Welcoming the Stranger

United Methodism’s Legacy of Embracing Diversity

General Commission on Archives and History
The United Methodist Church
Heritage Sunday 2015
Who is the Stranger?

The stranger can be anyone. A stranger can range from a family member to groups of people whose ways seem different than your own. Nationalities, customs, norms, mores, living patterns, addiction, ethnicity, physical handicaps, politics, identity, economics, religious expression, history, addiction, as well as other factors create distrust, hatred, racism, sexism, prejudice, violence, etc.
As people of faith, United Methodists, like their founder, John Wesley, look to the Bible for guidance when ministering to the stranger.

Deuteronomy 10:19: You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 16:11: Rejoice before the Lord your God—you and your sons and your daughters, … , as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

Matthew 25:35: …for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me…

Romans 12:13: Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Ephesians 2:19: So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God…
John Wesley Met the Stranger Where They Lived by Preaching a Transformative Faith and Practicing a Social Gospel.

- Wesley Preaching on Father’s Tomb
- Wesley with Slave Girl in South Carolina
- Wesley’s Dispensary for the Poor
- Wesley Loaning Money to the Needy
- Wesley preaching in Newgate Prison
Sunday 14 was a comfortable day. In the morning, I met the Strangers Society, Instituted wholly for the relief, not of our society, but for the poor, sick, friendless strangers. I do not know that I ever heard or read of such an institution till within a few years ago. So this is also one of the fruits of Methodism.

Early Methodists not only ministered to its own members but to those in need outside their societies.
Dear Adam,  

You have great reason to bless God for giving you strength according to your day. He has indeed supported you in a wonderful manner under these complicated afflictions. You may well say, I will put my trust in thee as long as I live. I will desire Dr. Whitehead to consider your case, and give you his thoughts upon it. I am not afraid of your doing too little, but too much. I am in imminent danger of this. Do a little at a time, that your may do the more. My love to sisters Cookman and Boyle; but it is a doubt with me, whether I shall cross the seas any more. What Preacher was it who first omitted meeting the select society? I wonder it did not destroy the work! You have done right in setting up the Strangers’ (Friend) Society. It is an excellent institution...
United Methodist’s Rich Heritage with Strangers

From the beginning Methodists, United Brethren and Evangelicals were strangers in faith within their respective geographic areas.

There were indigenous people around the world who embraced our missionaries, preachers, deaconess with their Gospel message and social institutions.

Yet there were other indigenous groups who did not embrace Wesleyan theology nor accept Western Christianity. Those who did would reinterpret it over time to fit their specific needs.
New Churches for a New Country

- United Methodist’s predecessors were embraced by a new country seeking out its own identity.

- These denominations met the spiritual and more so later on the social needs of a growing American population and later around the world.

- Structures of these denominational identities were in some way modeled after the United States federal government.

United Methodist Membership Statistics

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Welcoming the Stranger Took Different Forms!

Preaching and living the Gospel remains at the heart of essential faith as understood by Wesley, Otterbein and Albright and their followers. It does not matter if God finds the person at a mourner’s bench, church rail, evangelistic meeting or a place of solitude.
United Methodism Has Never Stopped Preaching the Good News
Welcoming the Stranger
Through a Social Gospel

There are many ways missionaries, clergy, deaconess and laity brought the Good News to local communities around the world.
Methodists Welcomed Strangers Through Education in the Trades, Domestic Spheres,
Higher Education was embraced by Methodists and United Brethren early on. Cokesbury College, Maryland, opened 1787, Otterbein University, Ohio, in 1847 and Africa University, Harare, Zimbabwe established in 1988.
Orphanages Start It Off

Anapolia Orphanage, Brazil
Followed by Homes,

Retirement Home for Methodist Women in Hyderabad, India
Doctors, nurses, dentists, surgeons, pharmacists of both sexes were often the key for success on the mission field when followed by educational facilities, homes, orphanages, etc.
New York Methodist Hospital formerly the Methodist Episcopal Hospital, Brooklyn, New York, which opened its doors in 1887.

New England Deaconess Hospital founded in 1896. Today it is known as the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.
Immigration

- United Methodism is an immigrant church in that its beginnings began in Europe.
- The same is true for our German branches.
- Starting in the early 19th century more Germans immigrated and moved westward.
- 1845 - The great Irish migration.
- 1849 – Asians arrive in California seeking gold.
- 1860 – Eastern Europeans arrive with Polish immigrants reaching 2,000,000 by 1914.
- 1880 – Italians come to America.
- 1903 – Koreans settle in Hawaii.
- 1948 – MCOR helps to settle hundreds of thousands European WW2 refugees. Asian war refugees, however, are restricted in number.
- 1970 – Increase immigration from Mexico and Central America.
Deaconesses Lead the Way

Alma Mathews House
New York City
1954
Angel Island Immigration Station
“These Ellis Island of the West.”

