

Belonging

— Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church —

Referenced to the *Handbook 2012*

Belonging

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

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Belonging

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

CHAPTER 1 **BELONGING TO A TEAM**

Welcome
The potential for growth
The benefits of community values
The value of a wider network
Having your say in the process

FURTHER THOUGHT

BELONGING TO A TEAM

Building relationships can be difficult in our busy world. Even in church it can be difficult to get to know new people and difficult to share yourself in return. These studies are intended to help in the process of building a lifelong relationship between you and the people you are coming to know. So... welcome! We hope that you will make yourself at home in our midst.

Welcome

In these studies we shall introduce ourselves by describing the history and values of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. We have a fascinating history that spans several continents. We hope to come to know more about the experiences that brought you to this place too, so that together we might worship and serve our Lord. The Spirit of God, dwelling in each true believer, gives us a sense of belonging and warmth. You can move into a new fellowship with confidence. You belong here.

The reason why we feel confident building friendships in church is because we share a common friendship with Jesus, our shared Saviour. Jesus Christ suffered on the cross for us all and he desires that we live in unity and peace. The Lord is the most faithful friend you or I will ever know and he is the reason we commit to each other in partnership in the Church. Maintaining a strong friendship with God protects and strengthens our friendships with each other. Jesus Christ is the Friend who makes us friends.

God's unique plan is for the Church to be a body of believers who bring out the best in each other. We all need others to rub the rough edges off us and interaction with others broadens our understanding of many issues. Others can inspire us, encourage us and help us to take another step of faith. It is the unselfish interest in one another's well-being and growth (in other words, our love for each other) that is one of the hallmarks that sets Christians apart from those who do not follow Christ.

The potential for growth

Being a follower of Jesus Christ means being a disciple. A disciple is a learner, so being a disciple implies a process of growth toward Christ-likeness. Taking church membership is one part in that process of personal spiritual growth. A typical growth pattern would include these elements:

1. You make a personal response to Jesus, accepting his mercy and being born again through his Spirit.
2. You enter into a basic discipleship program, including regular meetings for Bible study. During this time you will come to know your Bible and learn the basic truths of Christian faith.
3. You are baptised, sometimes quite early in the discipleship process, as an outward demonstration that your life and priorities have changed and that you now belong to Jesus.
4. You take church membership (the process you are now undertaking), when, as a committed disciple, you bond with a group of fellow believers.
5. You continue the process of life-long growth and service as you learn more about God's values and you apply those values to your daily life.

Key Point

Are you confident that you have taken the first step, that of making a personal response to Jesus? If not, ask the study leader for guidance.

Yes

No / I'm not sure

Have you undertaken basic Discipleship studies? If not, ask the study leader to assign you to a study group. We recommend the booklet of twelve studies *A New Creation*, which is published by the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

Yes

No, I have not done any basic bible studies

Have you been baptised? If not, ask the pastor to baptise you.

Yes

No, I have not been baptised

Discipleship is not only personal growth in Jesus; it is also telling others about the hope found in Christ.

When Jesus finished his ministry on earth he left us with a command. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20). These verses emphasise the twin issues of evangelism and discipleship, providing the Church with a broad description of its overall goal. The Church seeks those who do not know Christ, leads them into a saving relationship with him and prepares them to go out and find others. The Church is more than a recruitment and training organisation though. What makes us a church is not just what we do – it is the fact that we do it together. The Church is more than an organisation – it is a community. It is a place where people can belong and grow in their relationship with God while carrying out the commission of Christ.

Romans 12:5 says, “In Christ we who are many form one body and each member belongs to all the others”. We see here that the Christian life means more than just believing; it also means belonging. One of the main ways we grow in Christ is by being in relationship with other Christians just as Romans 12:10 says; “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love”.

As Christians we have turned away from our old ways of living and have adopted new priorities in our lives; to live for Christ in increasing measure and to share his love with the world. It is easier to live out these ideals in a fellowship where faith is based on the authority of the Bible (Luke 17:3; Matthew 18:15). The Wesleyan Methodist Church is firmly committed to the accuracy of the Bible. You can have confidence in the Bible as you discover new spiritual truths and grow in love for God and mankind. Church membership is a journey of character development, love, joy and peace; guided by the sure promises of the Bible.

Church membership is a journey of character development, love, joy and peace; guided by the sure promises of the Bible.

The benefits of community values

The Wesleyan Methodist Church has a heritage of strong corporate values. These have been shaped primarily by three things:

- 1) Our faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ over every aspect of our personal lives and our life together as a community of faith;
- 2) Our confidence in the Bible as the final authority for Christian beliefs and lifestyles;
- 3) Our desire to see all believers become fully devoted followers of Christ, known for their remarkable love and their holy lives.

These values are the influences and motives behind our church's membership commitments. Every person who becomes a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church enters into a covenant with other believers to live, work and witness together in ways that allow for both individual growth and the building up of the whole body of believers.

A covenant is an agreement that binds parties together in mutually beneficial ways. Take God's covenant with the people of Israel made at Mount Sinai for example (Exodus 19:1-8; 24:3-8). The Lord expected and received his people's worship, trust, loyalty and obedience; the Israelites were promised and received material and spiritual blessings from God for themselves and their descendants. The covenant bound the people together with regulations that set them apart as a community. It gave them standards and values that guaranteed they would enjoy a unique identity and strength as God's people.

Key Point

The Wesleyan Methodist Church also has expectations. These can be grouped:

1. All those who enter into a covenant relationship through membership with the Church must have a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord and they must have been baptised as an outward demonstration of their faith.
2. All members must agree to a summary of the doctrinal statements of the church (pp. 25-26).

3. All members must agree to be guided by the Mission and Vision and the Elementary Principles of the church (App. B); they must agree to eight Minimum Commitments (pp. 36-37); and they must accept the authority of the Handbook in matters of church government.
4. All members must commit to living a life guided by the Holy Spirit and the Bible in light of the Filter Questions (pp. 37-38) and the Collective Conscience Statements (pp. 41-50).

The value of the wider network

The Wesleyan Methodist Church is not a collection of independent churches unrelated to each other, nor simply an association, but a “family” of congregations connected by our identity in Christ, our structures, and our passion for developing fully committed disciples of Christ. This network of congregations reaches across Australia and the South Pacific, with intimate ties to congregations in more than 90 countries around the world. Being part of this network provides extensive opportunities for you to serve Christ.

Being a member of a local church which is itself part of a wider movement brings many benefits. These include:

1. The fellowship of a family of churches through the wider network. When young people or families are transferred to another part of the country for study or employment, being part of a wider network means there are friendships already established to help ease the unsettling experience of moving. Further, your local group is likely to gain from those moving into your area.
2. Access to special resources and ministry, especially to children and youth. Camps beyond the local church provide opportunities for developing friendships with those of similar background and some of these last a lifetime. Further, the benefit of teaching, vision and example from those especially gifted in this ministry wonderfully complements the influence of the local church in their lives.
3. A system of government that is already developed with most “bugs” ironed out. Without such a system, a fledgling group will obviously make mistakes and these can be damaging to its development, leaving hurts and

discouragement. This painful process is more readily avoided when there is an agreed and proven model provided from the start.

4. For those seeking full-time service, there is a recognised training program that is committed to developing practical ministry skills and is geared to the needs of the day.

5. When the pastor senses God's call to move, continuity of ministry is not just the responsibility of the group, but of the wider church, and help is available to secure a replacement. There is a team of ministers from which one may be invited by the local church with a confidence that the change will mean further progress, numerically and spiritually. The clear doctrinal statements of the Church also minimises the danger of division over new teachings.

6. Access to wider resources for financial support and denominational collateral when expanding facilities.

7. A direct link with a missionary program reaching across the South Pacific and around the globe. This is important for those called to a missionary career and for the local church that wants to support a known and trusted missionary venture.

8. The unifying power of a shared vision is an important advantage of belonging to a wider denomination. The Wesleyan Methodist Church has a long standing awareness that God called us to promote the message of full salvation – that believers can know the calm assurance of a personal relationship with God and they can experience the inner peace that comes from loving God with an undivided heart. These truths not only give us a sense of purpose, stability and direction to our activities as a movement, they also give us an expectancy that God can bring about spiritual awakening in our generation.

Having your say in the process

The Wesleyan Methodist Church has elements of a democratic style of government. For example, the Local Church Board is elected by the members to work with the pastor on items that arise from week-to-week, but in turn, all decisions made by that Board must be brought to the next members' meeting for their approval. As it is the Lord's Church, we need to seek and find his mind on issues that arise. Members' meetings are a great

place to pool different perspectives on issues. Many times, particularly after a difficult decision has been made, we can look back and recognise that it was the Holy Spirit himself whose guiding hand had been upon the decision (Acts 13:1-3).

Not only can covenant members have a say in the local church but they may be elected as delegates to the District Conference and/or National Conference. Membership however, means much more than having voting rights; it defines those who can be counted on. To join an army you have to sign up—membership identifies those who are committed to being part of the team.

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Church membership provides the personal and corporate benefits of believing and belonging as you discover the joy of a life that is truly worthwhile – a life given to the ultimate goal of reaching the world for Christ.

FURTHER THOUGHT

Consider these verses from the Bible and discuss the questions that follow:

1 John 3:11

Romans 12:10

Colossians 3:16

Galatians 5:13

Galatians 6:2

Ephesians 4:2

1 Thessalonians 5:11

1 Peter 3:8-9

Romans 15:7

1 Corinthians 16:20

Ephesians 5:21

James 5:16

Colossians 3:13

1. What do these verses teach us about our accountability to one another in the church?
2. Under what conditions do you appreciate accountability to other believers? Under what circumstances do you not appreciate it?
3. What are some practical ways you think God might use you to bring out the best in others?

What are your gifts?

If you could do anything for God, what would you do?

