

WESLEY CLASS MEETINGS FOR TRANSITION CHURCHES

1. Continue as _____ CHURCH NAME _____ Class Meeting
 - Under this option the congregation is not dispersed, but the assets are transferred to the Annual Conference under Paragraph 2549.3, 2540 and 2541.
 - The Annual Conference will provide financial and training support for the congregation to transition into a Class Meeting form of faith community. This is the form of faith community that was the root of the Methodist Movement in which groups of Christians gathered regularly for Bible Study, Life Support, Faith development, community service and Fellowship.
 - The Annual Conference's Church Vitality Initiative will provide training for leaders who can be either lay persons or local pastors.
 - From the Conference's Cabinet Development Fund the church will receive support of a maximum of \$750 per month. The amount may be less based on the value of the assets transferred.
 - The support will be for three (3) years.

NOTES OF EXPLANATION

Methodism grew from a basic format of groups of persons gathered under the guidance of a leader committed to spiritual growth. Wesley's general rules for his societies (multiple classes made up a society) were:

*That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies called "**classes**," according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class, one of whom is styled the Leader. It is his business: (1) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order **to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor;** (2) To meet the minister and stewards of the society once a week; to pay to the stewards that they have received of their several classes in the week preceding; and to show their account of what each person has contributed.*

*There is one only condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies – "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation. First by **doing no harm**, avoiding evil in every kind;*

It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation:

*Secondly, by **doing good**, by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, by doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to all.....*

*It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation: thirdly, by **attending upon all the ordinances of God**. Such are the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded, the Supper of the Lord; private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence.*

These are the General Rules of our societies, all [of] which are taught by god to observe, even in his written word – the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these, we know, his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart....

The Wesleyan way of Discipleship has clear marks/DNA. Those are:

- A grounding in grace which is the centerpiece and focus of all actions
- Acts of Mercy in which faith is lived in the world
- Acts of Piety that are the shaping actions in which the Holy Spirit can do the work of transformation.

The Class Meeting Initiative is designed for local flexibility while holding to the structure and DNA of our Wesleyan heritage.

Rationale and Process

It is the function of the Class Meeting to provide a format in which a community can continue to be disciple through shared activities of Bible Study, Prayer, accountability and acts of service. It is currently envisioned that this will be accomplished by a trained leader organizing classes of 8-15 people who will gather regularly for prayer, study, mutual accountability and opportunities for service. Worship and sacraments may be accomplished by attending at other churches or by means of a Monthly Circuit Rider type of system in which licensed or ordained clergy offer worship and sacraments on a scheduled basis. This is the current system of some circuits in British Methodism.

The Vital Church Initiative will provide trained leaders for the class meetings who can lead the community in the actions mentioned above.

The support being offered is to be used by the Class meeting for rental of a space to hold class meetings and to contribute to the support of the Class Leader. This arrangement should free up dollars for the membership to engage in “Acts of Mercy” in the community.

At this point we do not intend for these groups to be as formal or as uniform as Wesley’s. Our primary purposes are:

1. To provide an option for a United Methodist Congregation that has reached the point of being unable to afford its' facility and pastor that allows the community to remain together.
2. To provide a format in which the continuing community can continue to grow in discipleship.

Hopefully this is an initiative that can address some of the concerns we have heard from churches in transition.