



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

Dr. Timothy L. Freeman

Mrs. Devieta C. Moore, Missionary Supervisor

Rt. Rev. W. Darin Moore, Presiding Prelate





The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ Never omit meeting your Class or Band... These are the very sinews of our Society; and whatever weakens, or tends to weaken, our regard for these, or our exactness in attending them, strikes at the very root of our community.

John Wesley



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ When we review the historical analysis of the revival in America we have to remember that it was George Whitfield, then, and not John Wesley, who was largely the face of the 18th century Evangelical Revival. Whitfield was the most dynamic preacher of his era. The truth is that Whitfield was a better preacher than John Wesley. The key to the Methodist survival and its flourishing was Wesley's emphasis on small groups.



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ Historical Facts:

- ▶ In 1776, Methodists accounted for 2.5% of the religious adherents in the colonies. It was the second smallest of the major denominations of that time.
- ▶ By 1850 Methodists comprised 34.2% of religious adherents in the United States, which was 14% more than the next largest group.
- ▶ The class meetings played an integral part in growth during this time. It was in these classes that people who had come to faith in Christ would be with a group to help them to grow in their faith and where they would learn how to practice their faith.



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ The class leaders were developed within these small groups to ensure that people were keeping the “General Rules”
- ▶ The “General Rules” were:
 - ▶ Do no harm.
 - ▶ Do good.
 - ▶ Attend the ordinances of God.



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ While the first 2 rules are very straight forward “attend upon the ordinances of God” was a little convoluted. But Wesley explained that this rule simple referred to basic Christian practices or disciplines. He explicitly mentioned:
 - ▶ Public worship
 - ▶ Ministry of the Word
 - ▶ The Lord’s Supper
 - ▶ Family and Private Prayer
 - ▶ Searching the Scriptures
 - ▶ Fasting or Abstinence



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ Initially the class leader met persons in their home. Then it became apparent that the most practical way was for the entire class to meet together once a week.
- ▶ Wesley himself reported that at the class meeting "advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels were made up, misunderstandings were removed. After an hour or two was spent in this labor of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving."



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ The Early Class Meetings Focused on Three Things:
 - ▶ 1) It held people accountable to keeping the General Rules.
 - ▶ 2) The class meeting was a place where Methodists were encouraged to give weekly to the relief of the poor.
 - ▶ 3) It was a place where every Methodist answered the question, "How is it with your soul?" More contemporary thought would ask, "How is your life with God?"



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ The Early Methodist Class meetings:
 - ▶ Were not Bible Studies.
 - ▶ It was not an information transferring group.
 - ▶ Focused on helping people grow and come to know Jesus Christ and learn how to give every part of their lives to living and serving Christ.
 - ▶ Watched over one another with love.
 - ▶ Committed to the idea that the Christian life is a journey of growth in grace, or sanctification.