Belonging

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

CHAPTER 2 **HISTORY AND STRUCTURE**

The first Methodists - in Britain
The Wesleyan Church in North America
The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia
Our structures

FURTHER THOUGHT

HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

The first Methodists - in Britain

The name “Wesleyan” is used in memory of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement. He was a priest in the Church of England who lived from 1703 to 1791. As a young man, John sought to please God through rigorous disciplines of Bible study, prayer, fasting, visiting the sick, ministering in prisons and through social work. Together with his brother, Charles, he shared in a group at Oxford College called the “Holy Club” where members were held accountable for their weekly behaviour. However, these disciplines did not bring John or Charles the peace with God they longed for. Even a time of missionary service in Georgia (USA) did not satisfy this desire for inner peace. Having studied at Oxford, been ordained as a priest and served as a missionary, John Wesley still questioned his own salvation.

However, God broke through their self-righteousness, revealing himself through a small prayer meeting, first to Charles and, within days, to John. On May 24, 1738, John Wesley attended the prayer meeting at the Moravian chapel on Aldersgate Street in London. He listened as a reader presented portions of Martin Luther’s opening comments on the book of Romans. “About a quarter before nine,” John wrote in his journal later that night, “while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

What followed was a remarkable transformation of the Wesley brothers and of Britain. John began tirelessly preaching forgiveness and assurance of salvation through faith in Christ and the sanctifying work of the Spirit for those who give themselves fully to God. The sheer number of people who were born again was astounding. The Methodist revival spread like wildfire across England and soon extended to Ireland, Scotland, Wales and colonial

*We are people
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*We maintain that
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North America. With prophetic accuracy, John Wesley said, “The world is my parish.” At the same time, Charles was preaching and writing hymns; he wrote over 6,000 hymns and gospel songs during his lifetime!

In 1784, with the independence of the American colonies, a fully constituted Methodist denomination was formed in North America. Meanwhile, because of John Wesley’s commitment to the Church of England, the Methodists did not separate from the Church of England in his homeland until 1795, four years after his death.

Key Point

Influences from British Methodism still evident in our church today:

- ◇ We are committed to the truth that salvation is only by faith in Jesus Christ.
- ◇ We teach that believers can know the inner assurance of peace with God.
- ◇ We expect Christians to be cleansed from sin (sanctified) to live a life wholly devoted to God.
- ◇ We are people of the Bible. John Wesley described himself as a man of one book – the Bible. We maintain that the Bible is God’s infallible Word to us today and is superior to all forms of human wisdom.

The Wesleyan Church in North America

Early Methodists in the American colonies were totally opposed to slavery in any form, but when Methodism took root in the Southern United States, many of its members were slave-holders and eventually even the Bishops began to condone the practice. As agitation for the abolition of human slavery grew, the bishops tried to prohibit Methodist ministers speaking on the subject, resulting in the withdrawal of numerous ministers from the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Wesleyan Methodist Church grew out of this reform movement. It was organised in 1843 in New York State as a direct protest against the continuing practice of slavery and the undue authority of bishops.

In the later decades of the 19th century a renewed passion for the holiness message swept across the United States and Canada. New holiness denominations emerged and non-denominational camp meetings were used powerfully in spreading the message. The Wesleyan Methodists, among others, attended camp meetings held by the early Pilgrim Holiness movement. As the Pilgrim Holiness movement grew and adopted denominational structures, they and the Wesleyan Methodists began to explore options for merger. In 1968 the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Pilgrim Holiness Church formally merged to form the Wesleyan Church. By that time, the Wesleyan Methodist Church had been planted and growing in Australia for 22 years.

Meanwhile, waves of British Methodist missionaries had reached across the South Pacific and Asia, resulting in a strong Methodist heritage across the Pacific.

- Rev Samuel Leigh pioneered Methodist work in Australia from August 1815 and in New Zealand from 1818.
- Rev John Thomas & John Hutchins planted the vibrant Methodist work in Tonga in 1822.
- The Tongan church sent missionaries to Samoa in 1828.
- In 1835, David Cargill and William Cross were sent to Fiji from Tonga.
- These three nations, Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, partnering with Australian, New Zealand and British missionaries, then spearheaded Methodist outreach into Papua and New Guinea in 1875, the Solomon Islands in 1902 and Bougainville in 1916.

Key Point

Influences from American Wesleyanism still evident in our church today:

- ◇ We have a strong commitment to the equal rights of all persons, regardless of race, gender or colour. Historically, Wesleyans have been at the forefront of the abolition and suffrage movements. Ordination and leadership are open to men and women, regardless of ethnicity.
- ◇ We are committed to maintaining a balance of laity and clergy in our district and national conferences and boards. This is required to avoid the extremes of lay or clergy domination. We do not use the term “bishops”, but rather elect superintendents for defined terms of service.

- ◇ We have a strong commitment to the spread of the holiness doctrine.
- ◇ We have a growing percentage of Pacific and Asian congregations.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia

During World War II an R.A.A.F. chaplain, Rev Kingsley Ridgway, first learned of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Attracted by the testimonies of Wesleyan Methodist servicemen, he determined to learn more about the church, so wrote to North America for information. He concluded, "This is exactly what we believe and the requirements of its Discipline are based on the Scriptures throughout". Kingsley wrote to America inquiring about starting a work in Australia. On November 1, 1945, Rev K.M. Ridgway became the official representative of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australia.

The first meetings were held in Melbourne, and a movement burdened for the spreading of scriptural holiness began. The official beginning of the denomination followed at a former Church of Christ building at 561 Rathdowne Street, Carlton, on November 23-24, 1946. In 1947, "Hunting Tower", a two storey building in South Street, Glenroy was purchased for use as a national headquarters and a bible school. College classes commenced in 1949 with seven students. The college was renamed "Kingsley College" in 1973 after the Australian church's founder.

The early movement was blessed with a number of gifted and faithful leaders. The following deserve particular mention: Reverends Kingsley Ridgway, Leo Cox (USA), Robert Mattke (USA), Aubrey Carnell, and James Ridgway. Following the Mattkes' return to USA, leadership in Australia has continued to be directed through Australian personnel.

The period from 1946 to the 1970s was characterised by an intense commitment to evangelism, children's ministry and church planting. However, this was a period with a number of setbacks, with churches started and lost in Tasmania, Adelaide and Sydney. It was also marked by the continuing pioneer spirit of Rev Kingsley Ridgway, most especially in his leading a new missionary effort into the highlands of Papua New Guinea.

This new mission, started in 1961, quickly outgrew the work in Australia and now reaches to Port Moresby and Lae.

By 1982 the Australian church had developed to the point where it became necessary to divide the church into three districts under the structure of a multi-district National Conference. This structure was approved in 1982 with two provisional districts and one pioneer district, with annual District Conferences and a biennial National Conference. Rev Dr James Ridgway was appointed the first National Superintendent, serving nine years in that role while also leading the Bible College. National church leadership has been:

- Rev Dr James M Ridgway, Oct '75 to Dec '84
- Rev Dr Donald W Hardgrave, Dec '84 to May '87
- Rev Thomas J Blythe May, '87 to Jan '97
- Rev Stanley E Baker, Jan '97 to Jan '08
- Rev Lindsay L Cameron, Jan '08 to Jan '12
- Rev Rex Rigby, Jan '12 to the present

The period from the 1970s to the 1990s was characterised by rapid growth as new churches were planted and new leaders joined the denomination. By 1993 the work had grown to the extent that a fourth district was added by dividing Queensland into two districts. The rapid growth of the Australian work was influenced by several factors:

- The growing credibility of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Australia.
- Changes within the former Methodist Church of Australasia as it merged into the Uniting Church, causing many to seek a more evangelical Methodist Church. Rev Dr Don Hardgrave was especially influential as a church planter and District Superintendent in Queensland during this time.
- A growing number of ethnic groups seeking a Methodist connection in Australia. Primary amongst these has been the growth of Tongan churches within our ranks, but it is also demonstrated in the increasing number of Fijian, Samoan, Chinese, Korean and Indigenous Australian congregations.

Missionary outreach also continued to be a high priority to the Australian church, with new work started in Bougainville and the Solomon Islands in the 1990s. Furthermore, missionaries were sent to Mozambique from 1997, and a partnership with a new group in New Zealand was entered into in 2000.

Key Point

Influences from Australian development evident in our church today:

- ◇ The Australian church has worked to separate American cultural regulations from universal biblical values. The result is an expectation that church members will accept timeless principles and apply them to the world in which they live. This is reflected in the adoption of “Collective Conscience Statements” rather than membership rules. Our desire is that you will develop strong personal convictions under the direction of the Holy Spirit, founded on timeless Biblical principles and guided by historic expressions of faith.
- ◇ We are strongly committed to each member of the church experiencing the fullness of relationship with Christ through salvation and an undivided heart.
- ◇ We continue to emphasise church planting and missions.

At the commencement of the 21st century the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia has churches in seven states and territories (QLD, NSW, ACT, VIC, SA, WA, NT), with missionary presence in three countries (PNG, Solomon Islands and Mozambique). We are multi-cultural, focused and committed to growth. Together with the New Zealand, Bougainville and Solomon Islands Wesleyan Methodists, who were formed under the care of the Australian church, we achieved the status of Established Regional Conference in 2012. Under this status we no longer relate to the North American church as a mission field, but rather as an autonomous regional conference of the International Wesleyan Church. As a local church member you will be part of a dynamic movement with deep historic roots and a call to reach the South Pacific.

Our structures

The government of the Wesleyan Methodist Church incorporates democratic and constitutional values. The members vote on the call of the pastor, elect their local officers and send delegates to District Conference, which in turn elects the district officials and delegates to national and international conferences. Thus the church on all levels is governed by

direct vote or by elected delegates and each church is under the authority of a conference made up of voting delegates from local churches.

