of love, we thank you for leaders who wear the joys and sorrows of life for all to see:
Triumph, disappointment, loss and grief, joy, courage, and service.
We pray your blessing upon Joseph Biden and his family and on Kamala Harris and her family.
Bless their leadership and inspire them to be leaders who hold their humanity boldly.
May they recognize your Divine Spirit in all people, especially the poor and marginalized and serve them.
Awaken us to the tangible reality of our holy web of interdependence and inspire us to act in our oneness.
Lead us to work for justice and equity, and let justice roll down like waters with righteousness a mighty stream.
Give us the strength to sustain our spirits and will in this sacred work.
Let us rise together, go up together.

   *Our hope is in you, our rock and refuge,*
   *the Source of all that is good and never-ending.*
   *Your Truth makes us free.*

Guide us each day to embrace your grace and to bring your love and justice into the world.
On this day of hope, gird us for the difficult challenges and holy opportunities ahead.
Help us to be true to you, O God, and true to our native land.
Amen.

*Inspiration: Psalm 62.5-12; Lift Every Voice and Sing, UMH 519.*
(Rev. Ted Crass who is the President of the United Methodist Foundation in New England).
LITANY OF TRUTH

ONE: We are called to proclaim the truth.
Let us together this day proclaim the truth about human worth and dignity. And let us believe: It is not true that this world and its people are doomed to die and be lost.

CONG: This is true: there is a future for the children of today.

ONE: It is not true that we must accept inhumanity and discrimination, hunger and poverty, death and destruction.

CONG: This is true: Our Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces and will remove disgrace of people from all the earth.

ONE: It is not true that violence and hatred should have the last word and that war and destruction have come to stay forever.

CONG: This is true: the Lord foils the plans of the nations and thwarts the plans of the peoples, but the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of the heart of the Lord through all generations.

ALL: So, let us dream, let us prophesy, let us see visions of love.
And let us seek peace and justice with humility, with joy and faith, with courage.
MUSIC SUGGESTIONS:

"TRUST AND ENDURE"

A song for our troubled times; especially appropriate for the Advent season.
This song is my response to the Atlanta shooting. It is my best worship that I can offer as an Asian American for my community.

Lyrics

Trust and endure
Trust and endure
All you heavy-laden
Wondering how long?
Wondering how long?
And there is no end in sight

Worry and fear
Anguish and tears
Don’t know how to go on
God-with-us sees you
Sees you and hears your cry

Trust and endure
Trust and endure
In the aching, longing
Wait and take heart
Wait and take heart
When you’ve done all you can do

Daylight will come
Daylight will come
O trust that God will act
Bringing forth justice
Justice and righteousness

Be still, be still
Patiently wait
Be still, be still
Patiently wait
Those who wait will see God's hand
Trust and endure (x4)

credits

Music & Lyrics - Gloria Fanchiang, Singer/Songwriter, Worship Leader
Recorded & Performed by Gloria Fanchiang, gloriafanchiang.com
Mixed & Mastered by Gene Paul, gandjaudio.com
Album art by ericnomiddlenametal.com

For streaming permissions for churches please email glofanmusic@gmail.com. Sheet music available at: bit.ly/2UpFny
license all rights reserved
THE CORINTHIANS SONG

I am troubled, yet not distressed,
Perplexed, but not in despair.
‘Cause I'm a vessel full of power,
With a treasure none can compare.

Persecuted, but not forsaken,
Cast down, but not destroyed.
I'm a vessel full of power
With a treasure, from the Lord.

Bruised and battered, but not broken,
Born in sin, but from sin set free.
I am a vessel, got a whole lot of power
With a treasure delivered me.

Thank you, Jesus, for your power, it has resurrected me.
Over painful circumstances
That my poor soul could not flee.

I'm a vessel, you're a vessel full of power
You've got power from the Lord.
I'm a vessel, full of power with a treasure from the Lord.