Deaconess Katharine Maurer Greeting Korean immigrants at the Angel Island Immigration Station San Francisco Bay. 1914

Gum Moon Residence San Francisco, CA. 1972

Kana Yajima, Bible Woman, circa 1920s
American Methodism, whether it was intentional or not, believed the fastest way for new immigrants to live their faith in a new land had to become American-like as fast as possible. Church leaders realized early on they had the means by which to make the immigrant’s transition from his or hers original culture to an American one was through a graduated process via language classes, work training, American sports such as baseball and basketball, domestic classes, education, etc.
Foreign Language Conferences

La Trinidad Church, San Antonio, Texas

One of the ways United Methodism employed to ease immigrants into both church and society was the establishment of foreign language mission conferences which eventually evolved into fully functioning annual conferences. The practice ended with the merger of the Rio Grande and Southwest Texas Annual Conferences to form the Rio Texas Annual Conference on January 1, 2015.
Institutional churches were successful attempts in major cities to help immigrants fit into their new surroundings while providing spiritual guidance. Born out of the need for social reforms in urban areas these churches reached their high point during the late Progressive Era. Many of these mega churches took on the name *Church of All Nations* to reflect the diverse ethnicity of their congregations. Services, publications and programs were in the immigrant’s original language while learning English at the church. There were Methodist *Church of All Nations* located around the country. Smaller mission churches had the same intent as the Institutional churches but with reduced or singular ethnic groups in their respective cities.
The Methodist side of our church family on how it dealt with its African American members is a tragic story. Throughout our history African American Methodists were treated like strangers despite being with the Methodist Episcopal Church’s beginning. Racial prejudice and eventual ecclesiastical politics led to a literal church within a church for Black Methodists who did not leave to form new denominations as other members did. Segregation came in the form of separate annual conferences, schools and mission projects after the Civil War. But the worst was the creation of a separate Central Jurisdiction in 1939 which did not end officially until 1972.
Native Americans

Reverend Albert Horse Translating a Sermon into Kiowa for a Meeting in Oklahoma, 1945

A Gift of a Station Wagon from the Kearney District Methodist Youth Fellowship in Nebraska to the Huerfano Mission in New Mexico, circa early 1950s
Concluding Remarks

The idea of welcoming the stranger is a very United Methodist and biblically mandated mission for our life of faith. John Wesley and the early Methodists were open to new people joining their ranks regardless of nationality. Salvation through gospel preaching coupled social gospel outreach allowed John Wesley to extend the right hand of fellowship to those who were different from your typical British citizen. Otherwise he would not have baptized two African slaves and had a deep desire to work with natives in the New World.

Yet welcoming the stranger is never a straightforward path when human and social exclusiveness are dominant traits in any given society. To United Methodism’s credit, the predecessor denominations made great inroads to groups outside of each group’s heritage. At first glance who would think that the decidedly German nature of the Evangelical Association and later Evangelical Church would start Italian missions at the same time their Methodist counterparts were doing the same. Immigration is still a hot button topic amongst United Methodists. Let’s hope we can agree as a church to welcome the stranger as our forbearers did with the same grit and drive that come from our collective heritage while finding different and creative ways through preaching, teaching and social gospels while being guided by our Wesleyan DNA.

As with any historical presentation that tries to include a large audience, especially one as diversified as The United Methodist Church, there will be omissions, intentional and unintentional, due to space and time constraints. There will be errors pointed out by those who have deeper knowledge than the author on certain subjects. You would be surprised that a good general work on Methodism and immigration is lacking in our holdings. Perhaps someone will pick up the challenge and rectify this situation.

Please feel free to alter the power point for personal need. Also, for those individuals and churches outside the United States who find a severe lack of information for each area, I encourage you to create your own presentation based on your history. The General Commission on Archives and History would welcome receiving copies of your work.

All the information used here are from standard Methodist history works which are cited in a very unscholarly way. I encourage you to use these works for further research. Also the links in the notes are a new feature this year and should be followed for a better Heritage Sunday experience.

Mark Shenise, Associate Archivist