It is constitutional because the essential doctrines, principles of church government and rights and responsibilities of members and ministers are set forth in the Constitution (contained in the Handbook). The actions of all governing bodies and church officials must be in keeping with the Handbook.

An Established Local Church

- Meets as often as quarterly (sometimes bi-annually). At the Annual General Meeting the members hear reports of officers, adopt plans for the coming year and elect leadership, including church board members and delegates to District Conference.
- Votes on the call or renewal of a call to a pastor.
- Votes to receive new members (unless this task is delegated to the local church board).

The exception to this model is a Pioneer Church, which is under the direct supervision of the District Superintendent who appoints the church board in consultation with the pastor. The aim is to see growth so it will reach the minimum membership and financial viability to become established.

The Local Church Board

- The chief administrative body between members meetings, with authority to act on their behalf.
- Reports on its actions to the next members' meeting for ratification.

The Pastor serves as the spiritual shepherd and the administrative overseer of the local church. The same pattern repeats at the wider level as the District Conference is made up of delegates from churches in a geographic area.

The District Conference meets annually to:

- Hear reports, adopt plans and approve budgets for the next year.
- Elect the district officials, the members of the District Board of Administration and other important boards and committees.
- Approve ministerial candidates for licensing and for ordination.
- Elect delegates to National Conference and adopt resolutions.
- Initiate amendments to the Handbook for referral to National Conference.

The District Board of Administration functions as the chief administrative body between District Conferences. It consists of the Superintendent as chair, the Assistant Superintendent, the Secretary, the Treasurer, and several members-at-large depending upon the size of the conference. The Superintendent is to the district what the Pastor is to the local church - spiritual shepherd and administrative overseer.

The National Conference is held every four years to deal with those matters affecting the church throughout Australia and internationally. It meets to:

- Hear reports, adopt plans and approve a budget for its work.
- Elect officials and members of the National Board of Administration and other important boards and committees.
- Elect delegates to International Conference meeting every four years.

The National Board of Administration functions as the chief administrative body between National Conferences. It consists of the Superintendent as chair, the Assistant Superintendent, the Secretary, the Treasurer, the District Superintendents and other members elected by National Conference. It meets twice each year. The National Superintendent is to the national church what the Pastor is to the local church - spiritual shepherd and administrative overseer.

The Regional Conference is venue for fellowship and cooperation between the various Wesleyan Methodist National Conferences in the South Pacific. The Regional Conference usually meets once each four years alongside one of the national church events. The inaugural South Pacific Regional Conference was held in Brisbane, Australia on 24th and 25th August 2012.

The International Conference is the chief governing body of the Wesleyan Church worldwide. It meets every four years to receive reports from the entire denomination and to elect officials. The International Conference has two primary responsibilities: to ensure adherence to the Articles of Religion worldwide and to review and approve changes to membership requirements in various countries. Changes to the Articles of Religion must be approved by a two-thirds vote of the various conferences worldwide.

Ministries within Australia

The Wesleyan Methodist Church operates many ministries for specialised groups. These include WW (Wesleyan Women), Wesleyan Men, Young Adults International and WY (Wesleyan Youth). A varied camping program is undertaken throughout the year.

The formal training of our pastors and laymen takes place under the oversight of the National Board of Ministerial Development. This is achieved through undergraduate studies at various colleges approved by the National Board of Administration and through a vocational education program operating from many local Wesleyan Methodist churches across the country.

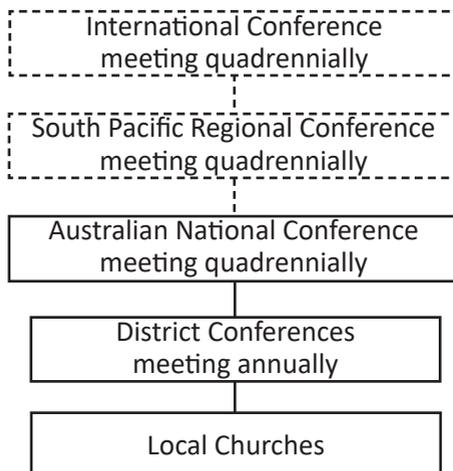
The Australian Wesleyan is our official magazine and is produced quarterly. Other publications include the Wesleyan Life magazine which is produced in the United States of America.

Overseas Missions

When you join a local Wesleyan Methodist Church you become part of a much larger community of believers who together carry on a world wide ministry. Wesleyan World Missions are currently supporting around 200 missionaries working in more than 90 countries. The Australian church has a long history of missionary work, primarily in the Pacific region. These include:

- Starting the Wesleyan Church in Papua New Guinea in 1961,
- Starting the Wesleyan Church in Bougainville in 1996,
- Starting the Wesleyan Church in the Solomon Islands in 1997,
- Facilitating the commencement of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in New Zealand in 2000, and
- Sending missionaries to the Wesleyan work in Mozambique since 1997.

The organisational chart for the Wesleyan Methodist Church includes these elements:



FURTHER THOUGHT

1. Briefly describe the journey that brought you to this point.

2. John Wesley had been going to church for years, but he still did not know God. He was trained as a priest and had served as a missionary, but he had no assurance that he was going to heaven.

» Do you have assurance that you would go to heaven if you were to die today?

» How can we have such confidence? Would you be able to explain your confidence to someone who does not know Jesus?

» If you are not currently involved in a weekly Bible study, ask your pastor to place you in a study group. This weekly meeting will help you to grow spiritually and provide you with a network of prayer support as you continue to share your faith.

3. Which parts of Wesleyan Methodist history strike you as most interesting? Have you seen any of the historic influences in your congregation?

Belonging

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

CHAPTER 3 DOCTRINES AND COMMITMENTS

*It makes us who we are
The Articles of Religion
Three commitments of membership
The Filter Questions*

FURTHER THOUGHT

DOCTRINES AND COMMITMENTS

It makes us who we are

Our theological statements are at the core of our existence as an Australian church and as a world-wide movement. Wesleyans from around the world agree to 21 statements of faith. It is what makes us who we are. There are many different styles of worship in our extended family and there are differing lifestyle regulations for different cultures, but our doctrines remain the same. You can go to the Wesleyan Church in North America, the Pilgrim Wesleyan Church in Zambia, La Iglesia Wesleyana de Colombia, Yayasan Gereja Wesleyan Indonesia or the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia and you will find the same doctrinal statements. It is what makes us who we are.

There are many different styles of worship in our extended family and there are differing lifestyle regulations for different cultures, but our doctrines remain the same... It is what makes us who we are.

Our doctrinal statements are called the Articles of Religion. They identify us as an evangelical Protestant church committed to orthodox Christianity, the integrity of the Bible, evangelism and holiness of heart.

Key Point

Candidates for covenant membership shall declare their agreement with the following summary of the Articles of Religion:

HANDBOOK
para 154

1. We believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We believe that Jesus Christ the Son suffered in our place on the cross, that he died but rose again, that he now sits at the Father's right hand until he returns to judge all people at the last day.
2. We believe in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

3. We believe that by the grace of God every person has the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and that those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified by faith.

4. We believe that God not only counts believers as righteous, but that he makes them righteous, freeing them of sin's dominion at conversion, purifying their hearts by faith and perfecting them in love at entire sanctification, and providing for their growth in grace at every stage of their spiritual life, enabling them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live a victorious life.

The full text of the Articles of Religion is below. Review these Articles and note which one you would like to discuss further.

The Articles of Religion

HANDBOOK
para 103-126

1. Faith in the Holy Trinity

We believe in the one living and true God, both holy and loving, eternal, unlimited in power, wisdom, and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things. Within this unity there are three persons of one essential nature, power, and eternity – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Gen 1:1; Ex 3:13-15, 33:20; Deut 6:4; Ps 90:2; Isa 40:28-29; Matt 3:16-17, 28:19; Jn 1:1-2, 4:24, 16:13, 17:3; Acts 5:3-4, 17:24-25; I Cor 8:4, 6; Eph 2:18; Phil 2:6; Col 1:16-17; I Tim 1:17; Heb 1:8; 1 Jn 5:20.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

2. The Father

We believe the Father is the source of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, he made man in his image. By intention he relates to man as Father, thereby forever declaring his goodwill toward man. In love, he both seeks and receives penitent sinners.

Ps 68:5; Isa 64:8; Matt 7:11; Jn 3:17; Rom 8:15; I Pet 1:17.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

3. *The Son of God*

We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, truly God and truly man. He died on the cross and was buried, to be a sacrifice both for original sin and for all the transgressions of men, and to reconcile us to God. Christ rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until he returns to judge all men at the last day.

Ps 16:8-10; Matt 1:21, 23, 11:27; 16:28; 27:62-66, 28:5-9, 16-17; Mk 10:45; 15, 16:6-7; Lu 1:27, 31, 35, 24:4-8, 23; Jn 1:1, 14, 18, 3:16-17, 20:26-29, 21; Acts 1:2-3, 2:24-31, 4:12, 10:40; Rom 5:10, 18, 8:34, 14:9; I Cor 15:3-8, 14; II Cor 5:18-19; Gal 1:4, 2:20, 4:4-5; Eph 5:2; I Tim 1:15; Heb 2:17, 7:27, 9:14, 28, 10:12, 13:20; I Pet 2:24; I Jn 2:2, 4:14.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

4. *The Holy Spirit*

We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory, as the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. He is the Administrator of grace to all mankind, and is particularly the effective Agent in conviction for sin, in regeneration, in sanctification, and in glorification. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer.

Job 33:4; Matt 28:19; Jn 4:24; 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13-15; Acts 5:3-4; Rom 8:9; II Cor 3:17; Gal 4:6.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

5. *The Sufficiency and Full Authority of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation*

We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures. They are the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority, and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. We believe that they contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. Both in the Old and New Testaments life is offered to mankind ultimately through Christ, who is the only Mediator

between God and man. The New Testament teaches Christians how to fulfil the moral principles of the Old Testament, calling for loving obedience to God made possible by the indwelling presence of his Holy Spirit.

