

**Our United
Methodist
History:
Five Lessons for
Elementary Aged
Children**

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Introduction

The history of The United Methodist Church is filled with great faith, excitement, evangelism, care for the poor and oppressed, and people with the deep desire to do whatever was necessary to share the love and good news of God with those who needed it most. The lessons outlined below are designed to help children learn and celebrate the rich and vibrant history of their denomination and perhaps, through understanding the history and passion of John Wesley and others, they might capture the desire to do God's work and bring the good news to those in our world today who need to hear it.

The lessons are short and designed to work with multi-aged elementary children. It can be used as a supplement to your regular curriculum, as the opening time to Sunday school, or anytime that children gather. The importance is not when or where it is used but that the children be taught this rich history.

These lessons and activities:

- use a minimum of supplies so that costs will not be an issue and so that the preparation will not be overwhelming
- include some pictures of the activities to help with clarity
- will take some preparation and forethought, so be sure to read through this material a few weeks before you plan to use it

Please note that sometimes you are invited to break your children into smaller groups. However, if your Sunday school is already a small group, there is no need. Just stay together and do the activity!

Finding Our Place On Our Church Family Tree

PREPARATION

Gather some of your old family pictures to share with the children.

Print and frame pictures of John Wesley, Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke, Suzanna Wesley, and a Circuit Rider. Find and frame pictures of church members and your pastor.

SUPPLIES

The framed pictures and printouts you gathered
Six pipe cleaners for each child
Six paper key tags from the office supply store
A pencil or marker for each child

GATHERING TIME

Share your family photos and tell about the history of your family. It is fine to be proud and excited to share. Our family histories are exciting!

Then, explain that we have a church family as well as a biological family. Show the children some of the pictures of the founders of The United Methodist Church, and explain that these are the grandparents of our church family.

Tell them that over the next few weeks they will be getting to know these church family members and all of the wonderful things they did!

ACTIVITY TIME

Give each child six pipe cleaners and twist the middle section tightly together. Spread out the bottom wires to create roots so that the tree stands. Then spread out the top wires to create the branches of the tree.

Using the pictures of Coke, Asbury, Wesley, the Circuit Rider, and Suzanna Wesley, help the children write their names or draw their pictures on the key ring. Then have them draw a picture of themselves or write their name. Place them on the tree they have made. Invite the children to take it home and think about how special our own families are and how wonderful it is to belong to The United Methodist family.

Have the children gather in a circle and one at a time name a member of their family, then **pray**: "God, we are so blessed to have our families. We are also blessed to have a church family in The United Methodist Church family. May we treat each other as brothers and sisters with great love and care for one another. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen."

How The United Methodist Church Was Formed

PREPARATION

You will need card stock with one of the words/names listed below printed on each sheet. In the bottom, cut a hole and tie a long piece (about three feet long and 6 inches wide) of different colored tulle fabric on it. These will eventually be braided together. Lay the cardstock across a table with the tulle fabric hanging down.

SUPPLIES

Cardstock with the following names written on them (one name per sheet):

John Wesley
Charles Wesley
Francis Asbury
Thomas Coke
The Anglican Church of England
The Methodist Episcopal Church
Circuit Riders
Methodist Church
Women in the Church
Jacob Albright and the Evangelical Association
Otterbein and Boehm and the Brethren in Christ Church
Evangelical United Brethren Church
United Methodist Church
Cross and Flame

GATHERING AND ACTIVITY TIME

Read the following script and, as one of the pre-printed names is read, select a child to stand in the front of the group and hold it up. The children should continue to stand in the front until it is all braided together when indicated in the script. The point of this lesson is to demonstrate that we are a united church created from the merger of several religious groups and developed from the hard work of many people. While John Wesley is often cited as the only founder of our church, there were many people who also worked hard to create it.

(The times for the cards to be held are noted and bolded.)

SCRIPT

This is the history of our church: **The United Methodist Church.**

JOHN WESLEY (have a child hold up his card) was born June 17, 1703 and died March 2, 1791. He was 88 years old.

He was born in a parsonage which is a house where ministers live. His dad was a minister in the **ANGLICAN CHURCH OF ENGLAND** (have a child hold up his card). He had 11 brothers and sisters and was home schooled by his mother, Suzanna. He was very smart and a good student.

When he was very little there was a fire. John survived the fire and felt that God had saved him for a reason. He loved God and became very holy!

