

CARE for the Margins:

The Covenant Discipleship Group as the Platform for Mission

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Introduction

Last quadrennium (2013-2016), we launched the Covenant Discipleship Group Ministry as one of the Flagship Programs of the Baguio Episcopal Area. It was embraced as our United Methodist discipleship model for small group ministries. We are grateful to Rev. Steven Manskar and his book, "Accountable Discipleship." This book became the official BEA roadmap for Covenant Discipleship Ministry.¹

We embraced the CDG discipleship model as the re-discovery of John Wesley's Class Meetings. In order to understand our journey, we must turn back to the pages of time and refresh our historical memories that are grounded in our Wesleyan heritage.

Distinctive Features of the Methodist Movement

Unique features of Methodism such as 1) itinerant preaching, 2) use of laypersons as class leaders, and 3) small groups which fostered faith-sharing and accountability led to its unprecedented growth. According to Wesley scholar Philip F. Hardt, these historic features distinguished Methodism from other groups in the Evangelical Revival.²

Furthermore, scholars agree that the Methodist movement provided pastoral oversight to its members through 1) the large Sunday society evening meeting, 2) the twelve-member weekly class meeting which both explained Christian doctrine to prospective members and spiritually nurtured veteran members, and 3) the more intimate band meetings in which deeply committed members confessed their sins to one another.³

¹ The first book that I used in studying Class Meetings and Covenant Discipleship Book as an old edition of Dr. Kevin Watson. The Pastors who owned the book lost it since we used it in our Ilocos South District training sessions between 2010-2012 when I was District Superintendent. I have since accessed newer copies of Dr. Watson's book and I have quoted from them in this paper.

² Philip F. Hardt, "The Class Meeting in Early British Methodism," *The Soul of Methodism: The Class Meeting in Early New York City Methodism* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2000), 1

³ Ibid.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, instituted the weekly class leaders' meetings. This provided prayerful and mutual support. It also became a venue for training and doctrinal instruction.

Methodist preachers also published their own "class manuals." These leadership and discipleship literature gave helpful advice to class leaders.⁴

It was said that George Whitfield was one of the greatest preachers of his generation. He was a good friend of John Wesley and he disagreed with him only because of Wesley's doctrinal views against Calvinism.

But this is what Whitfield said about John Wesley, a statement that I believe is a tribute to the results of discipleship and evangelism that took place in Methodist class meetings, bands, and societies: "My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in societies, and then preserved the fruit of his labor. This I neglected, and my people were a rope of sand."⁵

The Origin and Purpose of the Wesley Class Meetings

How did the Class Meeting begin?

It was originally a collection scheme when it started in 1742. A group of Methodists were discussing how they can pay off a construction debt. A new Methodist chapel was built in Bristol, England. They were meeting like our present-day Board of Trustees or Finance Committees.

A certain Captain Foy proposed that the Bristol society would be divided into groups of twelve (12) Methodists. Captain Foy convinced the group that if a leader is designated to collect one penny each from the 12 (including himself) every week, the Bristol Methodists would be debt-free.

⁴ Ibid., 2

⁵ <https://milewis.wordpress.com/2015/12/19/whitfield-wesley-rope-of-sand>; August 16, 2018

What if the poorest Methodists cannot contribute their pennies? Captain Foy explained that if he were the leader of a group, he would pay for the penny of every member who could not afford to contribute.⁶

Never did these early Methodists who engaged in ministries with the poor ever project that their disciplined lifestyle will inspire Filipino Methodists to embrace their example. Today, Operation World would talk about

a more holistic understanding of evangelical mission within the Church. Ministry that cares for orphans and widows, uplifts the poor, brings liberty to the oppressed and sets captives free reflects the heart of God, the values of the Scriptures and the role of the Church. Caring for the downtrodden and vulnerable and demonstrating practically Christ's love are increasingly – and rightly – the focused activities of evangelical ministry.⁷

The Class Meeting was a cause-oriented group. It was clearly defined by its purpose. It was one of the seeds that contributed to Methodist aspirations for revival, renewal, and reform in early Methodism. David Brooks in "The Summoned Self" provides an engaging description of what would happen if individuals commit themselves to worthy aspirations: "Life comes to a point not when the individual project is complete but when the self dissolves into a larger purpose and cause."⁸

And so, John Wesley introduced the passion for prayer and dedication to discipline that characterized the Christian spirituality of early Methodism. His life was dissolved in the higher purpose and larger cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

John Wesley describes the experience: "Those who are desirous to save their souls were no longer a rope of sand, but clave to one another, and began to watch each other in love. Societies were formed, and Christian discipline was introduced in all its branches." In quoting Wesley, Mitchell Lewis

⁶ Kevin M. Watson, "The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival," *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Franklin: Seedbed Publishing, 2014), 23

⁷ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation – 7th Edition* (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 7

⁸ "Time to Dive In," Texas Methodist Foundation, 2015

comments that there are now tens of millions of Wesleyan Christians all over the world.⁹

The Meeting That Focused on the General Rules

Before the end of 1739, a group of eight to ten persons went to John Wesley for spiritual nurture and direction. Their number gradually increased. Their fellowship with John Wesley provided the impetus for the rise of the United Society. It started in England, then in America.

