THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
AS A CONNECTIONAL COVENANT COMMUNITY
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OUTLINE

"Polity is the shape of our corporate obedience."
(Bishop Wayne Clymer)

"Theologically understood, connectionalism is an expression of ecclesiology and mission."
(Bishop Kenneth L. Carder)

"Everything about the life of a Christian is corporate."
(Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."
(I Corinthians 12:26)

"God is not a God of confusion but of peace. All things should be done decently and in order."
(I Corinthians 14:33 & 40)

POLITY IS ECCLESIOLOGY — PRACTICAL DIVINITY

World Methodism's giant of learning Dr. Albert Outler once asked whether or not Methodism even has a doctrine of the church. I think the answer, though it is not the one he gave, is, "Yes, by implication, in its doxological and governing documents."

Bishop Wayne Clymer's appropriate aphorism and Bishop Kenneth Carder's strong assertion (see p.1) remind us that church organization and administration are more than merely pragmatic and programatic, and that they are not trivial. **POLITY IS ECCLESIOLOGY**. Polity is how we order the common life of our sub-community (*politeuma;* denomination) in the *polis* (city) of God. This ordering reflects what we think the church is. So, polity is the practical side of ecclesiology (*logos* of the *ecclesia*). "Polity IS the shape of our corporate obedience." **POLITY IS PRACTICAL DIVINITY**.

THE COVENANT OF OUR CONNECTION

All United Methodists are in connectional covenant. "A member of any local United Methodist Church is a member of the denomination and the catholic (universal) church" (BOD¶215, *The Wider Church*). John Wesley himself might have written this. Before he died Methodism had spread to North America and the Caribbean, and reflecting on this amazing advance he said, "The Methodists are one in all the world."

Scripture makes much of covenant — a solemn expression of a permanent relationship between God and persons or a people, or between persons. The vertical covenants, those initiated by God, are covenants between unequal parties. Others are peer covenants or horizontal covenants.

Whether it is a vertical or a peer covenant, a covenant is not a contract. Covenants are grounded in the personal commitment of the covenanting parties to one another. Of course, persons united in covenant have mutual responsibilities, obligations, duties, privileges, and accountability, but their covenant relationship is wider and deeper than a contract can comprehend. Contracts define legal relationships and communities (polities). Covenants go beyond law to define relationships and communities (polities) of grace. All Christian polities must be polities of grace.

Many Churches are connectional--Episcopal, Lutheran, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic. But owing to their systems of appointive itinerancy the connectionalism of the episcopal Methodist denominations is uniquely powerful among the historic, orthodox reformed catholic communions.

A Christian enters this unique connectional covenant when she or he promises to be loyal to The United Methodist Church and uphold it by prayers, presence, gifts, and service. Such a person is "accepting the discipline/*Discipline*"--choosing to be Christian in the United Methodist way. This commitment must be voluntarily and prayerfully made. Once it is made the congregation and the connection at large have the right to expect cheerful participation in the UM way of Christian life together.

Some United Methodists are called and admitted to another UM connectional covenant-- the covenant of ordained ministry and Annual Conference membership (BOD¶302&303). This covenant is entered upon after the elders of an Annual Conference have "tested the spirits" (I

John 4:1) and voted to admit a woman or a man to one of the several categories of Annual Conference membership and to deacons' or elders' orders. Bishops may ordain only those whom the Conference has elected to membership and to orders.

The special United Methodist connectional covenants do not apply to every denomination, and we do not equate them with the ecumenical covenants established through sacramental sign-acts, namely, baptism, confirmation, and ordination. Persons are not baptized and confirmed into the UMC. Ministers are not ordained into UMC ministry. We are baptized, confirmed, and ordained in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. As United Methodists we, like other denominations, are stewards of these mysteries of God as part of and in behalf of the church universal, the holy catholic church. We are stewards, not the proprietors, of these ecumenical treasures of the church catholic.

Only <u>after</u> the act of baptism and <u>after</u> the act of confirmation do we ask, "Will you be loyal to the UMC . . .?" Accepting our discipline/*Discipline* is a third act, special to our denomination. Thus if a person leaves the UMC then later returns to it, we do not rebaptize or reconfirm them. We merely ask the UMC question again. It is like saying, "Do you want to resume our discipline/*Discipline*?"

Likewise, Annual Conference membership is not the same as ordination. Ordination is ecumenical--setting apart certain Christians, with prayer and the laying on of hands, for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order. Conference membership is bringing an ordained person into this special connectional covenant of appointive itinerancy — the UM way of ordering ordained ministry. The clergy of Annual Conference vote twice on each candidate — once to elect to orders and once to admit to Conference membership. If a person leaves the "traveling ministry" or the diaconate then later is readmitted, he or she is not reordained, merely readmitted to Conference.

The sources and criteria for Christian doctrine are Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience (BOD¶104). **THIS PAPER AIMS TO SHOW HOW CONNECTIONALISM IN GENERAL AND WESLEYAN/UNITED METHODIST CONNECTIONALISM IN PARTICULAR, REST UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THIS ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL QUADRILATERAL**. To demonstrate this clearly, the sections on Scripture and Tradition are collated with the current *Book of Discipline*.