The canonical books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The canonical books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, and Revelation.

Ps 19:7; Matt 5:17-19; 22:37-40; Lu 24:27, 44; Jn 1:45; 5:46; 17:17; Acts 17:2, 11; Rom 1:2; 15:4, 8; 16:26; II Cor 1:20; Gal 1:8; Eph 2:15-16; I Tim 2:5; II Tim 3:15-17; Heb 4:12; 10:1; 11:39; Js 1:21; I Pet 1:23; I Pet 1:19-21; 1 Jn 2:3-7; Rev 22:18-19.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

6. God's Purpose for Man

We believe that the two great commandments which require us to love the Lord our God with all the heart, and our neighbours as ourselves, summarise the divine law as it is revealed in the Scriptures. They are the perfect measure and norm of human duty, both for the ordering and directing of families and nations, and all other social bodies, and for individual acts, by which we are required to acknowledge God as our only Supreme Ruler, and all men as created by him, equal in all natural rights. Therefore all men should so order all their individual, social, and political acts as to give to God entire and absolute obedience, and to assure to all men the enjoyment of every natural right, as well as to promote the fulfilment of each in the possession and exercise of such rights.

Lev 19:18, 34; Deut 1:16-17; Job 31: 13-14; Jer 21:12; 22:3; Mic 6:8; Matt 5:44-48; 7:12; Mk 12:28-31; Lu 6:27-29, 35; Jn 13:34-35; Acts 10:34-35; 17:26; Rom 12:9; 13:1, 7-8, 10; Gal 5:14; 6:10; Tit 3:1; Js 2:8; I Pet 2:17; I Jn 2:5; 4:12-13; II Jn 6.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

7. Marriage and the Family

We believe that man is created in the image of God, that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger whole, and fulfilment. God's Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for his relationship with his covenant people and for revealing the truth that that relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore God's plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship which is divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a covenant union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship.

Gen 1:27-28; 2:18, 20, 23, 24; Isa 54: 4-8; 62:5b; Jer 3:14; Eze 16:3ff.; Hos 2; Mal 2:14; Matt 19:4-6; Mk 10:9; Jn 2:1-2, 11; I Tim 5:14; I Cor 9:5; Eph 5:23-32; Heb 13:4; Rev 19:7-8.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

8. Man's Choice

We believe that man's creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus man was made morally responsible for his choices. But since the fall of Adam, man is unable in his own strength to do the right. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of every man, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature is continually inclined to evil. He cannot of himself even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what man in himself cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all men, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.

Gen 6:5; 8:21; Deut 30:19; Josh 24:15; I Kings 20:40; Ps 51:5; Isa 64:6; Jer 17:9; Mk 7:21-23; Lu 16:15; Jn 7:17; Rom 3:10- 12; 5:12-21; I Cor 15:22; Eph 2:1-3; I Tim 2:5; Tit 3:5; Heb 11:6; Rev 22:17.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

9. The Atonement

We believe that Christ's offering of himself, once and for all, through his sufferings and meritorious death on the cross, provides the perfect redemption and atonement for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual. There is no other ground of salvation from sin but that alone. This atonement is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. It is unconditionally effective in the salvation of those mentally incompetent from birth, of those converted persons who have become mentally incompetent, and of children under the age of accountability. But it is effective for the salvation of those who reach the age of accountability only when they repent and exercise faith in Christ.

Isa 52:13-53:12; Lu 24:46-47; Jn 3:16; Acts 3:18; 4:12; Rom 3:20, 24-26; 5:8-11,13,18-20; 7:7; 8:34; I Cor 6:11; 15:22; Gal 2:16; 3:2-3; Eph 1:7; 2:13, 16; I Tim 2:5-6; Heb 7:23-27; 9:11-15, 24-28; 10:14; I Jn 2:2; 4:10.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

10. Repentance and Faith

We believe that for man to appropriate what God's prevenient grace has made possible, he must voluntarily respond in repentance and faith. The ability comes from God, but the act is man's.

Repentance is prompted by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It involves a wilful change of mind that renounces sin and longs for righteousness, a godly sorrow for and a confession of past sins, proper restitution for wrongdoings, and a resolution to reform the life. Repentance is the precondition for saving faith, and without it saving faith is impossible. Faith, in turn, is the only condition of salvation. It begins in the agreement of the mind and the consent of the will to the truth of the gospel, but issues in a complete reliance by the whole person in the saving ability of Jesus Christ and a complete trusting of oneself to him as Saviour and Lord. Saving faith is expressed in a public acknowledgement of his Lordship and identification with his church.

Mk 1:15; Lu 5:32; 13:3; 24:47; Jn 3:16; 17:20; 20:31; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 11:18; 16:31; 20:21; 26:20; Rom 1:16; 2:4; 10:8-10,17; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:8; 4:4-6; Phil 3:9; II Thess 2:13; II Tim 2:25; Heb 11:6; 12:2; I Pet 1:9; II Pet 3:9.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

11. Justification and Regeneration

We believe that when man repents of his sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, he in the same moment is justified, regenerated, adopted into the family of God, and assured of his salvation through the witness of the Spirit.

We believe that we are accounted righteous before God only on the basis of the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, being justified by faith alone, and not on the basis of our own works.

We believe that regeneration is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the pardoned sinner becomes a child of God. This new life is received through faith in Jesus Christ, and by it the regenerate is delivered from the power of sin which reigns over all the unregenerate, so that they love God and through grace serve him with the will and affections of the heart, receiving the Spirit of Adoption.

Justification: Hab 2:4; Acts 13:38-39; 15:11; 16:31; Rom 1:17; 3:28; 4:2-5; 5:1-2; Gal 3:6-14; Eph 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; Heb 10:38.

Regeneration: Jn 1:12-13; 3:3; 5-8; 11 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:5, 10, 19; 4:24; Col 3:10; Tit 3:5; Js 1:18; I Pet 1:3-4; II Pet 1:4; I John 3:1.

Adoption: Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5, 7; Eph 1:5.

Witness of the Spirit: Rom 8:16-17; Gal 4:6; Jn 2:3; 3:14; 18-19.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

12. Good Works

We believe that although good works cannot save us from our sins or from God's judgement, they are the fruit of faith and follow after regeneration. Therefore they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and by them a living faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

Matt 5:16; 7:16-20; Jn 15:8; Rom 3:20; 4:2, 4:6; Gal 2:16; 5:6; Eph 2:10; Phil 1:11; Col 1:10; I Thess 1:3; Tit 2:14; 3:5; Js 2:18, 22; I Pet 2:9, 12.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

13. Sin after Regeneration

We believe that after we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to fall into sin, for in this life there is no such height or strength of holiness from which it is impossible to fall. But by the grace of God one who has fallen into sin may by true repentance and faith find forgiveness and restoration.

Mal 3:7; Matt 18:21-22; Jn 15:4-6; I Tim 4:1, 16; Heb 10:35-39; I Jn 1:9; 2:1, 24-25.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

14. Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire

We believe that sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is separated from sin unto God and is enabled to love God with all his heart and to walk in all his holy commandments blameless. Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God. This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when the believer presents himself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin. The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers him for effective service. It is followed by lifelong growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. The life of holiness continues through faith in the sanctifying blood of Christ and evidences itself by loving obedience to God's revealed will.

Gen 17:1; Deut 30:6; Ps 130:8; Isa 6:1-6; Eze 36:25-29; Matt 5:8, 48; Lu 1:74-75; 3:16-17; 24:49; Jn 17:1-26; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4; 15:8-9; 26:18; Rom 8:3-4; I Cor 1:2; 6:11; II Cor 7:1; Eph 4:13, 24; 5:25-27; I Thess 3:10, 12-13; 4:3, 7-8; 5:23-24; II Thess 2:13; Tit 2:11-14; Heb 10:14; 12:14; 13:12; Js 3:17-18; 4:8; I Pet 1:2; II Pet 1:4; I Jn 1:7, 9; 3:8-9; 4:17-18; Jude 24.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

15. The Gifts of the Spirit

We believe that the Gift of the Holy Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself, and he is to be desired more than the gifts of the Spirit which he in his wise counsel bestows upon individual members of the Church to enable them

properly to fulfil their function as members of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit, although not always identifiable with natural abilities, function through them for the edification of the whole church. These gifts are to be exercised in love under the administration of the Lord of the church, not through human volition. The relative value of the gifts of the Spirit is to be tested by their usefulness in the church and not by the ecstasy produced in the ones receiving them.

Lu 11:13; 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:38-39; 8:19-20; 10:45; 11:17; Rom 12:4-8; I Cor 12:1-14:40; Eph 4:7-8, 11-16; Heb 2:4; 13:20-21; I Pet 4:8-11.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

16. The Church

We believe that the Christian Church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only Head of the Church. The Church includes both those believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those who remain on the earth, having renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and having dedicated themselves to the work which Christ committed unto his Church until he comes. The Church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body of believers formally organised on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship, and worship. The Wesleyan Methodist Church is a denomination consisting of those members within district conferences and local churches who, as members of the body of Christ, hold the faith set forth in these Articles of Religion and acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of its governing bodies.

Matt 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:41-47; 9:31; 11:22; 12:5; 14:23; 15:22; 20:28; I Cor 1:2; 12:28; 16:1; II Cor 1:1; Gal 1:2; Eph 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:9-10, 21; 5:22-33; Col. 1:18, 24; I Thess 1:1; II Thess 1:1; I Tim 3:15; Heb 12:23; Js 5:14.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

17. The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the Church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are tokens of our profession of Christian faith

and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, he works within us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith.