In 1730 he went to Oxford College in England and he and his younger brother, **CHARLES WESLEY** (have a child hold up this card), began a club for prayer and singing. They were trying to become very holy people and do what God wanted them to do. People made fun of their club and called it the "Holy Club!"

As the Americas were settled, John Wesley's professor convinced John and his brother to go to Georgia and preach and teach about Jesus.

In 1733-1737, he went to America but was not popular, got into some trouble - John Wesley was not perfect - and went back to England!

Back in England, he started covenant groups, worked with poor children, and started the whole idea of Sunday school! The children and their teachers met on Sundays because children worked six days a week in factories. Their Sunday school teachers taught them to read, told them about God, and worked hard to create laws that said that children could not work. John Wesley and the Sunday school teachers worked hard to educate and protect children!

Back in America, people were preaching and teaching the things Wesley taught them! He wrote back and forth to them. They were part of the Anglican Church of England. They followed his methodical way of doing things and were called Methodists because they had a method they followed!

Two top preachers who followed John Wesley's teachings were **FRANCIS ASBURY** and **THOMAS COKE** (have a child hold up each of these cards). They asked for a Bishop to be sent to run the Anglican Church in America, but England was angry because of the Revolutionary War and would not send anyone.

At a conference called the Christmas Conference in 1784, they took matters into their own hands and created the **METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH** (have a child hold up his card). They decided to choose their own ministers and send them out riding horses and preaching and telling people about the love of God! These preachers were called **CIRCUIT RIDERS** (have a child hold up this card).

By 1844 (100 years later), there were over 4,000 Circuit Riders and the Methodist Episcopal Church became the largest in the country!

Sadly in 1844, the church split over slavery. The Methodist Episcopal Church was in the south and supported slavery. The Methodist Church in the north did not want slavery anymore. These two denominations merged back together in 1939 and formed The **METHODIST CHURCH** (have a child hold up his card).

Wesley stayed connected to the church in America and spoke out against slavery and supported the kind treatment of children. He also allowed women to teach classes and preach but they could not be Circuit Riders. The women did lead Sunday school classes and did the pastoral care of the congregations between visits of the Circuit Riders. The **WOMEN** were a very important part of the church (have a child hold up his card).

Other people were also following John Wesley's methods. In 1800, **JACOB ALBRIGHT** from Pennsylvania started the Evangelical Association (have a child hold up this card), and men named **OTTERBIEN** and **BOEHM** started the United Brethren in Christ Church in 1800 (have a child hold up these cards).

These two churches merged in 1946 and formed the **EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH** (have a child hold up this card).

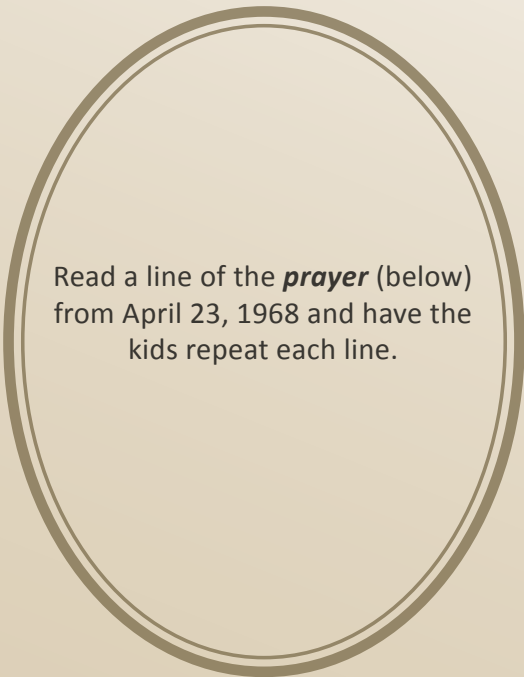
On April 23, 1968, all these parts came together and formed **THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH** (have a child hold up this card).

(Braid all the tulle together into one long braid!)

The prayer as they became one united denomination was: "Lord of the church, we are united in Thee and Thy church, and now, The United Methodist Church."

The symbol of the **CROSS AND FLAME** (have a child hold up this card) was created and this is still our symbol today! (Tie it to the bottom of the braided tulle).

Today we, The United Methodist Church, have millions of members worldwide, and missions in over 100 countries!



Read a line of the *prayer* (below) from April 23, 1968 and have the kids repeat each line.