SCRIPTURE
Connectional *koinonia* is the NEW TESTAMENT NORM of ecclesial principle and practice. From the beginning connectionalism, as an expression of oneness and catholicity, was a mark (*nota*) of the church. **TO BE ONE AND CATHOLIC AS A CHURCH IS TO BE A CONNECTIONAL CHURCH**.

The Gospel Ideal

John 17

Jesus' prayer for all disciples (the church) that they may be one as the Father and the Son are one, so that they might be in the Father and the Son and the world might believe that the Father sent the Son.

The Jerusalem Church

Acts 8

The apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to the new church in Samaria to lay hands on them so they might receive the Holy Spirit. This is the foundation of the practice of confirmation by the laying on of hands by a bishop in the Episcopal and Roman Catholic Churches or by the pastor in Methodist Churches.

Acts 15

The Jerusalem Council, the first "General Conference," exercised authority throughout the whole church. The apostles and elders, exerted "full legislative power over all matters distinctively connectional" (BOD¶s15; 501). No other person, paper, or organization had the authority to speak officially for the church (BOD¶509). The congregations did not decide independently on the crucial issue of qualifications for church membership (BOD¶s4; 214). James, traditionally called the first bishop of Jerusalem, said, "My judgment is . . . ."

Then the "General Conference" selected Judas and Silas to accompany Paul and Barnabas with a pastoral letter to the Christians of Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. The letter was delivered and interpreted, not put to a vote, in each congregation.

This conference, the confirmation visit of Peter and John to Samaria, and the Jerusalem "Advance Special" (Romans 15; I Corinthians 16; II Corinthians 8-9) establish the primacy of the Jerusalem church in the whole church. The local congregation was not independent.

Acts 16:4

Paul, Silas, and Timothy. "As they went on their way through the cities, they <u>delivered</u> to them <u>for observance</u> <u>the decisions</u> which had been <u>reached</u> by the apostles and elders who were <u>at Jerusalem</u>."

Paul's Itinerant General Superintendency

Paul's ministry was connectional. He was an itinerant general superintendent (BOD¶17). William Axley, a Kentucky Methodist preacher of the camp meeting era, said that Paul was a bishop, or at least a presiding elder, and was out opening up new circuits. Methodists discerned in Paul THE model of New Testament apostolic ministry and boldly asserted that their itinerant system followed this New Testament classic paradigm more faithfully than any other church polity. "It is the traveling apostolic order and ministry that is found in our very constitution" (Asbury, p. 84). John Wesley, John William Fletcher, and Bishop Francis Asbury wrote about this.

The USA Methodists articulated the doctrine of ministry more fully than did their British counterparts, and more coherently than we United Methodists do today. Asbury's so-called "Valedictory Address" (1813) expresses it succinctly. The core documents for Asbury's argument were Paul's story from Acts and "his" letters to Timothy and Titus, a compact corpus from which to develop a Biblical theology of ministry. "Mark well the similarity of apostolic order and government and the Methodist Episcopal form of things! (Asbury, p. 76). Our second

bishop--the classical figure of our heroic era in the USA--saw himself as the Paul of America. Such confidence in his *vocatio* permitted him to say without arrogance, as Wesley before him said, "The signs of an apostle have been seen in me" (Romans 15:18-20; II Corinthians 12:12).

        The Methodists detected the characteristic features of their ordering of ministry in Acts 14: 23; I Timothy 1:3 and 4:14; II Timothy 1:6 and 4:5, and Titus 1:5 and 2:15.

     Acts 20:17-38
      A called meeting of the Ephesus "Conference" (or Presbytery) at Miletus.
        Paul "called to him the elders of the church." "The church of" could mean a metropolitan area (city-state or *polis*) such as Ephesus, or a province (state) such as Galatia. UMs would say the Ephesus District or Annual Conference and the Galatia Annual Conference. Ephesus was the capital of the Proconsular Province of Asia (modern Turkey). Paul's companion Timothy came to be credited as its first bishop. From the 200s Ephesus was high in the second echelon of prestige "episcopal areas" in the church.

     Romans 15:25-27
      "Macedonia and Achaia have given to aid the poor among the saints in Jerusalem."
       The first Advance Special or Bishop's Offering for Relief?

     I Corinthians 1:2
      "Corinth . . . called to be saints together with all those who in every place . . . ."
       The catholic oneness of the church.
       I Corinthians 4:17
       "I sent to you Timothy , my beloved and faithful child (*teknon*, elder son; same word Mary used to refer to Jesus at his pre-adolescent Temple caper in Luke 2, and used of the older son in the parable of the loving father in Luke 15) in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church."
       "Bishop" Paul appointed Timothy to act for him as "an extension of the general superintendency" (BOD¶417). Wesley called his full-time itinerants "my sons in the gospel." He was Paul to their Timothy and Titus.
    I Corinthians 7:10
      "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord [no divorce]."
      Paul gave instructions to the congregations and expected his apostolic authority to be obeyed. In this instance the authority he cites is that of a direct word of Christ.
    I Corinthians 7:17
      "Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him. <u>This is my rule in all the churches</u>."
      Paul asserts his superintending authority (*episcope*) in the congregations.
      Late in his life Wesley made a Pauline sounding comment such as this, and the one at I Corinthians 11:16, in a stern letter of 10 May 1789 to Jonathan Crowther concerning developments in the Methodist society of Glasgow, Scotland. "'Sessions!' 'elders!' We Methodists have no such customs, neither any of the Churches of God that are under my care. . . . We acknowledge only preachers, stewards, and leaders among us, over whom the Assistant in each circuit presides. . . . Who had authority to vary from [the Methodist plan]"(<u>Letters</u>, 8:136)?
    I Corinthians 9:3-14

Paul and Barnabas have a right to financial support from the churches in the connection for their general itinerant ministry. United Methodists might recognize here the Episcopal Fund.