We believe that water baptism is a sacrament of the Church, commanded by our Lord and administered to believers. It is a symbol of the new covenant of grace and signifies acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ. By means of this sacrament, believers declare their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour.

Matt 3:13-17; 28:19; Mk 1:9-11; Jn 3:5, 22, 26; 4:1-2; Acts 2:38-39, 41; 8:12-17, 36-38; 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Rom 2:28-29; 4:11; 6:3-4; I Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-29; Col 2:11-12; Tit 3:5.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death and of our hope in his victorious return, as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other. To such as receive it humbly, with a proper spirit and by faith, the Lord's Supper is made a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.

Matt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lu 22:19-20; Jn 6:48-58; I Cor 5:7-8; 10:3-4, 16-17; 11:23-29.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

18. The Second Coming of Christ

We believe that the certainty of the personal and imminent return of Christ inspires holy living and zeal for the evangelisation of the world. At his return he will fulfil all prophecies made concerning his final and complete triumph over evil.

Job 19:25-27; Isa 11:1-12; Zech 14:1-11; Matt 24:1-51; 25; 26:64; Mk 13:1-37; Lu 17:22-37; 21:5-36; Jn 14:1-3; Acts 1:6-11; I Cor 1:7-8; I Thess 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23; II Thess 1:6-10; 2:1-12; Tit 2:11-14; Heb 9:27-28; Js 5:7-8; II Pet 3:1-14; I Jn 3:2-3; Rev 1:7; 19:11-16; 22:6-7, 12, 20.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

19. The Resurrection of the Dead

We believe in the bodily resurrection from the dead of all mankind – of the just unto the resurrection of life, and of the unjust unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection which will occur at Christ’s Second Coming. The raised body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable.

Job 19:25-27; Dan 12:2; Matt 22:30-32; 28:1-20; Mk 16:1-8; Lu 14:14; 24:1-53; Jn 5:28-29; 11:21-27; 20:1--21:25; Acts 1:3; Rom 8:11; I Cor 6:14; 15:1-58; II Cor 4:14; 5:1-11; I Thess 4:13-17; Rev 20:4-6, 11-13.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

20. The Judgement of Mankind

We believe that the Scriptures reveal God as the Judge of all mankind and the acts of his judgement are based on his omniscience and eternal justice. His administration of judgement will culminate in the final meeting of mankind before his throne of great majesty and power, where records will be examined and final rewards and punishments will be administered.

Eccl 12:14; Matt 10:15; 25:31-46; Lu 11:31-32; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 2:16; 14:10-12; II Cor 5:10; II Tim 4:1; Heb 9:27; II Pet 3:7; Rev 20:11-13.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

21. Destiny

We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that there is a conscious personal existence after death. The final destiny of man is determined by God’s grace and man’s response, evidenced inevitably by his moral character which results from his personal and volitional choices and not from any arbitrary decree of God. Heaven with its eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ’s presence is the final abode of those who choose the salvation which God provides through Jesus Christ, but hell with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who neglect this great salvation.

Dan 12:2; Matt 25:34-46; Mk 9:43-48; Lu 13:3; Jn 8:21-23; 14:2-3; II Cor 5:6, 8, 10; Heb 2:1-3; 9:27-28; 10:26-31; Rev 20:14-15; 21:1-22:5, 14-15.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

Three commitments of membership

While the Church acknowledges that acceptance of the gift of God's forgiveness and grace incorporates the believer into the family of God, it also acknowledges the need for an ongoing commitment to growth and a set of agreed principles to follow as a group.

1) A commitment to Christ and baptism:

Without an acceptance of the consequences of sin (Romans 6:23), and the remedy for it (Acts 3:19), it is impossible to have a relationship with God or be a member of the Church Universal. Therefore, these are essential for membership in the local church. This is witnessed by the act of baptism. Baptism signifies new life, cleansing and receiving of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is an outward act signifying what has already taken place in your life. Salvation and baptism are essential for covenant membership.

2) A commitment to ongoing spiritual growth:

HANDBOOK
para 134

In the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20) Jesus called his followers to go and make disciples. While this involves evangelism it includes much more. The concept of discipleship was to produce followers who were just like their Master – followers who were hard to distinguish from the One they followed. The implication for the Church is profound. It is our goal as a Church and as individuals to become more like Christ.

The following are some measurable ways to demonstrate growth towards Christ-likeness, and are Minimal Commitments for membership in our church:

1. To regularly attend church and to live in fellowship with those who attend.
2. To use your talents and spiritual gifts to serve in and through the church.
3. To use your time carefully and responsibly in order to maximise your spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical well-being, including the principle of one day's rest in seven.
4. To use your material wealth wisely, giving due consideration to the Biblical principle of tithing into the work of the local church and to giving to those in need.

5. To read and study God's word, worship him, take the Lord's Supper, pray, and to fast when necessary.
6. To abstain from all forms of spiritism, such as witchcraft, astrology and the like, and to refuse membership in any secret society.
7. Not to hold membership in another church while a member of this church.
8. To abide by the Scriptural teaching regarding marriage. This includes the affirmation that heterosexual monogamy is God's plan for marriage and that any sex outside of marriage is sinful. We believe however that the grace of God is sufficient to overcome both the practice of such activity and the propensity leading to such practices.

3) A commitment to a life guided by the Spirit's power and the Word of God: To assist Christians in holy living and to enable a lifestyle of growth the following set of questions are provided to help guide you in your consideration of what is appropriate for a Spirit-led Christ-like life.

Key Point

The Filter Questions

HANDBOOK
para.135

- a) Is the action **helpful**, beneficial or constructive for me?
 - Does the action contravene any clear teaching of Scripture?
 - Does the Scripture speak to the issue at hand to offer me protection from harm?
 - Does it cause me to grow spiritually or help others grow?
 - Does the action pull me away from God or draw me to him?
 - Does the action make me less interested in spiritual things?
- b) Is the action a **habit**?
 - Is it an addictive behaviour?
 - Does it hold me in its power?
 - Do I feel that I need this to be happy and fulfilled?
 - Does it control my thoughts or actions?
 - Does the action keep me from being fully engaged as a human being?
 - Does it impair my judgement or cloud my thinking?
 - Does it stop me being in charge of all my faculties?
 - Does it control me or am I in control?

- c) Is the action **hurtful** for myself or for another person?
- Does the action violate what I experience as my conscience?
 - Do I feel that it is wrong in my spirit?
 - If it passes my conscience will doing it hurt someone else and cause them to be tempted to go against their conscience?
 - Is it hurtful for a non-Christian?
 - Could my behaviour cause a non-Christian to ignore the gospel or disregard Christ?
- d) Is the action **honouring** to God?
- Glorifying God means to give God his rightful place, to please him by seeking his interests. In doing it, would I bring glory to God or dishonour to him?
 - Does the action identify you as a follower of Christ or of the world?
 - Will it make you more *of* the world rather than simply *in* it?

A commitment to living a life guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in the light of the Filter Questions and the Collective Conscience Statements is at the heart of church membership.

FURTHER THOUGHT

Which Articles of Religion are of special interest to you, and why?

In what way is baptism a “symbol” and in what way is it a “means of grace”? (Article 17)

Belonging

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

CHAPTER 4 **THE EXAMPLE OF OTHER BELIEVERS**

Collective Conscience Statements
Developing Godly convictions

FURTHER THOUGHT

THE EXAMPLE OF OTHER BELIEVERS

Collective Conscience Statements

Key Point

All believers are guided by the Holy Spirit and by the Bible as they seek to live a blameless lifestyle and to grow in Christlike attitudes. One great asset in this learning experience is the example of other believers; both those in the church today and those who have lived in years past. The convictions that the Spirit led us to adopt in past years are listed as the Collective Conscience Statements. These are not presented to you as *rules* for membership, but they are presented to you as proven Biblical recommendations and you are asked to carefully consider the wisdom of these historic statements.

You probably already agree with many of the Collective Conscience Statements because of your own convictions. HANDBOOK
para 187-198:

You may have reservations about some of the statements though, and simply submitting to these without thinking through the issues might put you at risk of following man-made rules. Therefore, we ask you to read through the Collective Conscience Statements and mark those statements which particularly interest you, or even bother you. Discuss those issues with your study leader.

The statements below are contained in the Handbook, paragraphs 187-198. *Additional notes on some statements are added in Appendix A.*

A. Christian Social Concern

These statements represent convictions reflecting the collective conscience of the members, ministers and officials of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and provide guidelines for bearing public testimony on the issues discussed.

1) Gambling.

We believe that gambling violates the principle of Christian Stewardship and the tenth commandment; is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive; can be a poor example to others of how to manage the resources of God or trust in God's provision; appeals to greed; endangers families; lowers socio-economic standards and self esteem; engenders false hope; and is exploitative. We believe that abstinence is the best Christian response to gambling in all its forms.

Ex 20:17; Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 6:12.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

2) Substance Abuse.

Christians are to regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. While no 'thing' of itself is sinful, the Christian should avoid the use of anything which would damage the body, undermine the fellowship of the church, hinder the believer from reaching his/her full potential in Christ, enslave him/her (1 Cor 6:12) or become a stumbling block to the young in age or faith (1 Cor 8:9,13).

The consequences to society stemming from the abuse of substances such as alcohol, tobacco, other harmful drugs and substances are of major concern because of their impact on the spiritual character and nature of individuals and society. These include family breakdown, increased violence and violent crime, increased property crime, and the destruction of the individual caught by the power of addiction.

In the light of the overwhelming evidence of damage to society and the spiritual health of the individual by the abuse of such substances we deplore the industry created by the production of these substances and believe that even where these substances are legalised – total abstinence is the appropriate response.

Eph 5:15-18; Prov 23:31-32; Prov 31:4.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

** Further notes on the use of alcohol and kava can be found in Appendix A.*

3) Gifts of the Spirit.

