

# Bethia United Methodist Church

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What is the basic mission of Bethia?

With our faith centered in Jesus Christ, we experience God's love, grow in God's love, and share God's love with the world.

### 2. What do we believe?

#### United Methodist Beliefs

United Methodists share a common heritage with all Christians. According to our foundational statement of beliefs in The Book of Discipline, we share the following basic affirmations in common with all Christian communities:

#### **Trinity**

- We describe God in three persons. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are commonly used to refer to the threefold nature of God. Sometimes we use other terms, such as Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer.
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 13.

#### **Father**

- We believe in one God, who created the world and all that is in it.
- We believe that God is sovereign; that is, God is the ruler of the universe.
- We believe that God is loving. We can experience God's love and grace.
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 13.

#### **Jesus**

- We believe that Jesus was human. He lived as a man and died when he was crucified.
- We believe that Jesus is divine. He is the Son of God.
- We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that the risen Christ lives today. (Christ and messiah mean the same thing—God's anointed.)
- We believe that Jesus is our Savior. In Christ we receive abundant life and forgiveness of sins.
- We believe that Jesus is our Lord and that we are called to pattern our lives after his.
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 13-14.

#### **The Holy Spirit**

- We believe that the Holy Spirit is God with us.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit comforts us when we are in need and convicts us when we stray from God.
- We believe that the Holy Spirit awakens us to God's will and empowers us to live obediently.
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 14.

## Human Beings

- We believe that God created human beings in God's image.
- We believe that humans can choose to accept or reject a relationship with God.
- We believe that all humans need to be in relationship with God in order to be fully human.
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 14.

## The Church

- We believe that the church is the body of Christ, an extension of Christ's life and ministry in the world today.
- We believe that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
- We believe that the church is "the communion of saints," a community made up of all past, present, and future disciples of Christ.
- We believe that the church is called to worship God and to support those who participate in its life as they grow in faith.
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 14. 1111",0111

## The Bible

- We believe that the Bible is God's Word.
- We believe that the Bible is the primary authority for our faith and practice.
- We believe that Christians need to know and study the Old Testament and the New Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Scriptures).
  - Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology (Discipleship Resources, 2002), p. 15.

## The Reign of God

- We believe that the kingdom or reign of God is both a present reality and future hope.
- We believe that wherever God's will is done, the kingdom or reign of God is present. It was present in Jesus' ministry, and it is also present in our world whenever persons and communities experience reconciliation, restoration, and healing.
- We believe that although the fulfillment of God's kingdom--the complete restoration of creation--is still to come.
- We believe that the church is called to be both witness to the vision of what God's kingdom will be like and a participant in helping to bring it to completion.
- We believe that the reign of God is both personal and social. Personally, we display the kingdom of God as our hearts and minds are transformed and we become more Christ-like. Socially, God's vision for the kingdom includes the restoration and transformation of all of creation.

\*\*Adapted from Who Are We? Leader's Guide, p. 28.

## Sacraments

With many other Protestants, we recognize the two sacraments in which Christ himself participated: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

### Baptism

- Through baptism we are joined with the church and with Christians everywhere.
- Baptism is a symbol of new life and a sign of God's love and forgiveness of our sins.
- Persons of any age can be baptized.
- We baptize by sprinkling, immersion or pouring.

- A person receives the sacrament of baptism only once in his or her life.

### **The Lord's Supper (Communion, Eucharist)**

- The Lord's Supper is a holy meal of bread and wine that symbolizes the body and blood of Christ.
- The Lord's Supper recalls the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and celebrates the unity of all the members of God's family.
- By sharing this meal, we give thanks for Christ's sacrifice and are nourished and empowered to go into the world in mission and ministry.
- We practice "open Communion," welcoming all who love Christ, repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another.

\*\*Taken from the United Methodist Church official website (<http://www.umc.org>).

## **3. What makes us United Methodist?**

### **United Methodist Heritage**

#### **Distinctive Emphases**

Wesley and the early Methodists were particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God's grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. They placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action. This emphasis on what Wesley referred to as "practical divinity" has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today.

The distinctive shape of our theological heritage can be seen not only in this emphasis on Christian living, but also in Wesley's distinctive understanding of God's saving grace. Although Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in salvation by grace, he combined them in a powerful way to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life.

#### **Grace**

Grace is central to our understanding of Christian faith and life. Grace can be defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. We read in the Letter to the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (**Ephesians 2:8-9**). Our United Methodist heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God's grace. This incredible grace flows from God's great love for us. Did you have to memorize John 3:16 in Sunday school when you were a child? There was a good reason. This one verse summarizes the gospel. The ability to call to mind God's love and God's gift of Jesus Christ is a rich resource for theology and faith.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, described God's grace as threefold:

- prevenient grace
- justifying grace
- sanctifying grace

#### **Prevenient Grace**

Wesley understood grace as God's active presence in our lives. This presence is not dependent on human actions or human response. It is a gift a gift that is always available, but that can be refused. God's grace stirs up within us a desire to know God and empowers us to respond to God's invitation to be in relationship with God. God's grace enables us to

discern differences between good and evil and makes it possible for us to choose good...God takes the initiative in relating to humanity. We do not have to beg and plead for God's love and grace. God actively seeks us!

\*\*Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology, p. 31.

### **Justifying Grace**

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: "In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). And in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul wrote: "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**).