I Corinthians 11:16

"We recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God."

There are church-wide (connectional) standards of conduct. (NOTE: We separate the connectional polity principle from the culture specific application of it in Corinth.)

I Corinthians 12

The unity and interdependence of the body of Christ is catholic as well as congregational.

I Corinthians 14:33

"God is not a God of confusion but of peace."

I Corinthians 14:40

"All things should be done decently and in order."

These two maxims of worship are also the first axioms of polity.

I Corinthians 16:1-4

"Now concerning the contribution (Advance Special) for the saints; as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you are to do."

Two elements of connectionalism are shown here; connectional fund raising and superintending ministry.

I Corinthians 16:19

"The churches of Asia send greetings."

Paul could be saying to the Corinth "Annual Conference," "The Annual Conference(s) of Asia (Turkey) send you greetings." Both Roman Catholics and Orthodox use "local church" to mean a bishop's diocese (parallel to a UM episcopal area). This definition of local church is rooted in New Testament connectionalism. The seven churches of Revelation 2:1-7 are regional designations. New Testament church growth and regional identities followed the outlines of the *polis* (*civitas*) demarcations of the Roman Empire.

II Corinthians 1:1b

"To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia."

This is a collective form of address to the Corinth "Conference." Corinth was the capital of the Roman province of Achaia which included all of Greece plus some adjacent territories.

II Corinthians 8-9

Lengthy section concerning the Jerusalem offering.

II Corinthians 8:13-15

The principle of church-wide sharing; using funds from some churches to supply the need of other churches.

Can we see here such UM usages as missions appropriations and equitable salary provisions? Actually, Paul's thought here is much more radical. He calls for a catholic community of resources "that there may be equality," not just assistance! John Wesley had a similar ideal for the Methodists, based on his reading of Acts 2 and 4.

II Corinthians 8:20-24

Paul appointed Titus and the churches appointed two "messengers" to go to Corinth. (Was Apollos one of them?) The latter were to assist in collecting the Jerusalem offering and to audit the collection accounts. Corinth must "give proof before the churches."

Clearly, there is connectional accountability here; Corinth must "give proof before the churches." There must have been some representative assembly (conference) with authority to select, empower, and finance these special fund raisers and auditors. Were "the churches" consciously following the example of the Jerusalem General Conference (Acts 15) which sent Judas and Silas as interpreting messengers to accompany Paul and Barnabas and relay James' decision to those northern churches?

Did Titus hold a "Charge Conference?"

Are Field Representatives from the Office of Finance and Field Service of the General Board of Global Ministries contemporary "messengers?"   "The Annual Conference shall have the power to make inquiry into the financial status of the local churches . . ., require the pastor and lay member to . . . make explanation [of a deficit], . . . [and] provide counsel to help the church overcome such a deficit position" (BOD¶604.8).

II Corinthians 11:8
   "I robbed other churches by accepting support from them in order to serve you."
   The Macedonians had sent him support.

II Corinthians 13:1-4
   Paul is coming to Corinth and will discipline wrong doers.
   He did not wait to be invited. This is pastoral initiative and pastoral intervention by an itinerant general superintendent.

Galatians 1:2
            In this regional pastoral letter Paul exercises episcopal (*episcope*) authority.

Galatians 1 & 2
   Paul may have been frustrated by the greater prestige of the Jerusalem leaders, the "super apostles" (II Cor. 12:11), but he nevertheless acknowledged it as a "polity" reality, and it was important to him that they approve his mission. In making the case for the validity of his ministry he cited their approval, all the while denying the need for it.

Philippians
            Contains doctrine and discipline.
   From 1784 to 1968 the Methodist *Discipline* was titled *The Doctrines and Discipline of* .
. . .

I Thessalonians 2:14
   "You . . . became imitators of the churches of God . . . in Judea."
   The sufferings of the church are connectional bonds.

I Thessalonians 3:1-5
   Paul sent Timothy to inquire concerning their faith [doctrine].
   Again, Timothy's work is an extension of Paul's general superintendency (BOD¶417).

Other Paulinist Documents

Ephesians
    Six chapters which divide evenly between doctrine and discipline.
    Ephesians 6:18
        "Pray . . . making supplication for all the saints."
        This manifests the spiritual connectedness of the church catholic, the foundation stone of its institutional connectionalism. Christian prayer is common prayer--prayer together/prayer for each other.

        Colossians
        The authorship of Colossians is disputed, the weight of scholarly opinion today is against Paul as the writer. This, however, does not detract from the connectional nature of the letter.
        Apparently, Epaphrus was appointed to a new church development at Colossae.   A certain Tychicus is also commended to this church as a faithful minister and fellow servant (4:7). Were Epaphrus and Tychius members of a Pauline "connection?"

        Colossians 2 & 3
        These chapters give practical instructions, so this is not just a fellowship communication. The writer rejoices in their good order and firm faith (2:5).
        This author is overseeing the spiritual and temporal affairs of this church (BOD¶414.1).
    Colossians 4:16
        "And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read the letter from Laodicea."
        Prof. Bruce M. Metzger says the letter from Laodicea is a copy of Ephesians or some other Pauline letter no longer extant. In any case, the letters were connectional communications.