We believe that every believer receives at least one spiritual gift. These spiritual gifts are given for the common good of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7). The following passages list the best known gifts:

Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 12:8-10; Eph 4:11-13; and 1 Pet 4:8-11.

We believe that all spiritual gifts should be exercised in the light of Biblical truth. We encourage believers to seek in every way to live and serve the Lord in the fullness of and under the control of the Holy Spirit in the Church.

In regard to the gift of tongues, we believe in the miraculous use of languages and the interpretation of languages in the biblical and historical setting. We believe that it is contrary to the explicit teaching of the Word of God to teach that speaking in an unknown tongue or the gift of tongues is the evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We also believe that the distinction between the gift of languages as described in Acts and the use of an ecstatic prayer language is not clear from Scripture or from patterns of established historical usage in the Church. In response to this the use of such a prayer language shall not be promoted among us.

Acts 8:14-17; 1 Cor 12:1-14:40; Gal 5:22-24.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

** Further notes on gifts of the Spirit can be found in Appendix A.*

4) Equal Rights.

We uphold the right of all individuals to equal opportunity politically, economically and religiously, and pledge ourselves to an active effort to bring about the possession of dignity and happiness by all people everywhere

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

5) Peace.

Knowing that war results in great suffering for the bodies, minds and souls of men and women, staggering economic loss with its legacy of debt for future generations, and the unleashing of the baser passions of life, we urge that persons and nations seek by every legitimate means to avoid armed conflict among the peoples and nations of the world. We also urge that

holy people everywhere pray earnestly for those in authority, so that peace may prevail (1 Tim 2:2), and for the quick return of the Prince of Peace.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

6) Military Service.

We teach respect for properly constituted civil authority and the proper loyalty to one's country. We recognise the responsibility of the individual to answer the call of government and to enter into military service. However, there are those within the fellowship of our Church who believe that military service is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and that their consciences are violated by being compelled to take part in such. We will therefore lend moral support to any member who asks and claims exemption by legal processes from military service as a sincere conscientious objector and who asks to serve one's country as a non-combatant.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

7) Divorce and Remarriage.

On the basis of careful study of the Scriptures we teach the following with reference to divorce and remarriage after divorce:

- a) That heterosexual monogamy is God's plan for marriage, and we regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behaviour, bestiality, or incest as the only biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counselling has failed to restore the relationship (Ex 20:14, 17, 22:19; Lev 20:10-16; Matt 5:32, 19:19; Mk 10:11-12; Lu 16:18).
- b) To obtain a divorce on other than scriptural grounds is a sin against God and humanity. Such separation of what God has joined is a direct and deliberate act of disobedience against both the Law and the Gospel. It separates one from God and subjects a member to church discipline.
- c) However, recognising the fallen state of humanity, divorce has been recognised in the Scriptures as a valid and permanent dissolution of marriage with all its rights and responsibilities. Divorce is not reversible. There is no way to "restore" a dissolved marriage. The divorced (unmarried) status can be changed only by a new marriage to the same person or another person. No divorced and remarried person has two spouses--only a former spouse and a present spouse, as in Deut 24:1-4 and 1 Cor 7.

d) Divorce, however sinful the act and however serious the consequences, is not “unpardonable.” A redeemed sinner or reclaimed backslider is free to marry or remain unmarried. The one exception to this freedom of choice is mentioned by the Apostle Paul. It is a believer who disobeys the commandment of God and puts away a believing spouse. That person must remain unmarried to leave room for reconciliation to the spouse (1 Cor 7).

e) The right to remarry in no way excuses the sin of divorce. It only implies that the Church must forgive and restore those whom the Lord forgives and restores. No matter what the consequences of the sin may be, no further penalty or penance can be applied.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

8) The Lord’s Day.

We believe that one day’s rest in seven is a fundamental principle for spiritual, mental and physical well being. We also believe that the regular gathering together for collective worship is an important aspect of spiritual health and growth. Therefore, in spite of the trends of contemporary society to completely secularise Sunday, the Lord’s Day, we counsel people not to neglect gathering for collective worship and to observe a day of rest each week. We support the choice of our members not to be engaged in secular employment on Sunday.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

9) Religion in Public Life.

Believing that it is possible to allow recognition of God and the invoking of his aid in public functions without violating the Australian Constitution, we advocate the enactment of suitable legislation by all levels of government which will strengthen the present provision for the free exercise of religion in national life and allow reference to, or the invoking of the aid of God, in any governmental or public document, proceeding, activity, ceremony or institution. We further affirm our belief in the school’s duty to do full justice to the large place of the Judeo-Christian tradition in our heritage, and our conviction that the Bible is an appropriate book for reading in schools and that the right of students to pray should not be abridged.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

10) School Activities.

We believe that Christian parents have the right and responsibility to determine what is appropriate education for their children according to their conscience. Members and adherents are encouraged to test the education their children are receiving in accordance with Biblical principles and to strive for true excellence in the education provided for all children. In the light of this we maintain the right of our members to seek exemption from participation by their children in all matters that are contrary to scriptural doctrines and principles as expressed in the articles of religion, membership commitments, or elementary principles of our church, without prejudice to academic standing.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

11) Judicial Oaths.

We reserve for our members the right to affirm the truth in testimony before the civil and criminal courts rather than to engage in a judicial oath.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

12) Sanctity of Life.

We seek to recognise and preserve the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and, thus, we are opposed to the use of induced abortion, euthanasia and Embryonic Stem Cell Research. However we recognise that there may be rare pregnancies where there are grave medical conditions threatening the life of the mother, which could raise a serious question about taking the life of the unborn child. In such a case, a decision should be made only after very prayerful consideration following medical and spiritual counselling. We believe that every life is precious to God. Therefore we are also opposed to causing the death of the elderly, deformed, disabled, or terminally ill for the sake of convenience or because their life is not considered worthwhile. We encourage our members to become informed about the issues of abortion and euthanasia as well as becoming actively involved locally and nationally in the preparation and passage of appropriate legislation guaranteeing protection of life under law.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

13) Appropriate Use of Media.

We believe that our members should exercise responsible stewardship of their leisure time. This will include careful regulation of the use in the home of all forms of media and communication where they feature the cheapening of human life, the excessively violent, and the sexually explicit and pornographic so as to honour the sentiment of Philippians 4:8 and to avoid addictive behaviour.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

14) Parent-Child Relationships

We believe that children are not the property of the State, but rightly belong in their parents care and remain under their care and responsibility in accordance with God's Word in every respect until they reach adult-hood. Parents are encouraged to invest appropriately in the spiritual, social and physical lives of their children in order to raise well-adjusted and morally responsible members of society.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

15) Social Holiness.

We believe our members should be active in witnessing against social evils by appropriate forms of influence. This includes the following:

- a) Refusal to participate in inappropriate activities and events
- b) Positive and proactive involvement in welfare and the community
- c) Activities that exert appropriate influence on society and government

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

B. Christian Worship and Fellowship

16) Rites and Ceremonies of Churches.

True religion does not consist in any ritual observances such as forms or ceremonies, even of the most excellent kind, be they ever so decent and significant, ever so expressive of inward things. The religion of Christ rises infinitely higher and lies infinitely deeper than all these. Let no man conceive that rites and ceremonies have any intrinsic worth, or that true worship cannot subsist without them. Therefore, it is not necessary that rites and

ceremonies should in all places be the same or exactly alike, for they have always been different and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and customs, provided that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Acts 15:10, 28-29; Rom 14:2-6, 15, 17, 21; 1 Cor 1:10, 12:25, 14:26; II Cor 13:11; Gal 5:1, 13; Col 2:16-17; II Thess 3:6, 14; I Tim 1:4, 6; I Peter 2:16.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

17) Healing.

The truth that Jesus is both able and willing to heal the bodies as well as the souls of men, whenever such healing is for his glory, is clearly set forth in God's Word and attested by the experience of many of his people at the present day. Prayer for healing according to the pattern set forth in the Scriptures shall be encouraged.

Js 5:14-16; Matt 10:8; Lu 9:2, 10:9; Acts 4:10, 14; I Cor 12:9, 28.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

18) Christian Liberty.

Christ, through his death on the cross, has freed his followers from sin and from bondage to the law. The Christian is "called unto liberty" (Gal 5:13), and is not under the law as a means of salvation. He is rather exhorted, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Gal 5:1).

This liberty, however, is not to be construed as licence (Gal 5:13). Rather, love for Christ constrains the Christian to live righteously and holily as God demands. By the Spirit of God, his laws are written on the heart (Heb 8:10). So the Christian resists evil and cleaves to the good, not in order to be saved, but because he has been saved.

Within the bounds of Christian liberty, there will be differences of opinion. In such cases, the believer seeks to avoid offending a brother. The stronger brother is mindful of the opinions of the one with the weaker conscience (I Cor 8 and 10), and is careful not to put a stumbling block in a brother's way (I Cor 10:24; Gal 5:13). On the other hand, the weak does not criticise the strong (I Cor 10:29-30), for the conscience of the weak may need instruction.

The recognition and exercise of that liberty which Christ affords will glorify God and promote the unity of the Church.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

19) Christian Unity.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church is fully committed to that true Christian unity which is based on scriptural truth and the fellowship of the Spirit, and deplores the separation or division of Christian brethren over peripheral and nonessential matters. While the Wesleyan Methodist Church opposes the building of one all-inclusive ecclesiastical organisation which regards neither scriptural doctrine nor practice, it welcomes fellowship with those who are committed to the same doctrines and standards of holy living, and co-operation across denominational lines with those who hold the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion revealed in the Bible.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

C. Christian Stewardship

20) Meaning of Stewardship.