PRAYER

L: Lord of the Church (Children repeat)

L: We are united in Thee and Thy church, (Children repeat)

L: And now, The United Methodist Church. (Children repeat)

L: God thank you for those men and women who created our church and may we be proud and happy to be part of this long and wonderful tradition of The United Methodist Church. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

The Hard Work of the Circuit Riders!

PREPARATION

All you need for this lesson is a white board and markers, a stick horse and a large open space for the children to ride!

SUPPLIES

A stick horse
White board and markers

GATHERING TIME

Explain to the children that one of the reasons we are called United Methodists today is because John Wesley and the founders of our church had a “method” of sending Circuit Riders out on horses to preach and teach. They would ride from congregation to congregation each year. They were riding alone most of the time and so it was a stressful and lonely job. They rode their horses through all kinds of weather and if they got sick there was no doctor to take care of them. It was difficult physically and emotionally and if they had not loved God so much, they would have never been able to do this important work.

Using a white board, have the children make a list of the feelings that the Circuit Riders probably had. List the positive ones such as pride, determination and love of God. Also list the negative ones such as loneliness, illness, fear, physical difficulties, hunger, cold, heat, etc.

ACTIVITY TIME

Help the children choose a partner and stand opposite of them as if they were going to play, “London Bridge.” Spread them out all over the room in pairs or groups. Assign each pair one of the following and have them act out the words below:

Cold Wind (Have them say, “Blowing wind.”)
Illness (Have them say, “Yuck, yuck, sick, sick!”)
Loneliness (Have them say, “You are all alone now!!!”)
Heat (Have them say, “Hot, hot, hot, hot!”)
Your horse is sick (Have them say, “Your poor horse, he is sick!”)
Animals (Have them growl and claw!)

Choose one child to be the Circuit Rider and, on the stick horse, have them travel through the groups hearing all the sad and scary things the Circuit Riders faced. After they get done, ask the children why they did it and have them yell, “Because they loved God!” Give each child a turn at being the Circuit Rider.

Have the children form a circle and share one way they can show the love of God to others. After each has shared, **pray**: “God, we give you thanks for the Circuit Riders who shared your love with so many. Help us to share your love today as they did long ago. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.”

Covenant Groups

PREPARATION

This session will focus on the importance and the lasting significance of the covenant group as a means of spiritual growth and formation. For this session you will need to be prepared to have the children break into small groups (five to eight children per group) with two adult leaders per group.

SUPPLIES

White board and markers
One pair of scissors and a cardstock sheet of paper per group

GATHERING TIME

Explain to the children that the Circuit Riders would only be able to preach and visit each congregation once a month or once every six months or once every year. In the meantime, their congregations were “on their own.” The men and women of these congregations would lead studies and visit the sick. They were encouraged to divide themselves into covenant groups. These were based on the groups John and his brother, Charles, formed at Oxford College while they were students there.

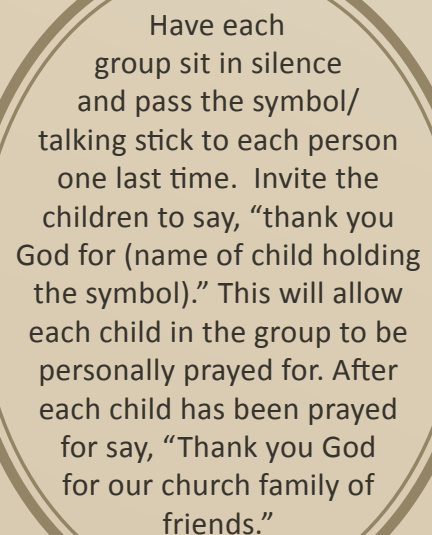
The groups took care of one another. If a member of the group became sick, they would visit. If one of them had a baby, the group would bring food to them. If one of the group members had a disaster, such as a fire, everyone would help!

But the main purpose of the covenant group was to meet regularly and make sure they were all living as God invites us to live. They would be asked to answer questions that helped them grow closer to God and notice the love of God around them.

Using the white board, have the children brainstorm symbols of what a covenant group was supposed to be. One symbol might be a “heart” symbolizing that the task of a covenant group was to love and care for one another. Another might be the “cross” to symbolize that the task was to grow closer to Jesus and God. Another might be “two friends” because it was to be a place for friends to gather. After you have come up with several symbols, it is time for the activity listed below.