Timothy and Titus
    We have seen the importance of Timothy and Titus, especially the former, for the early USA Methodist doctrine of ministry. Also see below under Experience and Reason.
    I Timothy 2:12
        "I permit . . . ."
        Again, the connectional principle can be separated from its specific culturally conditioned application.
    I Timothy 6-8
        Actually, the whole letter gives instructions on teaching and church order (doctrine and discipline) in the Ephesus Conference.
        Titus 1:5 and 2:15
        "I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you . . . ."
        "Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you."
        "Inasmuch as the district superintendency is an extension of the general superintendency, the bishop shall appoint elders to serve as district superintendents" (BOD¶417).
        Philemon
        Philemon, living at Laodicea, the leading town in the Lycus Valley, may have been a senior or presiding elder for the churches in that region, and thus Paul would have expected him to pass along the letter to Philemon to his churches.

Other General Letters With Pastoral And Polity Directives
James
I Peter
I John
Jude
Revelation

A Closing Connectional Word From Scripture
James 3:16
"Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."
What a wholesome connectional cautionary for United Methodist clergy!

Summary
New Testament Connectionalism is *communio in sacris*; *sobornost*.

UNITY	DIVERSITY
baptism	age when administered; methods
eucharist	theology of real presence
ministry	administration
faith	theologies.

Thus, John Wesley was voicing a universal New Testament polity theorem when he said, "The Methodists are one in all the world." **CONNECTIONALISM IS A MARK OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH AND OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**.

TRADITION

Christian Antiquity

Catholic unity was the assumed model, if not the reality, of the church until the Reformation. Nor did the Reformers want division, just changes to restore pastoral integrity and evangelical theological coherence.

During the second century the office of bishop emerged as a guarantor of unity and orthodoxy. A bishop was accountable to the larger church for his teaching. Bishops did not each go his own way in interpreting and handing on (*tradendi*) the New Testament, apostolic tradition (Campbell,70).

The post-New Testament ancient church continued the apostolic practice of conciliar decision making in matters distinctively connectional (Acts 15). Major bishops convened regional councils. From the 300s councils were also convened by the emperor. Some of these with their regions (Jurisdictions) and the chief issues they addressed were as follows:
>>Carthage, 251-252, 254-256 (North Africa)--how to treat Christians, especially priests, who had been false under persecution and now wanted to resume their place and ministry in the church;
>>Antioch, 265-268 (Asia Minor and Syria)--Christology; This council seems to be the first to speak of its decisions as canons, i.e. canon law.
>>Arles, 314 (western Roman Empire)--same as the councils of Carthage in the 250s;
>>Nicaea, 325; Constantinople, 381; Ephesus, 431, and Chaldedon, 451 (ecumenical)--doctrines of Trinity, Christology, and Mary; These four ecumenical councils produced and clarified the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol (Nicene Creed), the most important document in Christian history after the Bible itself.
>>Rome, 382 (western Roman Empire)--the canon of scripture.

The Western Medieval Church

In the Middle Ages sub-groups arose within the Latin speaking western church. They were called orders and were approved by the papacy. First came the monastic orders such as the Benedictines (c.529), Cluniacs (910), and Cistercians (1098). Each Benedictine house was self-governing, under the common *Rule*.

The **Cluniac** movement (from 910) first applied a connectional principle to monasticism. The abbot of Cluny was the head of all 314 Cluniac houses around Europe. By means of his itinerant general superintendency and his power of appointment of priors or abbots for the dependent houses he supervised the whole connection. "This ramshackle spiritual empire was not an order in the proper sense of the term. It was a vast spatial extension of St. Benedict's idea of a monastery as a family community living under the person direction of a father-abbot. All Cluniac monks, wherever they lived, were in theory members of the community of Cluny itself" (Lawrence, 96).

The **Cistercians** (from 1098) added two significant features to monastic connectionalism--the annual general chapter and the principle of filiation. All of the Cistercian abbots came to Citeaux each September for the general chapter where for a week to ten days, normally under the presidency of the abbot of Citeaux, they acted on matters distinctively connectional. When a

Cistercian abbey sponsored new foundations the new houses and their parent abbey formed a filiation, a sort of regional family of Cistertian establishments. The abbot of the parent-house was required to visit every community in the filiation at least once a year. By 1500 there were 738 Cistercian houses for monks and 654 for nuns.   (Lawrence, 183, 185-92).

The Cistercian general chapter commended itself to others, most notably the Cluniacs who adopted it in 1200. That great general conference of the western church, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, decreed that all singular houses of monks and canons were to come under triennial general chapters, organized by secular kingdoms or archepiscopal provinces. The general chapters were to enforce discipline, act on matters distinctively connectional, and provide for regular visitations to the convents and monasteries. This got nowhere, owing to the conservatism and "turf protectiveness" of the Benedictine abbots. General chapters continued to meet, but were poorly attended and their reiterated directives largely ignored (Lawrence, 192, 279-80).