The Corinthian Song · Kathy Taylor Live: The Worship Experience (2-CD Set) © 2009 Tyscot Records,
Provided to YouTube by Tyscot LLC Under Exclusive License from Katco Music Group
Source: LyricFind
Composer: V. Michael McKay
https://youtu.be/7fJDsQahJOg
You Have Not Passed This Way Before

United Methodist Heritage Sunday 2021
Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, Retired

Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before. (Joshua 3:4a)

Greetings

Sisters and Brothers, I am Ernest Shaw Lyght, a retired bishop of The United Methodist Church. It is with abundant joy that I greet you in the name of our Risen Christ. This year we share in a dual celebration, Pentecost Sunday and United Methodist Heritage Sunday. I appreciate the preaching invitation extended to me by Dr. Ashley Dreff, the General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History (GCAH). Also, let me take this opportunity to honor her gifted staff. In addition, I want to commend the faithful partnership that the General Commission on Archives and History has with the African American Methodist Heritage Center (AAMHC) as well as their collaborative work with other ethnic constituencies within the denomination.

Purpose

Our worship today is bathed in converging streams of our history. Our story is the chronological record of the significant events that serve as major markers on the journey traveled by people called Methodist from the time of John Wesley to this present day.

First, we are celebrating Pentecost Sunday, which marks the coming of the Holy Spirit on Jesus’ disciples. After receiving the Holy Spirit, the once frightened disciples were transformed into bold witnesses for the Resurrected Christ. Enabled by spiritual courage, the disciples no longer hesitated to face the possibility of death, even death on a cross. When touched by the Holy Spirit, they were able to communicate in a common language. In short, Pentecost is the birthday of the Church.

Second, we United Methodists observe Heritage Sunday on Aldersgate Day (May 24), or the Sunday preceding that date. This observance provides an opportunity for reflection on our heritage. What are the memorable landmarks on our historical journey as a denomination? How does our heritage inform our ministry and
mission in today’s world? Does John Wesley’s small group ministry have a place in our ministry today? What is the role of Christian conferencing, particularly when there is conflict among us, especially a denomination wide conflict? Heritage Sunday helps us to remember and honor our past, while Pentecost Sunday calls us to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The confluence of these two streams, Pentecost and Heritage, provides a sure foundation for this year’s Heritage Sunday Heritage Sunday purpose statement: *Pride, Shame and Pain: Methodist History with Racism and Efforts to Dismantle It.*

**The Biblical Text**

*Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, for you have not passed this way before.* (Joshua 3:4a)

Our text paints a picture. Joshua and the people of Israel are gathered on the banks of River Jordan, poised to cross the River and enter the land of promise. Their situation has undergone a dramatic change. The deadly wilderness is behind them. There has been a change of leadership, because Joshua has replaced Moses.

God had guided the Israelites for forty years: a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Not only did God lead them, God fed them fresh bread daily. They obviously became somewhat comfortable with the luxury of having plenty of food to eat, water to drink and safe passage. Their future at this time, however, was unknown. In some respects, perhaps, they were handicapped by a short memory and a lack of knowledge about their own history. Joshua cut to the chase when he said: *You have not passed this way before.* To be sure, the Israelites were confronted by an uncertain future and this prospect unsettled them. They were starting to navigate in uncharted water. They were in new territory that would bring new experiences. In the biblical text, the Israelites were instructed to follow the ark of the covenant.

**The Charted Past**

Events of the past have been charted in numerous volumes and they are a part of our Methodist Heritage. These past events did not always occur in isolation, but there often was a correlation or a kind of cause and effect. Based on what we learn from our history we can choose to change the course of the history that we are making. Whatever we do, current events are recorded in our history. John Wesley
and his brother Charles, working with other likeminded people laid a sure foundation for the Methodist movement in England which grew and eventually spread to America. The early Methodists were organized into classes and bands for the purpose of spiritual growth, accountability and fellowship. The Methodist movement in America attracted black people from its inception in America, and the movement spread scriptural holiness across the nation, from East to West following the frontier.

A review of Methodist history reveals that it is a complex history that is stained by the sins of slavery, racial segregation and racism. John Wesley made clear his opposition to slavery in his treatise titled, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. He opposed the slave trade which enabled American slavery to thrive. There were many early Methodists who supported slavery, while there were those Methodists who like the Quakers were opposed to any form of slavery.

African Americans were a part of the Methodist movement from the beginning in America. Richard Allen, however, protested the racism. He left the Methodist movement, and later formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1816). Some black leaders chose to leave the John Street Methodist Church in New York City and form the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (1821). In 1870 some forty African American men left the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and formed the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The denominational name was later changed from Colored to Christian. Racism was the culprit that led to these three departures of African Americans from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In 1864 there was a group of Black Methodists who chose to remain in the denomination despite the presence of racism and segregation in the denomination. These African Americans organized the Delaware Conference and the Washington Conference, and other black conferences emerged soon thereafter.