These verses demonstrate the justifying grace of God. They point to reconciliation, pardon, and restoration. Through the work of God in Christ our sins are forgiven, and our relationship with God is restored. According to John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, the image of God, which has been distorted by sin, is renewed within us through Christ's death.

Again, this dimension of God's grace is a gift. God's grace alone brings us into relationship with God. There are no hoops through which we have to jump in order to please God and to be loved by God. God has acted in Jesus Christ. We need only to respond in faith.

\*\*Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology, p. 31-32.

### **Conversion**

This process of salvation involves a change in us that we call conversion. Conversion is a turning around, leaving one orientation for another. It may be sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. But in any case, it's a new beginning. Following Jesus' words to Nicodemus, "You must be born anew" (**John 3:7 RSV**), we speak of this conversion as rebirth, new life in Christ, or regeneration.

Following Paul and Luther, John Wesley called this process justification. Justification is what happens when Christians abandon all those vain attempts to justify themselves before God, to be seen as "just" in God's eyes through religious and moral practices. It's a time when God's "justifying grace" is experienced and accepted, a time of pardon and forgiveness, of new peace and joy and love. Indeed, we're justified by God's grace through faith.

Justification is also a time of repentance—turning away from behaviors rooted in sin and toward actions that express God's love. In this conversion we can expect to receive assurance of our present salvation through the Holy Spirit "bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Romans 8:16).

\*\*Excerpt from The United Methodist Member's Handbook, p. 78-79.

### **Sanctifying Grace**

Salvation is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the ongoing experience of God's gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be. John Wesley described this dimension of God's grace as sanctification, or holiness.

\*\*Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology, p. 32-33)

Through God's sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to

love neighbor. Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God's will and testify to our union with God.

\*\*Excerpt from What Every Teacher Needs to Know About Theology, p. 32-33)

We're to press on, with God's help, in the path of sanctification toward perfection. By perfection, Wesley did not mean that we would not make mistakes or have weaknesses. Rather, he understood it to be a continual process of being made perfect in our love of God and each other and of removing our desire to sin.

\*\*Adapted from Who Are We: Doctrine, Ministry, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church, Revised: Leader's Guide by Kenneth L. Carder, Cokesbury, p. 46.)

### **Faith and Good Works**

United Methodists insist that faith and good works belong together. What we believe must be confirmed by what we do. Personal salvation must be expressed in ministry and mission in the world. We believe that Christian doctrine and Christian ethics are inseparable, that faith should inspire service. The integration of personal piety and social holiness has been a hallmark of our tradition. We affirm the biblical precept that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (**James 2:17**).

\*\*Excerpt from The United Methodist Primer, 2005 Revised Edition by Chester E. Custer (Discipleship Resources, 2005); p. 59.

### **Mission and Service**

Because of what God has done for us, we offer our lives back to God through a life of service. As disciples, we become active participants in God's activity in the world through mission and service. Love of God is always linked to love of thy neighbor and to a passionate commitment to seeking justice and renewal in the world.

### **Nurture and Mission of the Church**

For Wesley, there was no religion but social religion; no holiness but social holiness. In other words, faith always includes a social dimension. One cannot be a solitary Christian. As we grow in faith through our participation in the church community, we are also nourished and equipped for mission and service to the world.

"From Wesley's time to the present, Methodism has sought to be both a nurturing community and a servant community. Members of Methodist Societies and class meetings met for personal nurture through giving to the poor, visiting the imprisoned, and working for justice and peace in the community. They sought not only to receive the fullness of God's grace for themselves; but...they saw themselves as existing 'to reform the nation...and to spread scriptural holiness over the land"

\*\*Excerpt from Who Are We: Doctrine, Ministry, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church, Revised: Leader's Guide by Kenneth L. Carder, (Cokesbury), p. 55.

## **4. What is different about the 4 weekly services?**

The main difference is the music style. Our Saturday night and 8:30am worship services are more contemporary while the 9:45 and 11:00 services are more traditional.

## 5. **What are the different ministries of the church?**

You may view the pages for some of the different ministries or read a full listing of groups/activities under the Groups link on the website.

## 6. **What is the usual dress for the weekly services?**

Come just the way you are. Some of our members wear a tie and jacket but others are more comfortable in jeans and t-shirts. We want you to be comfortable in your attire so that you can focus on worshipping an awesome God!

## 7. **How can I find out more about Bethia UMC?**

Come and visit us! All of our members are very hospitable and would love to talk with you on Sunday mornings! If you would like to find out more before visiting, you can always call the church office, 739-3459. You can follow us [Facebook](#) (Facebook.com/BethiaUMC) or on [Twitter](#) (@Bethiaumc)

## 8. **Is there someone I can talk to before I attend my first service?**

Absolutely! One of our two pastors would love to talk with you. You can reach them by calling the church office, (804) 739-3459 or by email. Email Rev. James (Jay) H. Carey, Jr. at [j.carey@bethiaumc.org](mailto:j.carey@bethiaumc.org) or Rev. R. Jason Elmore at [pfrje@hotmail.com](mailto:pfrje@hotmail.com).

## 9. **What happens during the service?**

WE WORSHIP GOD through song, prayer, proclamation, Holy Baptism, Holy Communion and many other ways! The greatest way we worship God at Bethia is by loving each other!