



Wesleyan Roots

What Makes United Methodism Distinct

PARTICIPANT HANDOUT



Unit 3: The Way of Christ

Session 9: Social Holiness—Moving Toward Perfect Love

Personal and Social Holiness

Some Christian traditions put a great deal of focus on personal holiness and do not seem to emphasize **social holiness**. In other words, Christians in these traditions are taught to pray, keep the Ten Commandments, and maintain focus on God rather than on the things of earthly life. United Methodists believe that we are called to extend the concept of holiness beyond ourselves, demonstrating Christ's love with acts of justice and mercy to our neighbors. This way of being is an extension of our personal holiness and connected to our belief that all are called to love as Jesus Christ loved (Christian Perfection). This focus can be seen in how we invest our time, energy, and financial resources.

Loving God's people in Big and Small Ways

While we can't do everything for everyone, we can do something for someone. As a United Methodist Christian, I look around and see so much need. Sometimes it all seems overwhelming to me as I do not have adequate time, energy, knowledge, or resources to address even a fraction of the needs of our hurting world. When I experience this sense of inadequacy, I remind myself of two things.

First, God loves me and the Christ in me is called to love and serve in the world]. I've long had interest and skill in relating to grieving people. I currently serve as a volunteer chaplain with my local police department, and this makes me available to respond to complicated death calls when a clergy presence is especially needed. I have the opportunity to work with officers and their families and am empowered to express God's love to people of all religions or no religion at all. I officiate funeral and memorial services for those who have no church home, no religious tradition, or for those whose religious tradition will not provide this service for them due to a complex situation surrounding the death. I am often pulled out of my comfort-zone. It is only by God's grace that I have been able to serve in this way in my community. God calls me to bring a sense of dignity into the worst moments of people's

lives, and I trust God's holiness is being planted in the lives of others.

Secondly, I invite the churches I serve to partner with the worldwide United Methodist Church to make a larger scale difference in the world. When we pool our connectional resources together, we do more ministry on a larger scale than my small contribution could ever do on its own. This can be experienced through advocacy and personal financial contributions. A great example of our collective ministry together is the United Methodist Committee on Relief. When there is a natural disaster or other tragedy in the world, the United Methodist Committee on Relief assesses and responds to the immediate and long-term needs. 100% of my contribution to UMCOR following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina went toward that specific cause. This is because UMCOR is organized and dispatched through The United Methodist Church.

The Wesleyan Root of Social Holiness

Indeed, the biblical witness is clear that God calls us to continue the ministry of Jesus in the world. In Matthew 5:1-14 we read that God blesses those who are merciful and those who are makers of peace, and that we are called to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world." "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Continuing through the gospel, we read that we are called to love and pray for our enemies (5:43-44), refrain from judging others (7:1-2), forgive others (18:21-22), and love our neighbors as ourselves (22:39). In Matthew 25:31-46, as Jesus states that insofar as we offer food, drink, hospitality, clothes, and a healing and loving presence to others, so we have offered those things to him. I could go on, and these are just in the gospel of Matthew.

John Wesley taught that Christians are called to demonstrate Christ's love with acts of mercy and justice. This is a part of God's work of sanctification in our lives.

Wesleyan Roots Session 9: Social Holiness—Moving Toward Perfect Love

Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, General Secretary of the Board of Church and Society for The United Methodist Church, states, “United Methodists have a long commitment to social holiness. It is in our DNA. It is part of who we are. Wesley has said, ‘There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social.’ Wesley goes on to say that without social holiness, we cannot exist. It is because of God’s love for us and Christ’s love that we reach out into the world to walk with others and to accompany them in their journeys... We walk with those who are poor, those who are vulnerable, those who live on the margins of life. It is a gift that God has given us and we have claimed as Methodists who are committed to social holiness; that we would be with one another in this journey as we live our lives together.”¹

In the early 1900s virtually all public and private hospitals were located north of Interstate 30 in the city of Dallas, Texas. Concerned about this underserved population, Methodist ministers and civic leaders established Methodist Hospital of Dallas. A 100-bed facility opened on Christmas Eve, 1927, to adequately serve the health needs on the southern end of the city. While the UMC no longer directly operates or funds these hospitals, we do participate in their ministry to the community through the Golden Cross community clinics, the hospital system’s Board of Directors, volunteers, and in other important ways.

Indeed, United Methodists, and Methodists preceding them, are active in countless ministries of outreach on behalf of Jesus Christ including ministries providing food, clean drinking water, shelter, early childhood education and intervention, disaster relief, and many others. Methodists have led the way in higher education by establishing undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate level colleges and universities throughout the United States and beyond. We have historically led church and society initiatives for child welfare, racial justice, women’s rights, just immigration, housing equality, wage equity, safe working conditions, and more.

Social Holiness in Uncertain Times

God calls us to social holiness in small ways, and in greater ways that we can only do together. We live in uncertain times dealing with global pandemic, political upheaval, systemic racism, and economic instability. While my comfort-zone is challenged by my work as a Chaplain, and I may be tempted to keep all my financial resources to myself, my faith calls me to love like Christ and understand that human need only increases in times like this. Our personal holiness must extend to social holiness if we are in Christ. I urge you to consider how you might, in ways big and small, partner with the work of the Holy Spirit so that the fullness of Christ love (sanctification) will be known on earth as it is in heaven.

Marsha Engle Middleton

¹ www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-social-holiness

United Methodist Identity Points:

- Living as a Christian means, in part, that we are called to demonstrate Christ's love through intentional Christian actions of mercy and justice.
 - While we cannot do everything for everyone, we can do something for someone.
 - Social holiness is part of sanctification and the Christian life.
 - The connectional nature of The United Methodist Church makes it possible for us to do more together than any individual person or congregation can do on its own.
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Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

- When you think of holiness, do you tend to think of a Christian's personal lifestyle, of social holiness, or of both? Why?
 - How might God be calling you to move toward social holiness in ways both big and small? What might be a first step for you as you seek to love as Jesus loved?
 - How important, do you think, is the connection within The United Methodist Church? What are some additional ways in which our connection empowers us to do more ministry together than we could do as individual Christians or as individual congregations?
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