Gradually, the Cistercians took on many extramural activities. They campaigned in southern France against the Albigensians (Cathars). They promoted and went on the Crusades. They were missionaries in eastern Europe and the Baltic region. Increasingly, they took on local pastoral work, and by 1500 most Cistercian monasteries provided for the pastoral needs of the surrounding population (NCE 3:385). This makes the Cistercian movement a bridge to the 1200s and a new type of religious association--the mendicant order.

There is another bridge to the mendicants, albeit the Church sought to destroy this bridge rather than to bless and use it. In the late 1100s to early 1200s Christians in many cities of northern Italy and southern France organized locally to respond to the needy of their communities. Some of these lay led groups got in trouble with the official Church and were suppressed. Others eventually made peace with the establishment and found a place in it. Such were the so-called **Poor Catholics**. These bodies were largely absorbed by the great mendicant orders.

One group, however, started off in the Church, was then excommunicated, and survives today as a denomination. The **Waldensians** are thus unique in medieval Christian history. Like Methodism, the Waldensian Church grew from the evangelical ministry of a man who wanted to serve the Church, not leave it. Indeed, the British Methodist scholar Dr. Rupert Davies identifies the Waldensians as an example of "medieval Methodism" (Davies, 18; see also Tourn, 7).

Waldo (Valdesius) [d.1217], affluent wholesale merchant of Lyons, experienced evangelical enlightenment/conversion in 1174 and took the vow of poverty. Rather than become a monastic he began a ministry to the poor of his city. Waldo continued a layperson.

His example attracted others, lay and ordained, from all social levels. They called themselves the *societas* (society) of the **Poor in Spirit**. *Societas* was a commercial term we read today as company. The Society promoted vernacular translations of the Bible and the Latin Doctors of the Church, itinerant lay preaching by both men and women, and social service ministries. The Poor were largely laity. They continued their participation in civic and parish life.

Lay preaching was the original irreducible separator between the Society of the Poor in Spirit and the Church's leaders. Their 1179 request to be licensed to preach was firmly denied. Driven from Lyons, they also came to be influenced by more radical critics of the Church. From 1184 they were a "condemned movement" (Tourn, 3-14).

In the generation immediately following Waldo the **mendicant movement** shows how the Church leadership learned to assimilate, domesticate, and use this new urban based and lay led impulse to evangelical and apostolic living. The mendicant orders were connectional communities within the Roman Catholic Church. They had a general who was the official head of the order and they met in a representative General Chapter (General Conference) to act on matters distinctively connectional.

Unlike monks, but like the Waldensians, mendicants were out among the people, especially in the new and reviving cities. They preached, often itinerating on planned circuits, taught in universities, and operated social ministries. They were appointed to their work and held accountable for their performance of it. By means of a category of membership called the Third Order, persons could be part of a mendicant order without leaving their work and families. These tertiaries received spiritual direction from the full-time brothers.

Whether in its proscribed Waldensian form or its approved mendicant one, the western European cities of the 1170s to 1220s experienced a new moment in Christian history. Not since the church's first appearance in the Hellenistic cities of the apostolic age had such an effort been made to evangelize the general population.

Of the four major thirteenth century mendicant organizations — **Franciscans** (1209), **Dominicans** (1220/21), **Carmelites** (1247), and **Augustinians** (1256)--the **Franciscans** and **Dominicans** are the best known. There are many significant parallels between the thirteenth century mendicant movement and early Methodism in Britain. The Dominicans' official name is the **Order of Preachers**. This is precisely what the itinerants "in connexion with Mr. Wesley" were.

Closer analysis shows that early Methodism shares more of the dynamics and phenomenology of the **Franciscans** than the Dominicans. Again, Rupert Davies points to the Franciscans, along with the Waldensians, as one of the "two recognizable examples of medieval Methodism" (Davies, 18; see Note 1 below). In my view, the Wesleyans were the Anglican Franciscans. But the Church of England did not recognize and regularize its Franciscan-like Order of Methodist Preachers. Instead, the Methodists became and remain a separate Church.

From the outset of the public ministry that made him the man history remembers (1739-1791), Wesley intended for Methodism to display the Biblical and historic principle of connectionalism.
>>He called the movement the **UNITED** Society or Societies.
>>He often referred to "the **PEOPLE** called [denominated] Methodists."
>>He wrote to and about "the Preachers in **CONNEXION** with Mr. John Wesley."

>>The Methodist **Conference** (General Chapter) met for the first time in 1744 in the movement's headquarters, the Foundery at London. It has met every year since.
>>By means of personal itineration, correspondence, publication, and Conference he established the **Wesleyan** *typos* of Christian identity.

>>He drew up a plan, although it was never effective, for regular reports from all circuits to come to the Foundery, and for disputes about discipline to be decided there.
>>He provided for Conference to preserve and advance Methodism after his death.
>>And through everything and despite everything Wesley stayed in the Church, and officially (though not actually) so did the Methodists so long as he lived.

The United Methodist Church, then, results from an order stepping forward to become a Church so that it might better fulfill its mission to this new nation in the New World. Yet, even in its third century of autonomous ecclesial existence the UMC carries its Wesleyan patrimony. This shows most plainly in its polity--the particular shape of its corporate obedience as a Christian community of Wesleyan *typos* (see Brockwell, "Methodist Membership" for use of *typos*). As William Faulkner put it, "The past isn't dead, it isn't even past."