The Scriptures teach that God is the owner of all persons and all things, that men are his stewards of both life and possessions, that God's ownership and man's stewardship ought to be acknowledged, and that men shall be held personally accountable to God for the exercise of their stewardship. God, as a God of system and order in all of his ways, has established a system of giving which acknowledges his ownership and man's stewardship. To this end all his children should faithfully tithe and present offerings for the support of the gospel.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

21) Storehouse Tithing.

Storehouse tithing is a scriptural and practical performance of faithfully and regularly placing the tithe into that church to which the member belongs. Therefore, the financing of the church shall be based on the plan of storehouse tithing, and the Wesleyan Methodist Church shall be regarded by all its people as the storehouse. All who are a part of the Wesleyan Methodist Church are urged to contribute faithfully one-tenth of all their

increase as a minimum financial obligation to the Lord and freewill offerings in addition as God has prospered them.

Gen 14:20, 28:22; Lev 27:30-32; Deut 14:22; Prov 3:9-10, 11:24-25; Mal 3:10-11; Matt 23:23; Acts 4:34-35, 6:1-3; I Cor 16:2; II Cor 8:13-14; Heb 7:1-2, 6, 9.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

22) Methods of Fund Raising.

In the light of the scriptural teaching concerning the giving of tithes and offerings for the support of the gospel, and for the erection of church buildings, no Wesleyan Methodist Church should engage in any method of fund raising which would detract from these principles, hinder the gospel message, sully the name of the Church, discriminate against the poor, or misdirect the people's energies from promoting the gospel.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

23) Wills, Bequests, and Annuities.

It is essential in the exercise of Christian stewardship that careful thought be given as to what shall be done with one's estate after death. Civil laws often do not provide for the distribution of an estate in such a way as to glorify God. Each Christian should give careful attention to the preparation of his last will and testament in a careful and legal manner, and the Wesleyan Methodist Church and its various ministries through the local church, the district, world missions, extension and evangelism, education, and benevolences are recommended for consideration.

I agree

I would like to discuss this more

Developing Godly convictions

Key Point

The Bible has some very strong warnings for those who accept religious rules from others. The Apostle Paul warns that “Christ will be of no value to you at all” if you try to be righteous by keeping church regulations (Galatians 5:2). However, Paul goes on to warn that this freedom from rules is not an excuse to live in sin or worldliness. He warns that, while you were called to be free, “do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13). When you arrive at your own conclusions, under the leading of the Spirit, the Bible, the church family, logic and experience, you will be much stronger. You will no longer submit to other people’s *rules*, but will be guided by your own Christian *convictions*.

Some differences between rules and convictions:

RULES

- Other people force them on you
- You keep them only when others are around
- You don’t need to know why the rule is made
- Rules are weaker

CONVICTIONS

- You are convinced of these in yourself
- You keep them even if no one is around
- You have reasons for your convictions
- Convictions are stronger

FURTHER THOUGHT

Which issues would you like to discuss?

Take one of the issues that you marked for further discussion, and apply the Filter Questions (pp. 37-38): Is it helpful? Is it habit forming? Is it hurtful? Is it honouring?

Belonging

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

CHAPTER 5 **TAKING MEMBERSHIP**

Covenant membership
Community membership
Important distinctions
The ceremony
Are you ready for membership?

FURTHER THOUGHT

TAKING MEMBERSHIP

The goal of the membership class is to direct candidates toward covenant membership. This category of membership enables the member to fully engage in the Wesleyan Methodist Church through service and leadership at the local, district, national, and international levels (subject to requirements of election, ordination, etc).

Key Point

However, we are aware that some candidates are not ready to accept the commitments of covenant membership. This is often because of one of the following reasons: the candidate is not yet old enough in years or as a Christian for the following obligations, or the candidate is coming from a different theological heritage and cannot, in good conscience, agree to the doctrinal summary. To respect these ones we offer a second category of membership called Community Membership. Those who opt for community membership are allowed some flexibility in matters of personal conviction so that they are able to serve and lead in the local church without making a more comprehensive commitment to the broader denomination.

Covenant membership

The conditions of covenant membership are:

HANDBOOK
para 138

1. Confession of a personal experience in regeneration and a pledge to seek diligently until sanctified wholly if that grace has not yet been obtained.
2. Christian baptism.
3. Acceptance of the Articles of Religion as summarised (pp. 25-26), the Membership Commitments (pp. 36-37), the Elementary Principles (App. B), and the authority of the Handbook in matters of church government.

4. A commitment to living a life guided by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in the light of the Filter Questions and the Collective Conscience Statements.
5. A covenant to support the Church, to live in fellowship with the other members, and to seek God's glory in all things.
6. The approving vote of the members of the receiving church or the church board.

The rights of covenant membership are:

HANDBOOK
para 140

1. Christian fellowship, encouragement, admonition, and guidance.
2. Access to the sacraments.
3. The right to vote and the eligibility to hold any office for which a person in covenant membership is eligible, if not under discipline.
4. The right to trial and appeal if charged with failure to maintain the conditions of membership, with the specific provision that joining another religious body shall of itself sever membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church.
5. Membership in any Wesleyan Methodist Church to which they may wish to transfer, subject to the approving vote of the receiving church.

Church membership may only be terminated by one or more of the following:

HANDBOOK
para 141

- 1) Voluntary withdrawal.
- 2) Joining another religious body or a secret order.
- 3) Expulsion after proper trial and conviction.
- 4) Persistent neglect of church relationship as defined by the Handbook.

Community membership

The conditions of community membership are:

HANDBOOK
para 230

1. Confession of a personal experience in regeneration and a pledge to seek diligently until sanctified wholly if that grace has not yet been obtained.
2. A willingness to be disciplined in the faith and instructed in Wesleyan Methodist convictions.

3. Such membership shall not be transferable from one church to another.

The rights of community membership are:

HANDBOOK
para 231

1. The fellowship of the saints and the encouragement, admonition, and spiritual guidance of the ministry.
2. Access to the sacraments and ordinances of the Church.
3. Eligibility to fill any office or position in the local church other than those for which covenant membership is required by the Handbook, provided that the Local Board of Administration considers the community member sufficiently mature in years and spiritual development, exemplary in conduct, and gifted for such service.
4. The right to vote on all matters related to the local church, except the reception of covenant members and all district and national matters, which can only be voted on by covenant members. Minimum voting age shall be sixteen.
5. The right of a hearing before the Local Board of Administration in the event of dismissal from community membership, but if after such hearing the board reaffirms the vote of dismissal there shall be no further right of appeal. Joining another religious body shall of itself sever community membership in the Church.

HANDBOOK
para 232

A community member may become a covenant member at any time when qualified. The Local Board of Administration may discontinue a community member who has become inactive, who violates the qualifications for reception into such status, or whose conduct becomes a reproach to the Church.

Key Point

Important distinctions

1. Community membership provides for service in the local church. Covenant membership is necessary for district or national service.

2. Covenant and community members both vote in the election of a local church pastor. HANDBOOK para 279:4

3. Only covenant members shall vote on reception of new covenant members in the local church or on matters relating to the district or national church. HANDBOOK para 231:4

4. Only covenant members are elected to the Local Board of Administration. Subsequently though, covenant and community members may be co-opted by the Local Board of Administration as required, subject to these conditions:

- A majority of the Local Board of Administration must be covenant members.
- The Local Board of Administration shall decide whether co-opted members have a vote or a voice only.
- A community member shall not serve as Vice Chair of the Local Board of Administration. HANDBOOK para 231:3
- All members accepting a position on the Local Board of Administration shall agree to live in accord with the Leadership Covenant. HANDBOOK para 303, 1195

5. Community membership is not transferable to another Wesleyan Methodist Church. HANDBOOK para 230

The ceremony

In the course of your membership studies, the pastor shall confirm that you have been born again, have been baptised, and have accepted the doctrines and polity of the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

If you are being accepted into covenant membership, the pastor shall then ask you a set of specific questions, either in front of the Local Board of

Administration or in front of the congregation. These questions are called Covenant Questions.

HANDBOOK
para 1677

Covenant Questions

Pastor: *Do you believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? That Jesus Christ the Son suffered in your place on the cross, that he died but rose again, that he now sits at the Father's right hand until he returns to judge all the people the last day? And do you believe in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrantly written Word of God? That by the grace of God every person has the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and that those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified by faith? And do you believe that God not only counts believers as righteous, but that he makes them righteous, perfecting them in love at entire sanctification, and providing for their growth in grace at every stage of their spiritual life, enabling them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live victorious lives?*

Candidate: *This I believe.*

Pastor: *Have you the witness of the Spirit that you are a child of God?*

Candidate: *I do.*

Pastor: *Have you the assurance of the Spirit that you have experienced the deeper grace of heart cleansing through the infilling of the Holy Spirit? If not, do you purpose to diligently seek this grace?*

Candidate: *I do.*

Pastor: *Do you cordially accept our Membership Commitments and Elementary Principles as biblical guidelines for your conduct, and do you accept the authority of the Handbook of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in matters of church government?*

Candidate: *I do.*

Pastor: *Do you recognise your obligation to God and the Church, and do you purpose to contribute your resources as the Lord has prospered you for the support of the gospel as the Church fulfils its mission in the world?*

Candidate: *I do.*

Having responded appropriately to the Covenant Questions, you shall then be asked to respond to the Declaration of Purpose in front of the congregation to confirm your new status.

Declaration of Purpose

Pastor: By coming before us today you indicate your purpose to publicly confess the Lord Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to be your God and the object of your highest love. You accept the Lord Jesus to be your Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit to be your Sanctifier, Comforter, and Guide. You joyfully dedicate yourselves to God that within the everlasting covenant of His grace you might be used in His service to glorify and honour him. And you promise to hold to him as the highest good of your life; that you will give diligent attention to the commandments and principles of His Word; that you will seek the honour and advancement of His kingdom; and that forsaking all ungodliness and worldly desires, you will live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

You also purpose to join yourselves to this church, submitting yourselves to its principles of government; and by walking in love and fellowship with all its members, seek its peace, purity, and growth in grace.