In 1912 Rev. Charles A. Tindley from Philadelphia addressed the General Conference. In a few words he affirmed loyalty to the Methodist Episcopal Church, discarded the notion of leaving the denomination, and affirmed black humanity.

Remember that in 1845 The Methodist Episcopal Church, South was formed as a result of the debate about slave ownership and the slave trade.
The Methodist movement remained divided until 1939 when the Methodist Church was organized, resulting from the union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. But there was a factor that led to a painful and unholy compromise. Remember now, there were African American Methodists who never left the denomination. The perplexing question was what should be done about the black presence. The dilemma was resolved by placing the black annual conferences into the Central Jurisdiction based on race. The white annual conferences were placed in one of five jurisdictions based on geography.

The Methodist Church remained a legally segregated entity until 1968 when the Central Jurisdiction was ended. It should be noted that the 1968 merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church was predicated on abolishing the Central Jurisdiction. The EUBs insisted on this.

These elements of our past are an integral part of our history, and they provide a backdrop for our present efforts to dismantle racism. To be sure, we had never passed this way before.

**The Uncharted Present**

Sailors refer to their nautical charts when navigating their ship, especially in unfamiliar water. Someone has gone before them to chart the waters for the sailors who would follow them. It is not safe for a ship’s captain to navigate in uncharted water because of the danger of ship wreck caused by shallow water or hidden obstructions such as sandbars or reefs.

When we examine our charted past, we see a journey that was fraught with pride, shame and pain.

Pride was experienced as the denomination grew, following the frontier and spreading across the continent. At one point it was said that there were more Methodist churches than there were US Post Offices. Pride was expressed when the Methodist Church was formed in 1939, the merger of the two Methodist Churches, North and South. Great pride was exhibited when the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968 forming The United Methodist Church. We were proud. But, did we exhibit a sense of false pride? Did our new sense of pride become a navigational hazard?

Pain was an irritant for African Americans throughout this history, because of pervasive racism, discrimination in the general society and segregation in the
denomination. Some black delegates wept when the General Conference established the Central Jurisdiction in 1939. For African Americans, the journey has been stained with the tears of faithful sisters and brothers who toiled for the denomination in the name of Jesus. Our Methodist history has not always been a pleasant experience for all participants, especially people of color.

Shame characterized the journey for both black and white Methodists. What is shame? Guilt and impropriety have caused painful emotions. Shame is characterized by humiliation and disgrace. Racism in our denomination yields shame for some people. The Central Jurisdiction was a shameful experience for which the denomination has expressed its shame and sought to amend this tragedy through confession and reconciliation. The denomination participated in the shameful exclusion of women from ordination until 1956.

For decades there has been a divisive disagreement about the denominational pronouncements about the LGBTQ+ community in the United Methodist Church. This has been a matter of both inclusion and exclusion, as well as general mistreatment. It also includes the question of ordination and marriage. Currently the UM Book of Discipline prohibits the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals and it prohibits our clergy from officiating at a gay wedding. There is obviously a division of opinion on these matters of human sexuality.

As we observe Heritage Sunday 2021, we are facing two pandemics. First, we have the COVID-19 Pandemic which has claimed the lives of more than one-half million people in the US and more than three million people world-wide. The imposed quarantine and the resultant economic fallout have had a significant impact on United Methodist congregations in this global denomination. Second, we are faced with the Racism Pandemic. The Black Lives Matter movement has had a focused response to the several police killings of unarmed black men and women. There have been demonstrations in cities across America as well as in Europe and other places. Racism is a worldwide issue. Racism and white privilege are a profound problem in the United States, and it continues to be a disruptive factor among United Methodists. There are still vestiges of colonialism in the United Methodist Church and in our world.

Our Methodist Heritage is stained by racism, however, there have been genuine efforts to dismantle racism. This is an ongoing effort. The establishment of the General Commission on Religion and Race was an attempt to tackle racism in our midst and strive to eliminate it. The establishment of the General Commission on
the Status and Role of Women was a commitment to affirm the rights of women in
our church and society. Significant gains have been made, but the struggle goes on.

Friends, we now are navigating in uncharted waters, troubled by the storms
fomented by our past actions and present inaction in matters of racism and white
privilege. Although our denomination has come through many storms, we are in
uncharted territory today. We also are distracted by the rumors of a possible
denominational split. Denominational loyalty is eroding.