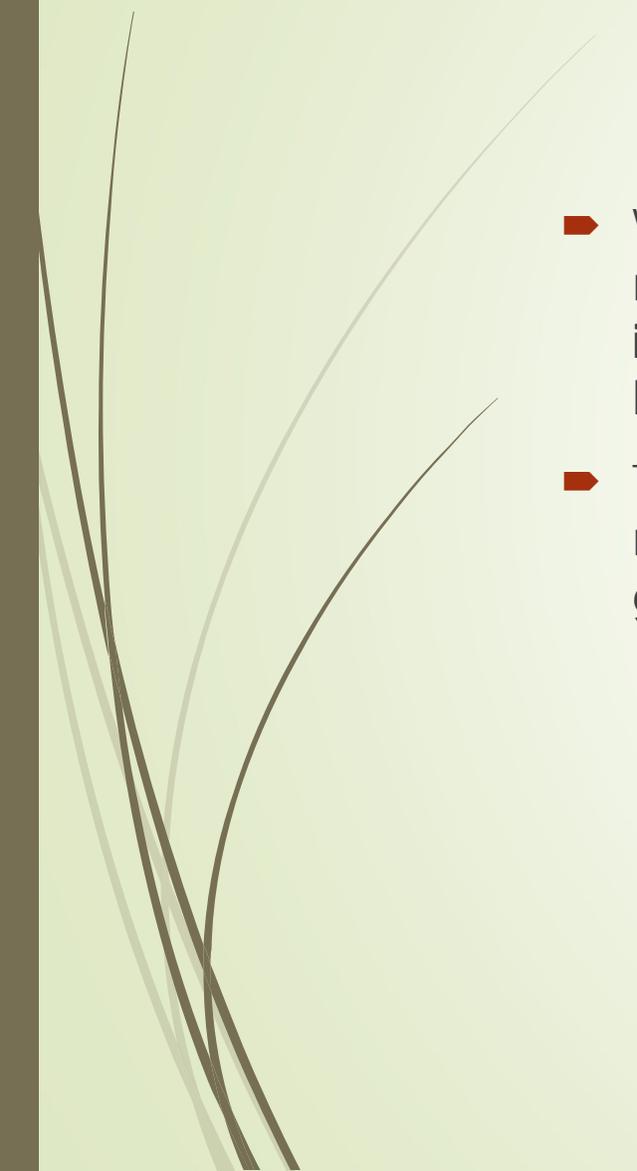


The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ Pillars of Early Methodism
 - ▶ The Class Meeting was the primary structure in early Methodism that was designed to keep every person connected to the rest of the movement, to make sure that people were doing all that they could do to cooperate with the grace that God had given them and to ensure that no one was forgotten or left behind.



The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival

- ▶ When we look at the focus and intent on the class meeting the idea that so many people especially Methodist are attempting to follow Christ in isolation reveals a serious disconnect from the riches of the Wesleyan heritage.
 - ▶ The Methodist Episcopal Church grew from a few thousand members to 2.5 million. But as Methodism began to distance itself from the class meeting its growth also began to decrease, then stop, and finally decline.
- 

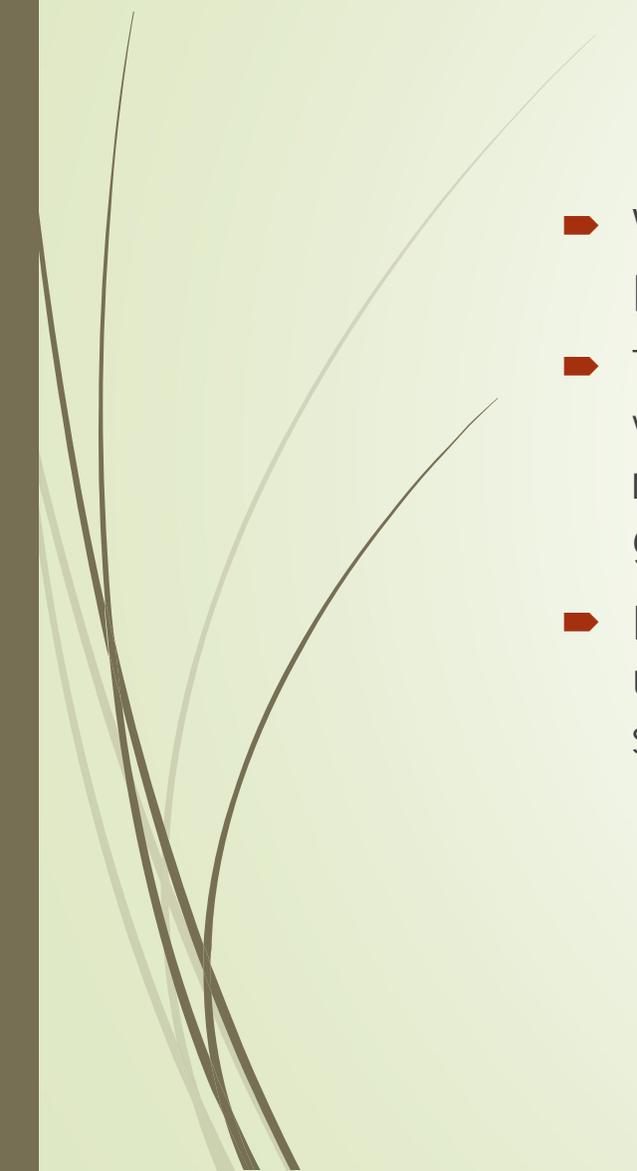


Moving into God's House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting

- ▶ The deep purpose of Methodism was not to get people into class meetings; rather it was to help them come to faith in Christ and grow in that faith.
- ▶ In the Methodist Episcopal Church Wesley not only ordained preachers to lead the new church, but he also included "Articles of Religion" which were concise statements of essential Christian doctrines. (2012 Book of Discipline, p. 13-19)
- ▶ These "Articles of Religion" expressed key Methodist beliefs.