The United Society is “a company of men [and women!] having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”¹⁰

The United Societies are divided into “classes.” Classes are organized on the basis of proximity; hence the class members are neighbors known to each other. The UMC Book of Discipline tells us that each class has about twelve members led by a class leader. It is the duty of the designated class leader:

- 1) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order (1) to inquire how their souls prosper; (2) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort; (3) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of preachers, church, and poor;
- 2) To meet the ministers and stewards of the society once a week, in order (1) to inform that minister of any that are sick, or any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved; (2) to pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.¹¹

However, the implementation of these procedures and ministries resulted into something else. The class leaders reported that the General Rules were not strictly followed by the early Methodists.

⁹ <https://milewis.wordpress.com/2015/12/19/whitfield-wesley-rope-of-sand/>; August 16, 2019

¹⁰ “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies,” Par. 104, The 2016 UMC Book of Discipline (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 77 – 78

¹¹ Ibid., 78

And so, it became one of the most important dynamics of the “class meeting” to seriously and consistently uphold the General Rules.

The Class That Required Accountable Discipleship

The decision to invent a fund-raising strategy to retire the Methodist debt for constructing their New Room in Bristol was a game-changer. Since its inception on February 15, 1742, the classes emerged as testimonial groups and evolved as “covenant discipleship groups.” Steven W. Manskar gives this description:

...the classes became much more than a means for retiring a debt; they became the very foundation on which the Methodist movement was built. The class meeting provided the means for spiritual nurture and accountability sought by those who came to join the Methodist societies.¹²

But in what way did the General Rules become a matrix or a mentor for the Methodist “class meetings?” Manskar continues his narrative:

The General Rules provided the framework for the weekly class meetings and were the guidelines for the telling of their lives since they last met. The class leaders and members told one another what they did and did not do. The rules served as their compass; the weekly class meeting, with the giving account and sharing of prayer, provided their compass heading. It helped them know where they stood and gave them an indicator where they were headed.

The class meeting also gave people an opportunity to make needed course corrections. The General Rules helped give guidance for living as disciples of Jesus Christ in the world by providing needed boundaries. Like a loving parent sets boundaries for a child’s behavior that reflects the values of the family, the General Rules were a

¹² Steven W. Manskar, “The Family Story: John Wesley and the People Called Methodists,” *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God’s Household* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 92

reflection of the values of the branch of God's household known as the Methodists.¹³

Before we leave this narrative in memory of the early Methodists and the class meetings, we have to continue to celebrate the continuing relevance of the General Rules in our discipleship life. For the 21st century, we now embrace the General Rule of Discipleship.

The General Rule of Discipleship

The General Rules had been "re-invented" in Paragraph 1117.2a of the 2016 UMC Book of Discipline (formerly Paragraph 1118.2 in the 2008 UMC Book of Discipline).

The General Board of Discipleship had been entrusted in promoting Covenant Discipleship Groups and the General Rule of Discipleship. Thus, the ministry of General Board of Discipleship is very significant for us who have embraced lessons we learned from Steven Manskar's *Accountable Discipleship*.

2. *Accountable Discipleship* – Affirming that our Wesleyan heritage embraces a distinct emphasis of mutual accountability, the General Board of Discipleship shall encourage accountability in congregations by:
 - a) promoting the General Rule of Discipleship: "To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion, under the guidance of the holy Spirit";
 - b) advocating the formation of Covenant Discipleship Groups or equivalent models applicable to the cultural context of the Central Conferences for all ages throughout the church by providing resources, training, and support services that ground leadership in the richness of our Wesleyan tradition;
 - c) providing resources, training, and support services for revitalizing the role of class leaders so that they may interpret the General Rule

¹³ Ibid., 96

of Discipleship to all church members and assist the pastor in fostering mutual accountability throughout the congregation and other ministries;

d) providing consultative services to jurisdictions, conferences, and districts in the introduction and development of Covenant Discipleship Groups and class leaders in congregations.¹⁴

Indeed, when we go back to the General Rules, we realize that they had been succinctly summarized in the General Rule of Discipleship.

But what does this mean to us?

Revival, Renewal and Reform – Authentic Marks in the Wesley Class Meetings

The most important mark of authentic revival in Wesley Class Meetings is the discipline of prayer and dependence on God.

Paul E.G. Cook goes back to the thinking and lectures of Charles Finney in *Revivals of Religion* (1835): "Whereas the Methodists retained the conviction that only God could save sinners and revive churches, the Calvinists were beginning to entertain the notion that God could not be expected to do it without the employment of special means. These reports make it clear that they were also beginning to think that churches can experience revival whenever they want it by fulfilling certain conditions."¹⁵

The historical contrast is striking: "While Methodists were still seeking to 'pray down' revival in the tradition of Jonathan Edwards and according to Scripture, the Calvinists were resorting to 'special means' to work up revivals."¹⁶

God must pour down upon His praying disciples the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This is because while the Lord Jesus Christ received the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34), the Church cannot receive the Holy Spirit

¹⁴ "General Board of Discipleship," Paragraph 1117.2 (a – d), The 2016 UMC Book of Discipline (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 611

¹⁵ Paul E. G. Cook, *Fire from Heaven: Times of Extraordinary Revival* (Faverdale North: EP Books, 2009), 45

¹⁶ Ibid.

without measure. The Church must go to God again and again for a fresh Pentecostal experience (Acts chapters 2 and 4).