Joshua told the people of Israel: you have not passed this way before. Sisters and
brothers, as a denomination we have not passed this way before.

Charting our Future

The United Methodist Church today is pondering the way forward. Where do we
go from here? To be sure, in the present moment we are faced with uncertainty.
Will the denomination split? What will be our future? Let me suggest that the
secrets of our future our couched in our past and our present.

The future is always uncertain because it is unknown except to God. To some
extent, the future is something of a mystery. Yet, with God, we go forward with
faith. Joshua said to the people, sanctify yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do
wonders among you.

Tomorrow belongs exclusively to God. We experience today which is given to us
by God. Jesus has prepared us for today to the extent that we have accepted Jesus
as the way, the truth and the life. We are guided by the principles of faith, hope and
love. With this certainty we go forward into what for us will be an uncertain future.
The children of Israel knew their past, but they did not understand their present,
therefore, they had extreme difficulty in comprehending their future. They did not
understand God’s grace that had led them out of Egypt. They needed Joshua to
point out to them that they had not passed that way before.

We have not passed this way before, but we have the certainty of our Methodist
heritage. The Israelites had the experience of forty years with God in the
wilderness. They had the experience of deliverance from bondage. God enabled
them to cross the sea that blocked their path. God provided them with free room
and board on their wilderness journey. So too, God has brought us forward from
the days of Wesley, segregation, separation and merger. God has cared for us even
when we strayed from the path of God’s leading. Hopefully, we have learned God’s lessons of deliverance.

We have not passed this way before, but we have the spirit and power of Pentecost. The holy Spirit gave the disciples the power and authority to go into all of the world. The influence of the disciples was so great that on one occasion, they were described as turning the world upside down.

We have not passed this way before, but we have the certainties of the present. The Israelites had Joshua, while we have Jesus who taught us to love our neighbor and to pray. Listen to the prayer for the Church at the Charter Meeting of the Central Jurisdiction Women’s Society of Christian Service, December 9, 1940:

**O God, we pray for Thy Church, which is set today amid the perplexities of a changing order, face to face with a great new task. We remember with love the nurture she gave to our spiritual life in its infancy, the tasks she set for our growing strength, the influence of the devoted hearts she gathers, the steadfast power for good she has exerted. When we compare her with all human institutions, we rejoice, for there is none like her. But when we judge her by the mind of her Master, we bow in contrition. Oh, baptize her afresh in the life-giving spirit of Jesus! Put upon her lips the ancient gospel of her Lord. Fill her with the prophet’s scorn of tyranny, and with a Christlike tenderness for the heavy-laden and downtrodden. Bid her cease from seeking her own life, lest she lose it. Make her valiant to give up her life to humanity, that like her crucified Lord she may mount by the path of the cross to a higher glory.** (*To a Higher Glory*. The Board of Global Ministries)

We have not passed this way before, but we claim the certainty of the future when following God’s leadership. We are striving for a higher glory!

As we journey into the future on a seemingly unknown path, just remember the words of John Wesley (1703-1791) who said on his death bed: *The best of all God is with us.* This is our heritage.

Charles Albert Tindley declared in his hymn that “We are tossed and driven on the restless sea of time” but “we’ll understand it better by and by.”

*Trials dark on every hand, and we cannot understand,*  
*All the ways that God would lead us to that Blessed Promised Land.*  
*But He guides us with His eye, and we’ll follow till we die,*
For we’ll understand it better by and by.
(U.M. Hymnal, #525)

This is our heritage.

The words of Lift Every Voice and Sing by James Weldon Johnson are apropos:

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way,
Thou who hast by thy might led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places our God where we met thee,
Lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget thee;
Shadowed beneath thy hand, may we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our native land.
(U.M. Hymnal, #519)

We have never passed this way before, but God knows the way. We only have to follow God’s leading. As pilgrim disciples of Jesus Christ, we want to embrace the future with faith, hope and love, while dismissing all fear, because -

We are marching in the light of God.
We are living in the love of God.
We are moving in the power of God.

We thank God for the Power of the Holy Spirit and we thank God for the richness of our Heritage. Because through it all we have learned to trust in God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit, and lead us to a Higher Glory where we can claim the potential of God’s mighty acts; enable us to extract the pain and the shame from our heritage, as we transcend the racism of this present age, so that we can proclaim unity in faith, unity in hope and unity in Love with a new sense of pride.

Friends, even though we have not passed this way before, we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Amen! Amen!