The United Methodist ordained ministry continues the ancient and medieval tradition of special communities of women and men who voluntarily take extraordinary vows for the sake of growth in grace and for mission. We have seen that Methodism is not a monasticism. Methodism is much more in the mendicant ambit. Nevertheless, there are substantial parallels between United Methodist Conference membership and ordination vows and the historic Benedictine and mendicant vows: **stability** (*stabilitas*), **obedience** (*obedientia*), **conversion** (*conversio morum*), and **chastity** (*castitas*). **Poverty** (*pauperitas*) also was accepted, if not vowed, by the preachers of early Methodism.

In western (Latin) Christianity the formal and solemn taking of vows was first crystalized in the *Rule* of St. Benedict (d. c.550). The Benedictine monk or nun promises stability, obedience, and conversion. It was assumed that the brothers and sisters would be poor and either virginal or continent, so they were not asked to take formal vows of poverty and chastity. In the twelfth century a new order, the **Hermits of St. Augustine**, were the first to specifically make profession to the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

 The UM minister's **commitment to the Annual Conference** is her/his vow of stability. The Constitution designates the Annual Conference as the basic body of the Church (BOD¶31). Clergy are members of an Annual Conference, not of a local church. Few clergy change their Annual Conference membership (see, however, BOD¶430.2). Transfers require the consent of both bishops and of the minister(BOD¶338.1; 416.5).

UM elders take a clear-cut vow of obedience. This is their vow to accept the discipline/*Discipline* of **appointive itinerancy**. "They offer themselves WITHOUT RESERVE to be appointed and to serve, after consultation, as the appointive authority may determine" (BOD¶s324; 327.c.2; see also 57; 416.1; 430.1). Both deacons and elders promise to be loyal to the UMC, to accept its order, liturgy, doctrine, and discipline, and to accept the authority of those appointed to supervise their ministry (BOW, p. 666, 676). Candidates for full connection in

Conference affirm that they "approve our Church government and polity and will support and maintain them" (BOD¶327.12-13).

The Benedictine vow of conversion is really a vow to **lifelong growth in grace**. Without denying the reality and value of the Damascus road or Aldersgate experience, *conversio morum* apprehends conversion as a lifelong process. So does Wesleyan spirituality. The first four questions put to candidates for UM Annual Conference membership are: "Have you faith in Christ? Are you going on to perfection? Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? Are you earnestly striving after it?" (BOD¶327.1-4).

Some UM clergy, especially those repaying education debts and rearing young families on entry level salaries, achieve poverty without taking this vow! But the Wesleyan analogue to the vow of poverty is the principle of **radical stewardship**. In the Wesleyan economy of living in the means of grace stewardship is required of all Methodists, not only clergy families. This is why the word steward has a history and usage special to Churches of the Wesleyan *typos* (see J. Wesley, "The Use of Money").

If **chastity** is taken in its original and still primary meaning of being morally pure, unpolluted, spotless, guiltless, virtuous, and modest then UM clergy do take this vow. Persons set apart by the Church for the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order . . . are required to maintain the highest standards represented by the practice of fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness (BOD¶304.2; 306.4.f; 315.9.n; 321.4.a.6; 326.a.6).

Thus the United Methodist covenant of ordained ministry and Annual Conference membership is a continuing practice of the tradition of New Testament connectionalism. Many particulars of the UM polity of representative ministry reflect the experience and wisdom of the church reaching back 1500 years.

The Late Medieval Church

Long before the Reformation the great ecclesiastical achievement of the Western Church of the High Middle Ages was failing. In Bohemia (modern Czech Republic) the radical wing of the Hussites (Jan Hus [d.1415]), proclaimed their independent ecclesial life in 1457. This **Unity of the Brethren** (*Unitas Fratrum*), also known as the Bohemian Brethren and later as **Moravians**, called themselves *Jednosta Bratska* (**Fellowship of the Brethren**).

The Brethren and the Waldensians enjoyed relations close enough to cause their *communio in sacris* of the 1400s to be called "**the Waldo-Hussite International**." They did not merge into a single organization. In 1542 many Brethren made common cause with the Lutherans. In 1555 many of them who had migrated to Poland united with the Calvinists. After the Thirty Years War their organized connectional life ceased until the few survivors in the 1720s found new life in Saxony as the Moravians. These are the people who provided John Wesley his spiritual directors from 1736-1739.

No doubt their "endangered species" status gave the Waldensians a yearning for solidarity while forcing them to maintain a low profile. Always very small in number, they not only survived but in the fifteenth century had communities in Italy, Spain, France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, and the Low Countries. Their leaders benefitted greatly in receiving theological formation by mentors from the Bohemian Brethren.

Persecution prohibited openly connectional organization, but through their itinerant preachers they maintained some Europe-wide knowledge of one another and a sense of group identity. They had an international network, even if they could not have organization like the medieval orders or the modern denominations. Their publishing activity was significant enough to elicit Roman Catholic response (Tourn, 60-61, 66).

It does not appear that either the Brethren or the Waldensians employed Church as the designation of their fellowship or network until after the medieval period.

The Post-Reformation Denomination
The Reformation provided the **Waldensians** their opportunity to be more openly connected. They look upon the years from their first Synod in 1558 to a declaration they call the **Pact or Covenant of Puy** (Podio) in 1561 as the formative time of their modern self-consciousness as a Church which was "a free coming together of believers who were at the same time committed to fraternal solidarity" (Tourn, 97-98;112;225). This document, however, is so brief and so general it cannot be interpreted as a denominational constitution.

