



January 2024: Identity
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Hi, I am Hector Burgos Núñez, resident bishop for United Methodists of Upper New York.

Welcome to together in prayer a call to reconnect with the essence of who we are as disciples of Christ and United Methodists.

An invitation to unite our hearts and seek a stronger connection with God and one another. To go deeper in our relationship with Jesus Christ and to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministries.

Growing up, my mom always encouraged my siblings and me to grow in our identity as children of God continuously. She would tell us, “When you know who you are, you know what you can do, where you can go, and what you can accomplish”.

Clarifying our identity as Christians and United Methodists is essential because it provides a solid foundation for guiding our beliefs, values, and actions as followers of Christ in the Wesleyan tradition.

Having a clear identity gives us a sense of value, belonging, and purpose. It guides us in our being and our doing, and it fosters a deeper connection to other believers.

Being clear about who we are and who we are becoming in Christ enables us to navigate life with a consistent compass grounded in our faith.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, preached many sermons on the importance of fully claiming our identity as beloved children of God and followers of Jesus Christ.

Our expression of faith as Christians and United Methodists includes several core attributes. Today, I want to highlight three things I believe are foundational to our identity as United Methodists.

First, is the centrality of God's grace in our expression of faith. Grace is God's unmerited loving action in our human experience through Jesus Christ and the ever-present Holy Spirit – grace is at the center of how we understand God and respond to God's love by loving our neighbors.

Our understanding of grace leads us, as Wesley preached, to the bold and optimistic pursuit of complete salvation and perfection for everyone. In other words, foundational to our identity is the understanding that God's grace is for all and that through Jesus Christ, we can all experience salvation and wholeness.

Second, as United Methodists, we emphasize personal and social holiness.

Our faith is personal in that we each are invited to rest in God's love in Jesus Christ and to grow in our inward and outward expressions of that love, and it is social because it calls us to live our faith out in the world, in community, compassionately and courageously seeking mercy, justice, equity, and peace for all of God's children, and responding to the concrete needs, hopes, and aspiration in the communities we live.

Lastly, as United Methodists, we are connectional. We share a common structure, polity, doctrine, and social principles.

At its heart, this sense of being connected is a Wesleyan understanding of the Christian community as the "body of Christ."

We are part of a diverse global network of disciples, congregations, and missional agencies working together contextually to transform the world as we nurture disciples of Jesus Christ who share faith, love, mercy, and justice in their everyday lives.

During your prayer times this month, I invite you to allow the Holy Spirit to help you imagine what your life, your local church, and your community will look like if we fully embrace our identity as United Methodist followers of Christ.

Now, let's join our hearts in prayer.

Loving God, grant us the clarity to understand our identity as your beloved children, followers of Christ, and United Methodists. May we find strength in our common faith, purpose in our actions and shared ministries, and unity in our love for one another. Guide us in living the teachings and example of Jesus Christ so that our identity reflects the power of your love. Amen.

Peace of God be with you.