Moving into God's House: The Theological Foundation of the Class Meeting

- ▶ Wesley truly believed that orthodoxy (right belief) leads to orthopraxy (right practice). For Methodist believers Holy living is the goal of Christian life.
 - ▶ The basic requirement for joining early Methodism was a "desire to flee the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins." As class leaders we have to remember that our greatest responsibility is to ensure that people are growing in their salvation.
 - ▶ However the greatest challenge that many of us will face is salvation seems unnecessary to many Americans, because some feel that they are the source of their own life and security.
- 



The Class Meeting

- ▶ The Class Leaders and their Duties According to the Book of Discipline of the AME Zion Church:
 - ▶ The class leader is **NOMINATED** by the Pastor and the majority of the Quarterly Conference present shall elect him/her if there be no **OBJECTION** to the character. This person shall serve 1 year and no longer unless reelected. (Paragraph 275, p. 109)
 - ▶ The class that the leader spiritually guides does have opportunity to decide if they wish their leader re-elected or not. (Para. 276, p. 109)



The Class Meeting

- ▶ The Duties of the Class Leader per Law of the Church is as follows:
 - ▶ Meet the class 1 x week at the appointed place; visit those who are absent ASAP. This visit should inquire as to how their soul prospers with the focus given to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort.
 - ▶ Take collection in the class Once in 3 months for the Poor. (Para., 277, p. 109)
 - ▶ Make weekly/monthly collections for the support of the Pastor as shall be agreed upon by the special class leaders conference, Trustees, and Steward Board and the Qtrly Conference from time to time.
 - ▶ Pay to the Preacher's any funds collected.
 - ▶ Attend to the class members.
 - ▶ Apply through the Pastor to the Poor Steward for means of relief for needy members.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ The Duties of the Class Leader per Law of the Church is as follows:
 - ▶ Collect from his/her members whatever the assessment has been agreed upon for the support of the Presiding Elder.
 - ▶ Collect for the connectional budget and special assessment for local purposes and report the same to the Pastor.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ The Leader of Leaders
 - ▶ Serves as the Class Leader for all of the class leaders.
 - ▶ Leader of Leaders should hold class meetings when the class leader is unable to attend.
 - ▶ Meet with class leader every 90 days prior to the Quarterly Conference.
 - ▶ Encourage/Assist all class leaders in preparing Qtrly Reports with the permission of the Pastor.
 - ▶ Shall be appointed by the Pastor and confirmed by the Qtrly Conference.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke stated “We have no doubt, but meetings of Christian brethren for the exposition of scripture-texts, may be attended with their advantages. The most profitable exercise of any is a free inquiry into the state of the heart.”
- ▶ In order for any class leader to be successful in their appointed position there must be a burning PASSION for people. Your task is not about being nose-y but serious about the spiritual well-being of your members’ soul!



The Class Meeting

- ▶ The class meeting is considered a small group. Did you know:
 - ▶ Small groups are the key “drivers” of vitality for small groups and congregations.
 - ▶ These small groups can’t be shallow. Meaning they have to have emphasis on Christian faith and formation. Example of shallow groups: “Red Hat Society”. This group does not appear to have anything to do with Christian formation but has everything to do with wearing hats.
 - ▶ The small group has to be Christ centered and not be a social club.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ Although the Book of Discipline gives us specific guidelines for the class leader system we have to remember the class leaders are responsible for spiritual formation of people. Therefore the approach to the class system will make the difference.
- ▶ There are 3 main approaches to Small Groups
 - ▶ 1) Affinity Groups
 - ▶ 2) Information Driven Groups
 - ▶ 3) Transformation Driven Groups



The Class Meeting

- ▶ Affinity Groups

- ▶ These groups are organized around common passions, interests and hobbies. Examples would be cooking clubs, bowling leagues or a book club. While the desire to participate in this kind of group is not bad it is not the purpose of the Class Leader System. This type of group should be the lowest priority of a Christian church's small group ministry, as this type of group is the least effective in helping people become disciples of Jesus Christ.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ Information Driven Groups
 - ▶ These groups are focused on conveying information and are organized around a common curriculum. Examples of these are Sunday School, Bible Study or even this training. In these groups members gather to learn more about their faith. While these types of groups provide Biblical literacy and awareness of basic Christian doctrine information driven groups are not the best way to assist people to become more mature Christians.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ Transformation Driven Groups
 - ▶ These groups don't focus on discussion or mastery of content, but on changed lives, on group members' experience of God. This type of group is organized around a common desire to support one another in their efforts to become increasingly faithful Christians who are growing in love of God and neighbor. Examples of these types of groups are accountability groups, fellowship groups, cell groups, class meetings and home churches. These groups focus on living and learning.
 - ▶ A class meeting is a small group that is primarily focused on transformation and not on information. The class is where people learn to interpret their entire lives through the lens of the gospel, build a vocabulary for giving voice to their experience of God, and grow in faith in Christ.