The **Reformed Church of France**, the **Huguenots**, can be styled the **first modern denomination**. That is, an openly national ecclesial entity which is not at the same time the nation's official Church. On this definition the Church of England of Wesley's day was technically not a denomination, nor is it now; it was and is THE Church (albeit of England). Nineteenth century English people still distinguished between the Church and the "denominational bodies around her." But the Episcopal Church in the USA, organized in 1789, has always been a denomination in the sense the word has had for two centuries now. Wesley himself was one of the early users of the term in the way it is employed today--a religious sect or body having a common faith, organization, and distinctive name.

In 1557 the Huguenot pastors of Poitiers drew up "**Articles of Polity**" for a nationwide connection. Two years later delegates from some fifty congregations convened at Paris and adopted a Reformed confession of faith and a form of connectional polity (doctrines and discipline) for the Reformed Church of France.

This *Discipline Ecclesiastique* delineated four representative assemblies of ministers and laity; an annual national synod, annual or biannual provincial synods, quarterly colloquies, and the local consistory. Here United Methodists recognize virtual prototypes of what Bishop Thomas B. Neely called "the governing conferences of Methodism"--General, Annual, District, and Charge. The Huguenots themselves would have known the mendicant connectional model of conventual, provincial, and general chapters (McNeill, 246).

The use of **discipline** as the **technical term for church polity and** as a **title word for books of canon law** originated with the Calvinist Protestants of the 1500s. Given the strong influence of Reformed Protestantism on seventeenth century Anglicanism, including the childhood homes of Samuel and Susannah Wesley, our use of the word probably has this same origin.

Historically then, modern denominations ensued from the failure of the western church to cope successfully with all of the reform and renewal movements of the sixteenth century. One of the sad ironies of church history is that these calls to return to New Testament Christianity resulted in the now nearly 500 year old loss of New Testament *communio in sacris*. We must not forget, however, the early medieval permanent ruptures in the eastern church, the eleventh century schism between the Greek and Latin spheres of Christendom, and the Waldensian breach in the late 1100s. All of these Churches subsist: **Coptic**, **Orthodox**, **Roman**, **Waldensian**. The ecumenical *koinonia* of the New Testament has been broken by the separation of the faithful for sixteen centuries.

Today it is at least recognized that **denominations lack scriptural warrant** (John 17:20-26; I Corinthians 1:12-16 and 3:3-9; Ephesians 4:4). Granted, from the beginning there were opposing theologies, groups, blocs, ethnic tensions, cultural confrontations, and the inevitable factional polemics (Acts 7 & 21; Galatians; Colossians 4:11; Titus 1:10; III John). But in the New Testament these stresses were contained within the oneness of the body, the hope, the faith, the baptism, and the triune God (Galatians 3:27-28; Ephesians 4:4).

John **Wesley** had an **uncommon commitment** to Christian **unity**. He vigorously promoted and heartily defended his convictions, but he separated issues from persons. "From real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all" ("The Character of a Methodist," 18). He embraced all disciples of Christ Jesus with proactive "catholic love" ("Catholic Spirit," III.4), seeking to establish with them "a league offensive and defensive."

To be Wesleyan, **then**, **is to be ecumenical**. This is written into the Preamble and Article 5 of our Constitution. The **UnitED** Methodist Church is a **unitING** Church. We are one of **nine** communions who are the **Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC)**.

We will have denominations for some time to come. In this situation connectional polity in an ecumenically committed denomination is an **<u>interim</u>** model and **<u>partial</u>** expression of New Testament connectional *koinonia*, the catholic unity God wills for the church. United Methodism is an especially powerful connectionalism. Among the historic orthodox reformed catholic Churches the degree of UM connectionalism is unique.

The 1784 Christmas Conference at Baltimore established The **Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America**. For the first time Methodists became a self governing denomination, a Church. Thus the USA Methodist conference ceased being a regional chapter along the lines of a sort of Church of England

Franciscan-like Order of Methodist Preachers and became a general conference (council) in the tradition of Acts 15.

Across two centuries and more of denominational life USA Methodism has experienced parallel streams, schisms, and reconciliations. Some of the salient developments are these:
>>First Conference of the United Brethren in Christ — 1789.
>>First Conference of the Evangelical Association — 1800.
>>Schisms in United Methodist history — 1791; 1792; 1813; 1816; 1821; 1830; 1843; 1845; 1860; 1870; 1880s; 1890s; 1907; 1939.
>>The Evangelical Church — 1922.
>>The Uniting Conference — 1939 --> The Methodist Church.
>>The Evangelical United Brethren Church — 1946.
>>The Uniting Conference — 1968 --> The United Methodist Church
>>The Consultation on Church Union — 1962-2002.
>>The Churches Uniting in Christ — 2002.

REASON AND EXPERIENCE

The fundamental rationale of connectional polity is rooted in New Testament ecclesiology and two thousand years of continuous Christian practice of connectional tradition. Since the sixteenth century there has been continuous deviation from connectional polity. But the survival and success of non-connectional churches does not nullify the scriptural and historic principle of connectionalism. Since connectionalism in itself is scriptural and historic, the argument for or against specifically United Methodist connectionalism draws most heavily upon the canons of Reason and Experience.