ACTIVITY TIME

Divide the children into small groups and have them sit in a circle. This will be their covenant group for the day. As a group, they will choose a symbol for their group and the leader will cut it out of the



Have each group sit in silence and pass the symbol/ talking stick to each person one last time. Invite the children to say, “thank you God for (name of child holding the symbol).” This will allow each child in the group to be personally prayed for. After each child has been prayed for say, “Thank you God for our church family of friends.”

cardstock paper. This will serve as a “talking stick.” Only the child holding the symbol/talking stick is to speak. All the others are listening with love and care.

The leader will then ask the three questions listed below and pass the symbol from child to child until each child has had the opportunity to share. Of course, no child should be forced to share and can simply say “pass” when it is their turn to hold the symbol. Before asking the questions, make sure they understand what you are asking by giving a few examples of each.

Question #1: Where/when did you see the love of God demonstrated this week?

Question #2: Where did you exemplify the love of God to others this week?

Question #3: Was there a time when you could have been kinder or more loving and did not do it?

The Music of Charles and John Wesley

PREPARATION

You will need to have a hymnal and CD with some of Charles Wesley's hymns on it and something to play the CD on. You will also need adults to work with the children once they are placed into small groups. This lesson celebrates our faith and theology that have so often been expressed through music. Music can be found through <http://www.gbod.org/worship>.

SUPPLIES

Hymnals

A CD with Charles Wesley hymns on it. Suggestions are:

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Love Divine, All Love Excelling

O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

And Are We Yet Alive

A sheet of paper and pen per group

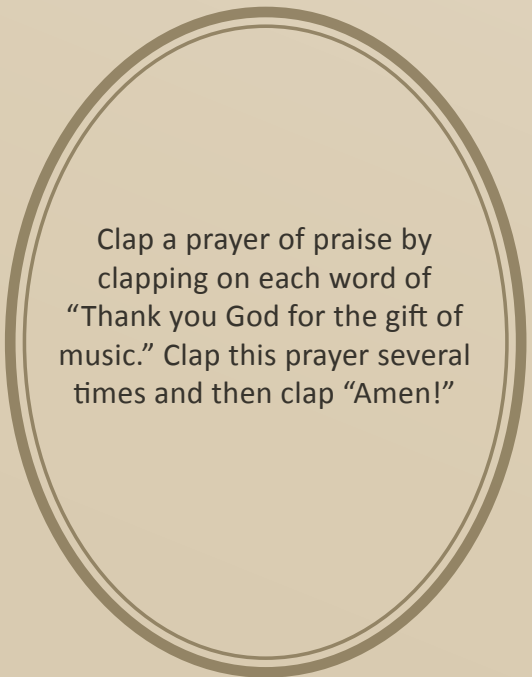
GATHERING TIME

Explain to the children that, while John Wesley and the Circuit Riders were great preachers, John believed that music was another wonderful way for people to experience the love of God. He encouraged people to sing songs of faith loudly and with meaning! John wrote a few hymns alone, but he mostly worked with his brother, Charles, who wrote over 6,300 hymns! His hymns represent the whole Bible. They tried to make the hymns easily sung so that even people who could not read could memorize and sing them.

Show the children some of Charles Wesley's hymns in *The United Methodist Hymnal* and play part of a few hymns for them to hear. Encourage them to look up these hymns on their own sometime and read the beautiful words!

ACTIVITY TIME

Break the children into small groups of about five each and with the help of adults, have each group decide on a common tune such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "B-I-N-G-O," or "Away In A Manger." Then write lyrics to the tune. As a small group, practice a few times and then gather back as a large group and have each group sing what they wrote.



Clap a prayer of praise by clapping on each word of "Thank you God for the gift of music." Clap this prayer several times and then clap "Amen!"