The Class Meeting

- ▶ Are we addicted to Curriculum?
 - ▶ In the beginning Class meetings were the most basic practice of early Methodists, which was one of the fastest growing movements of Christianity in America. Somehow most Methodist faiths have turned to information driven groups.
 - ▶ Which form of small group experience is most effective at helping people become disciples of Jesus Christ?
 - ▶ Do you believe the more we focus on curriculum based studies the more difficult it is to participate in transformation driven groups?



The Class Meeting

- ▶ How does the Class Meeting Promote Active Faith?
 - ▶ Encourages participants to discuss the state of their current relationship with God.
 - ▶ Encourages us to discuss how we are living out our faith? How we have failed to live out our faith?
 - ▶ This course will assist us to transition from a study to a class meeting.
 - ▶ We all will have opportunity to practice leading a class meeting that promotes transformational living!!
 - ▶ Class Leaders are the most viable ministry in the church! This is the group that promotes Christian maturity.



Getting Started

- ▶ Something to Remember: The expectations of membership in most churches in the US have been low for so long that many people who are not members of a church may simply not be willing to join a group that requires weekly attendance and a willingness to talk about the ways they are experiencing (or not experiencing) God's grace in their lives. You cannot control the level at which someone else is willing to commit to their faith. You can decide to invest more deeply in your own faith and invite others to join you.



The Role of the Class Leader (Session 4)

- ▶ Qualities of a Class Leader
 - ▶ The best class leaders will be women and men who are willing to be vulnerable with their groups and share openly about their relationships with God.
 - ▶ The most effective class leader will gently guide their group, reminding them that the focal point of the group is paying attention to the ways God has been at work. To do this most effectively, the class leader will be a good listener. They will learn to listen for the promptings of the Holy Spirit as their brothers and sisters in Christ talk about the state of their souls.



The Role of the Class Leader (Session 4)

- ▶ Qualities of a Class Leader
 - ▶ At the same time, class leaders should not feel that they should always, or even usually, say something in response to other group members. The most effective class leader will talk less over time, because they will empower the rest of the group to care for one another, to “watch over one another in love.”
 - ▶ The class leader will not be domineering or unnecessarily.



The Role of the Class Leader (Session 4)

- ▶ What a Class Leader Should Not Do
 - ▶ The class leader should not see themselves as a teacher. While you may offer the right insight to someone exactly when they need it, you are not the spiritual guru who solves everyone else's problems. The class leader should see themselves as a facilitator, rather than an expert or teacher.
 - ▶ Second the class leader should not feel the need to respond to every person at every meeting. The most effective class leaders will help others learn how to care for one another by creating space for people to contribute to the group.



The Role of the Class Leader (Session 4)

- ▶ What a Class Leader Should Not Do
 - ▶ Third, the class leader should not allow the weekly meeting to last more than an hour and a half. It may happen to go long sometimes because of the prompting of the Holy Spirit however this should not be the routine case.
 - ▶ Finally the class leader should not allow the group to grow beyond the number of 12-15. It is important for your small group to grow however as the group grows so will the members. This will be the perfect time to identify new leaders and possibly be able to start new small groups according to the polity of the church.



The Role of the Class Leader (Session 4)

- ▶ 10 Ways to Guarantee That Your Class Meeting will Fail
 - ▶ Never start one
 - ▶ Meet irregularly
 - ▶ Turn the class meeting into a Curriculum-Driven Group
 - ▶ Make the Class Meeting an Intense Accountability Group
 - ▶ Select a Class Leader Based on Anything Other than Spiritual Maturity and Leadership.
 - ▶ Allow one person to dominate the Conversation



The Role of the Class Leader (Session 4)

- ▶ 10 Ways to Guarantee That Your Class Meeting will Fail
 - ▶ Have All the Answers
 - ▶ Hide During the Meeting
 - ▶ View the group as a Place to gather gossip
 - ▶ Be unwilling to be Challenged to Grow Your Faith and Be Transformed by the grace of God.