

Wesleyan Vile-tality

Leaders Guide

During the 2024 Upper New York Annual Conference session, Dr. Ashley Boggan, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History of The United Methodist Church, shared a presentation on the importance of reconnecting with the lessons from the past, as we journey toward God's future with hope and joy. The UNY Archives and History team has put together this resource for local congregations that wish to explore this important topic in small group settings as part of their discipleship. This learning experience is designed in three sessions that use portions of Dr. Boggan's presentation video, alongside a scripture passage, discussion questions, and a prayer to guide the group.

Introduction:

The very first section of the *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* is a list of all the bishops who have served since Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury. Immediately after this list follows "A Brief History of The United Methodist Church." Before we even get to the Constitution, we find 24 pages of history that set the tone for all that follows.

Why is it so important to know what was happening in England almost 300 years ago? Shouldn't we just stick the history in the back, after all the important stuff? Would it not be easier to simply ignore our history in favor of moving forward and not letting it weigh us down? While our history as United Methodists may seem like a cross to bear, it tells us the story of who we are and where we come from. It tells us why we're organized the way we are, what drove John Wesley to seek a different way of living his faith, and why so many people were drawn to this way of living.

As we seek to more deeply understand our roots as United Methodists, both the good and the bad, we come to more deeply understand who we are in the present day. In this way, we are freed and equipped to venture into the future, knowing that we stand on a firm foundation. And who knows? We might even rediscover something from 300 years ago that could breathe new life into this rich and diverse Connexion.

Videos:



Full video
vimeo.com/952641415



Session 1
vimeo.com/988427967



Session 2
vimeo.com/988437799



Session 3
vimeo.com/988450407



Session 1:

Foundations of Our Faith (00:25-15:51)

Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Jeshanah and named it Ebenezer, for he said, “thus far the LORD has helped us.” (1 Samuel 7:12)

In this first section, Dr. Boggan reflects on the importance of knowing our past as a means of staying true to our roots and informing our future. She urges us not to forget where we come from or what it means to be Methodist, but also cautions us against longing for the past as we perceive it. In establishing where we come from as Methodists, Dr. Boggan recounts the history of the First Methodists at Oxford and how the name Methodist first came about. As you watch, consider some of the defining characteristics of early Methodism, as well as the ways in which Methodism of today looks different from Methodism of the 18th century.

Discuss:

Dr. Boggan talks about nostalgia versus history. Have you ever said, “Back in my day...” or lamented “the way things used to be?” What do you find yourself getting nostalgic about? Is your memory historically accurate?

How are Methodists perceived in your community today? Do Methodists stand out, or are they seen as just another church or community organization?

Closing Prayer:

God of our ancestors, you have helped us thus far and still, you continue to walk with us. Help us to move forward into the future you envision and to remember where we have been. Make us one with those who have come before us, granting us their wisdom, courage, and strength to follow your call in our lives. May we be grateful for these saints now in your care, who laid the foundation on which this movement was built and on which we stand today. In Christ’s holy name we pray. Amen.



Session 2: Practicing Our Faith (15:51-28:40)

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.” He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?” (Matthew 15:2-3)

In this second section, Dr. Boggan recounts the story from John Wesley’s time in Bristol that brought about his decision to “be more vile.” She dives deeper into what it means to be vile, how 18th-century Methodists sought to be vile, and how The United Methodist Church might live out this sense of vile-tality today. She stresses that Methodists throughout history have not sought to be vile for the sake of being vile, but so that God’s love might be known by as many people as possible. As you watch, consider what being vile would look like today and how The United Methodist Church might submit to be more vile in the 21st century.

Discuss:

When have you been accused of being vile?

What are some “fields” the church needs to be in today?

Have you ever been mocked or ridiculed for your faith? Has it ever gotten you in trouble?

Closing Prayer:

Restless and unnerving Spirit, you call us into strange and unfamiliar places. You call us far beyond the places that we know are safe and comfortable. You call us beyond our very walls, beyond our usual pews, beyond what we have known. As we find ourselves in new fields, seeking to share your love with all people, remind us that what is pleasing to you is not always what’s pleasing to the world. Grant us your peace as journey out into our world-wide parish and continue striving to walk as Christ walked in this world. In your name we pray. Amen.



Session 3: Living Into Our Future (28:40-43:10)

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the bushel basket; rather, they put it on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

In this final section, Dr. Boggan takes us through Wesley’s instructions on how to live into Methodist vileness. She explains how Wesley distinguished the Methodists from other Christian sects—as those who are “happy in God” — and elaborates on some of Wesley’s writings on how Methodists should exist in the world. Much of this advice remains relevant today as The United Methodist Church undergoes significant changes and seeks to define how we will live out our particular identity as Methodists. As you watch, consider the ways in which The United Methodist Church might reclaim Wesley’s advice and apply it to a 21st-century context.

Discuss:

In what ways can you commit to being more vile?

In what ways can your church commit to being more vile?

What would you like to see a New United Methodist Church reclaim going forward? Are there any practices or policies that should be shed?

Closing Prayer:

Timeless God, Eternal One. You move from one age into the next, constantly beckoning us closer to you. We long to know you, to walk alongside you. But we sometimes lose our way. Be with us always, we pray. In our looking back, in our learning and relearning, and in our looking forward. Be with us, we pray, as we press onward towards perfection until we might live as you would have us live—in peace and unity with all our siblings. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.