Do you thus freely and sincerely devote yourselves to be the Lord's within the fellowship of this church?

Candidate: *I do.*

HANDBOOK
para 1680

Community questions

If you are being accepted into community membership, the pastor shall ask you a simpler set of questions, either in front of the Local Board of Administration or in front of the congregation.

Pastor: The Church of Jesus Christ is intended by its Head and Master for all who know him as Saviour and who love and serve him as Lord. Those who are converted to Christ but who do not feel free to assume the responsibility of covenant membership, yet demonstrate willingness to be disciplined in the faith and instructed in Wesleyan Methodist convictions may be received as community members. For these, the Church has provided the category of community membership, that they may enjoy its pastoral care and spiritual nurture, and that they may grow in grace and participate as partners in the life of the local church. These come now that they may be questioned and received as their experience makes fitting.

To you who have been converted to Christ, who desire to study and grow in spiritual maturity, and who have here presented yourselves for reception as community members, we address these questions:

Pastor: *Does the Lord now forgive your sins?*

Candidate: *Yes, he does.*

Pastor: *Is it your purpose to grow spiritually, to participate in the discipleship program of the church, to become acquainted with the Scriptures and the Handbook of our church, and to be open to God's leading at the proper time into covenant membership?*

Candidate: *Yes, it is.*

Are you ready for membership?

(For all categories of membership)

- Do you have the witness of the Spirit that you are a child of God?
- Have you been baptised?
- Do you have the assurance that you have experienced a deeper cleansing so that you love God with all of your heart, or if not, do you earnestly intend to seek this cleansing within the fellowship of this local congregation?

(Furthermore, for covenant membership)

- Do you accept the summary of the Articles of Religion of the Wesleyan Methodist Church?
- Do you accept the Membership Commitments and Elementary Principles as biblical guidelines for your conduct, and will you endeavour to live your life according to the teaching of the Bible and the leading of the Spirit, giving proper consideration to the Collective Conscience Statements and the Filter Questions?
- Do you accept the authority of the Handbook of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in matters of church government?

Membership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church

If you have answered “yes” to these questions, then please provide the following information to your pastor:

1. For which category of membership are you applying?
2. Are you currently a member of any other local church or religious body? If so, please give its name and address so that we can notify them of this change.
3. Please include your name and contact details.

Welcome to the family. The same Lord who redeemed you from a lost and hurting world also instituted the local church to provide you with a home where you truly belong. This sense of belonging was God’s plan from the beginning.

APPENDIX A NOTES ON THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE STATEMENTS

Additional notes on alcohol:

The Bible does not teach that moderate consumption of alcohol is sinful. However, it clearly teaches that drunkenness is sinful and places eternal salvation at risk (1 Corinthians 5:11' 6:9-10; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; Luke 21:34).

While we agree that drunkenness and the abuse of alcohol is wrong, many would not agree that their own use of alcohol is in the category of "abuse". However, in some ways this evades the real issue. It is not only our personal use of alcohol that is to be considered – it is also the abuse of alcohol in society, which is destructive to people and property.

Furthermore, it is difficult to be objective about the grip that alcohol has upon one's own life. If you are unsure about this matter, then why not accept this challenge: take one year without alcohol. Consider it an act of separation unto God, such as the Nazirite Vow of the Old Testament (Numbers 6:2-4, Judges 13), or as an act of devotion to God, such as the example of Daniel and his young friends (Daniel 1).

Additional notes on kava:

Kava is used ceremonially and socially primarily amongst Tongan and Fijian men. It can be used to show love, honour, loyalty, respect and friendship. However, it can be used in a manner which is destructive physically, socially and spiritually as well.

Kava is not considered alcoholic, but produces relaxant and anaesthetic symptoms. The real danger with kava lies in its excessive use, separating a man from his proper responsibility to his wife and family and from his obligations to the church.

Guidelines for use:

Kava may be used in times of Christian fellowship or in cultural ceremonies, such as weddings or special welcoming ceremonies to show respect and honour providing the following regulations are adhered to.

- It is to be used moderately and infrequently.*
- Provide a Christian example by ensuring that the obligation to the family and the church are never compromised by its use.*
- Refuse to participate if the Spirit of God is troubling you or if the use of kava does not satisfy the demands of the Filter Questions (pp. 37-38)*
- Pastors and leaders are required to be especially moderate.*
- Use every opportunity to educate the community of the benefits and destructive influence kava can have.*

Additional notes on spiritual gifts:

In the book of Acts

The experience described in Acts is clearly human languages.

Jerusalem: 2:1-13, NB v.8

Cornelius: Acts 10:27-46, NB 11:15 (same gift as in Acts 2)

Ephesians: Acts 19:1-7, logical this is the same as earlier two episodes.

In 1 Corinthians 14

This passage might provide support for a different type of tongue, an ecstatic prayer language (14:2). However, this is not supported by the historic practice of the Church. Furthermore, the same chapter also rules that women must be silent in church (14:34), so clearly Paul is making allowance for some unique (questionable) expectations in this Corinthian congregation.

- *Paul is very clear that tongues is the lesser gift (14:12, 19. see also 1 Cor 12:28).*
- *Paul is very clear that the only thing that should be practised in church is that which instructs the congregation (14:9, 19, 12, 26, 28).*
- *At no time should multiple people be speaking - in an unknown language or even in the common language (14:30, 33, 27).*
- *The use of tongues in a worship service is unhelpful in reaching the unconverted (14:23).*
- *14:39 has two possible translations: "do not forbid speaking in tongues" or "do not hinder communication by using tongues." The latter is more consistent with Paul's clear statements throughout the chapter.*

Promotion of tongues

- *We are not all to have the same spiritual gifts, so teaching that tongues is necessary or desirable for all believers is contrary to the Scriptures (Romans 12:6).*
- *The Spirit bestows gifts as he sees fit (Eph 4:7, 11-13; Rom 12:4-8), so we accept whatever gift he chooses to give or to withhold. Therefore, promoting any particular gift is usurping the prerogative of the Spirit (Heb 2:4; 1 Cor 12:11, 30; Jn 3:8).*

APPENDIX B DENOMINATIONAL STATEMENTS

The Elementary Principles

Handbook paragraph 136:1b

These are the basic principles of our church:

- Christ is the only Head of the Church, and the Word of God the only rule of faith and conduct.
- No person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and obeys the gospel of God our Saviour, ought to be deprived of church membership.
- All persons have an inalienable right to private judgement in matters of religion, and an equal right to express their opinions in any way which will not violate the laws of God or the rights of their fellowman.
- All church trials should be conducted on gospel principles only; and no minister or member should be excommunicated except for immorality, the propagation of unchristian doctrines, or for neglect of duties enjoined by the Word of God.
- The Pastoral or ministerial office and duties are of divine appointment, and all ordained ministers in the Church of God are equal; but ministers are forbidden to be lords over God's heritage, or to have dominion over the faith of the saints.
- The Church has a right to form and enforce such rules and regulations only as are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, and may be necessary or have a tendency to carry into effect the great system of practical Christianity.
- Whatever power may be necessary to the formation of rules and regulations is inherent in the ministers and members of the Church; but so much of that power may be delegated from time to time, upon a plan of representation, as they may judge necessary and proper.
- It is the duty of all ministers and members of the Church to maintain Godliness and oppose all moral evil.
- It is obligatory upon ministers of the gospel to be faithful in the discharge of their Pastoral and ministerial duties, and it is also obligatory upon the members to esteem ministers highly for the works' sake, and to render them a righteous compensation for their labours.
- Acceptance of the Mission, Articles of Religion, Elementary Principles and the authority of the Handbook in matters of church government is a commitment expected of covenant membership.

Mission and Vision

Handbook paragraph 75-76

75. The Wesleyan Methodist Church has grown out of a revival movement which has historically given itself to one mission--the spreading of scriptural holiness throughout every land. The message which ignited the Wesleyan revival was the announcement that God through Christ can forgive man his sins, transform him, free him from inbred sin, enable him to live a holy life, and bear witness to his heart that he is indeed a child of God. The message was based on the Scriptures, was verified in personal experience, and came not only in word but in the power of the Spirit. It was dynamic and contagious, and was communicated from heart to heart and from land to land. It adapted itself to and gave new vitality and purpose to various kinds of Church Organisations.

76. The Wesleyan Methodist Church believes that to spread scriptural holiness throughout every land involves the entire church of Christ in mission to the world, including the following:

Sharing the divine revelation of full salvation through Christ as recorded in the Holy Scriptures so as to evangelise the lost and to minister redemptively to human society and its Institutions.

- (1) Relating new converts to Local Churches and providing Spirit-filled and well-trained Pastors and leaders for the same.
- (2) Developing in the converts patterns of worship to God and of fellowship with other believers.
- (3) Discipling them in turn to be witnesses for their Lord.
- (4) Guiding believers to experience entire sanctification so that they are enabled to live whole and holy lives.
- (5) Providing for them lifelong nurture and instruction, encouraging each to grow toward spiritual maturity in Christ Jesus.
- (6) Helping them to develop a Christian interpretation of life and the universe, training them to be good stewards of the talents, time, opportunities, and resources with which Christ has entrusted them.
- (7) Equipping them for lives of dynamic service to God and man, so that the full potential God has designed for each of them may be realised.

Leadership Covenant

Handbook paragraph 1195

Leaders have a Biblical responsibility to set an example of Christian living (1 Tim 3:1 – 10; Tit 1:6-9). All ordained, commissioned and licensed persons together with lay members of the District and National Boards of Administration and Ministerial Development, auxiliary leaders and lay members of the Local Board of Administration shall agree to live in the spirit of, declare and defend the Articles of Religion, Elementary Principles, Membership Commitments and Collective Conscience Statements.