For both clergy and congregations UM connectionalism is most personally, profoundly, proudly, and painfully experienced in the annual process of **appointive itinerancy**. "Through appointment-making, the connectional nature of the United Methodist system is made visible" (BOD¶430.1). As clergy normally travel within the bounds of the Annual Conference (UM clergy *stabilitas*), the Annual Conference is indeed the basic [connectional] body of the Church (BOD¶31). Here are some **fourteen reasons** for United Methodist polity through the appointive system in the Annual Conference. Persons will be able to respond to these points for themselves as they have experienced United Methodism.

1) Clergy and laity come to know each other and establish a wide circle of *koinonia* with sisters and brothers.

2) It is <u>possible</u> to try and match pastors and parishes for the mission (*apostole*) of the church.

3) Appointive itinerancy leads elders to bond with each other in an intensity of fellowship that cannot be experienced in other Churches. The UM <u>system</u> is what makes this possible.

4) **SECURITY OF APPOINTMENT** (BOD¶s325.1) PROTECTS **FREEDOM OF THE PULPIT**--THE **FREEDOM OF THE WORD**; a value of premier importance to preacher and people alike. SECURITY OF APPOINTMENT HELPS TO ASSURE THE **DIGNITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE PASTORATE** (THE PASTORAL MINISTRY).

> United Methodists need to speak up for this historic principle of Methodism. It is under strong attack by many leaders in the Church, ordained and lay, as being the refuge of incompetent, ineffective clergy.
>
> SECURITY OF APPOINTMENT IS THE **TWIN OF THE VOW** *OF* **OBEDIENCE** REQUIRED OF UM CLERGY. IF IT IS DONE AWAY THEN THE CHURCH HAS NO MORAL RIGHT TO DEMAND THAT ONE OFFER ONESELF WITHOUT RESERVE TO SERVE WHERE APPOINTED.
>
> The candidacy process, the probationary period, and the provisions of BOD¶s352.1.b; 356.3; 359.3.c, and 604.4 are sufficient, IF ANNUAL CONFERENCES, BISHOPS, AND DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENTS WILL ACT RESPONSIBLY AND COURAGEOUSLY. A minister's appointability must never be dependent from year to year upon the decision of the bishop and cabinet!
>
> > [A survey taken by one of the general boards of a denomination which has congregational polity showed that during an eighteen month period at least 2,100

ministers in the denomination had experienced forced termination, and that in 1988 this averaged 116 such occurrences each month (United Methodist Reporter,1990.02,23,p.1).]

5) Clergy can be held accountable for the integrity of their life and ministry.

6) When scandal occurs in the lives of laity or clergy BOD¶s359 and 2701-2719 provide due process remedy in the spirit of the apostolic principle of doing all things with decency and order (I Corinthians 14:40).

7) There are no abandoned congregations in United Methodism (BOD¶423.12). United Methodists are assured of pastoral ministry; they do not have to compete in the market for a minister. **SECURITY OF APPOINTMENT APPLIES TO CHURCHES AS WELL AS TO CONFERENCE MEMBERS**.

8) Needed pastoral leadership changes occur with less risk of *schismata* (I Corinthians 1:10 and 11:18) in the congregations. "God is not a God of confusion but of peace" (I Corinthians 14:33).

9) The superintending ministry of the district superintendent and the bishop can help and heal struggling, hurting, or abused congregations.

10) Pastors who need and want a new challenge are not trapped in their current churches until they can arrange their own relocatation or reach retirement.
> [A study in a denomination which has non-episcopal connectional polity revealed a kind of perpetual gridlock of 2,200 pastors seeking to relocate but only 600 positions open (Louisville, KY Courier-Journal, 1991,08.04, p. A19).]

11) Congregations who know they need new leadership, but hesitate to hurt a good person, are not dependent upon good fortune or the calendar to provide them the opportunity to make a change.

12) The Trust Clause (BOD¶s2501-2503) in deeds and titles to local church property protects congregations from a takeover and make over by a temporary majority. This is a crucial and conservative safeguard in periods of congregational conflict or times of social unrest affecting the Churches.

13) Connectional ministries enable United Methodists to be globally present in Jesus' name. The world IS their parish.

14) United Methodists have their Christian LIFE TOGETHER in Conference--a means of grace.

THE BOOKS OF UNITED METHODIST ECCLESIOLOGY

In order of priority these are the seven major working doxological and governing documents of United Methodist ecclesiology:

The Holy Bible
The United Methodist Hymnal
The Book of Worship
The Book of Discipline
The Book of Resolutions
The Decisions of the Judicial Council
The Journal of the Annual Conference.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
(United Methodist Communications booklet)

The Organization of The United Methodist Church
Local Church Organization
General Church Agencies
United Methodist Church Conferences and Areas
Our Bishops and Their Assignments
United Methodist Special Days and Funds
The World Service Fund

[NOTE: This section will be omitted from the Oxford Institute presentation.]

NOTES

BOD = *The Book of Discipline* (2000).

BOW = *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (1992).

NCE = *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1974).

1. Looking for spiritual emphases and group practices other than the connectional principle, Rupert Davies identifies these examples of Methodism in church history before the 1700s: definitely Montanism (100s), the Waldensians, and the Franciscans; maybe the Church of the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*), later known as the Moravians (1400s); certain aspects of German Pietism (1600s). Davies does not ask the connectional ecclesiology question we are pursuing here.

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