Extra Idea

A Visit from John Wesley

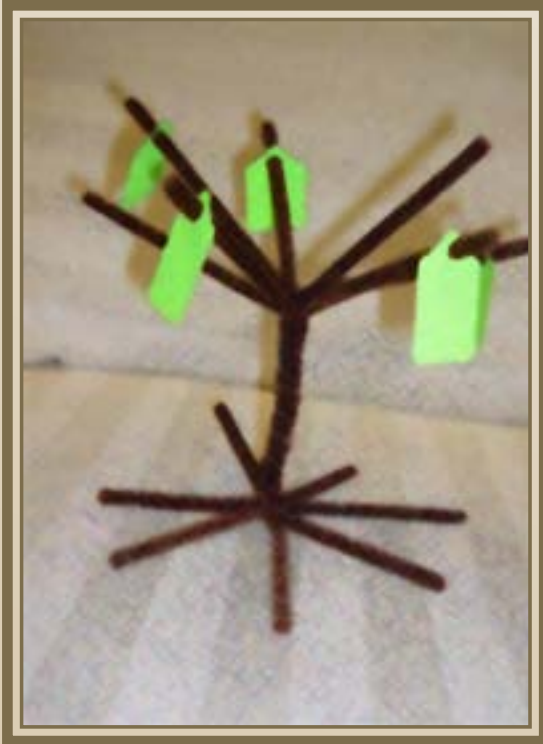
At the end of your study it would be fun to have John Wesley himself visit the children in person. Having him on horseback would be great! Introduce him to the children, allow time for questions, and then have a party to celebrate being United Methodist.

If you wanted, John could personally congratulate each child and give him or her a certificate that states that he or she is a United Methodist Child! Be sure and have John Wesley sign each certificate. (See sample certificate at the end.)

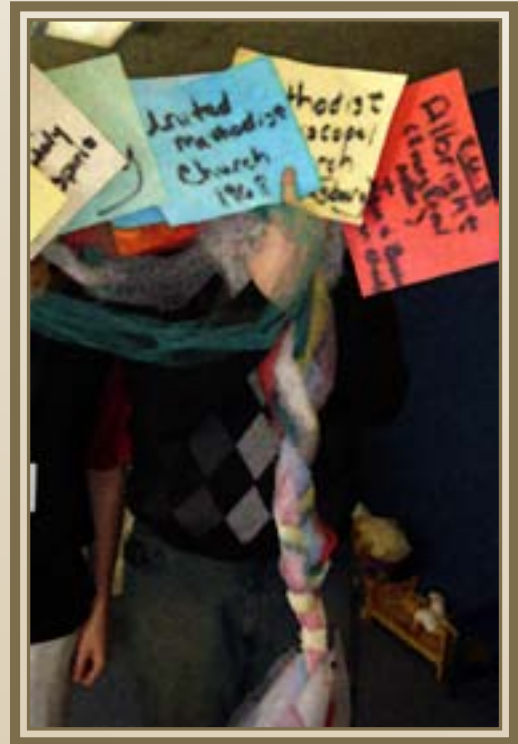


This is a picture of the Reverend Jerry Hurst, from the staff of First United Methodist Church, Colorado Springs, CO, who played John Wesley and met and preached to the children on their Sunday School Promotion Day!

Pictures of the Lessons



The pipe cleaner United Methodist Family Tree the children are invited to make during Lesson 1, "Finding Our Place on Our Church Family Tree"



The final braided history from Lesson 2



Children holding up the significant people and events from Lesson 2, "How The United Methodist Church was Formed"

Certificate of Promotion

I, _____, am a proud member of the
Sunday School of _____

Sunday School has always been an important part of the
United Methodist Church, started in the 1780's until today!

I was promoted to the _____ grade class on _____

Children's Minister

Sunday School Teacher

John Wesley
Founder of the United Methodist Church

The Reverend Dr. Leanne Ciampa Hadley is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. She is the President and Founder of the First Steps Spirituality Center, www.1ststeps.net, which is dedicated to providing spiritual care to hurting children at no cost to the children or their families. It is also the mission of the center to provide training and workshops to adults who are interested in the spirituality of children and teens.

Leanne also serves as an associate pastor at First United Methodist Church, Colorado Springs, where she oversees and directs the children and families ministries.

In addition to working at the church and center, Leanne travels nationally and internationally leading retreats, workshops and training events about the spirituality of children and teens.

Leanne is the author of *Friends and Followers of the Bible I and II*, and *A Walk with God For Women*, Abingdon Press, and has been a contributing author to several other books including *365 Meditations for Mothers with Young Children*, and *365 Meditations for Mothers*, Dimensions Press, and *The Children's Worker's Encyclopedia of the Bible*, by Group Publishing. She has also created two videos, "Praying with Children" and "Creative Children's Sermons," produced by Cokesbury Publishing.

Her most recent book, *When You Pray as a Family*, authored by herself and Rueben P. Job, is available from Abingdon Press and the website www.BecomingAPrayingCongregation.com.