Cook makes the assertion that this principle had been taught by John and Charles Wesley and the Methodists learned it from Jonathan Edwards who learned it from the Scriptures. "We are kept therefore, in a position of entire dependence upon God. So we have to keep coming and calling upon God for fresh effusions of the Spirit."¹⁷ In conclusion,

We must seek this heavenly dew and these divine influences in every part of our church life and in all our church activities. When God hears our prayers and we receive a quickening of the Spirit, it may not occur to us that it is of the same essence as what is called 'revival.' The fact that it is limited to one place or occasion will prevent us from doing so, nevertheless it will have the same characteristics: an awareness of God's presence, deep conviction of sin and true repentance, an awe of God and holy joy and gladness in His presence."¹⁸

The dependency on God and the discipline of prayer are distinctive marks of the Methodist revival. The class meetings provided the most dynamic context of this revival experience.

Steven Manskar looks back: "The class meeting became the muscle of the Methodist movement in England and America. From it emerged leaders who became mentors and lay pastors for countless men, women, children and families. People were brought to saving faith in Christ, and their faith was nurtured and lived. People who lived hard lives in grinding poverty in a world that regarded them as nothing more than a beast of burden found a place where they were somebody, a brother or a sister in Christ and fellow sojourner in the faith."¹⁹

But what about renewal? In what sense is the class meeting part of a renewal movement? A more contemporary question would be this one

¹⁷ Ibid., 45-46

¹⁸ Ibid., 46

¹⁹ Steven Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship*, 96-97

crafted by Dr. Kevin Watson: "Why are you so confident that a return to the class meeting would be a means of renewal for Methodists and Methodism?" He answers his own questions with profound conviction: "If Methodists need to learn how to experience God and speak of this experience, I can think of no better means to this end than the Wesleyan class meeting."²⁰

Watson describes the class meeting as the opportunity for people to learn how to interpret their lives through the lens of the Gospel. They learn to speak of God's present work in their lives. He believes that there is nothing more exciting or fulfilling than to be a part of seeing and hearing people learn to recognize and respond to God's love for them.²¹

Does the Christian faith make an impact in day to day living? Why do purely intellectual or cognitive approaches to the Christian life prove themselves inadequate for people who want to be influenced and empowered by their faith in Christ? How can such faith make a difference in our witness and action?

For Watson, the "class meeting helped early Methodists to become followers of Jesus Christ in word and deed. It helped them grow where they were. It can do the same for people today who want to grow in their faith and in their pursuit of Christ."²²

Renewal is a Christ-centered movement and stands on the conviction that doctrine is demonstrated in discipline, theology is proven in transformation, Scripture is translated into service, and Gospel witness is anchored from God-honoring worship.²³

²⁰ Kevin Watson, "The Class Meeting: A Practice Whose Time Has Come (Again)," November 15, 2013, <https://www.seedbd.com/the-class-meeting-practice-whose-time-has-come>, (March 11, 2018)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ The United Methodist Church is not only a revival movement anchored in prayer (Acts 2:41-47; 1 Samuel 12:23; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; Ephesians 6:18; Romans 8:26; Isaiah 56:7-8). It is also a renewal movement. The BEA Church Workers and the Lay People's Aldersgate Mission Conference this year (July 2018) again focused on Mission, Mentoring, and Management in their continuing experience of renewal. On a global scale, Operation World's research date offers a fresh challenge for our CDG CARE Ministries: "Renewal movements have grown at an unforeseen rate – from the birth of the Pentecostal movement at the beginning of the 20th Century, to the first stirrings of the charismatic renewal in the 1950s and 1960s, to the Third Wave in the latter part of the 20th Century, and finally to the 21st Century, and what many believe is a new (and final) global outpouring of the Holy Spirit that exceeds them all. Pentecostals grew from 12 million in 1960 to 178 million in 2010; charismatics from 167 million in 1990 to 426 million in 2010. The charismatic renewal has touched many parts of the Church, in thousands of denominations, in nearly every country. Despite imperfections (sinful humans are involved after all), charismatic renewal has revitalized the faith of approaching half a billion people

Finally, how did the class meeting become a vehicle for reform?

Wesley was famous for his opposition to slavery. Charles Yrigoyen Jr. writes that while the American Methodists at first embraced Wesley's abhorrence of slavery, they gradually either tolerated or accepted it as a matter of economic convenience.²⁴

To think of the class meeting as an engagement in ministry with people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, especially the poor, is to envision a small-group movement for reform. That is why the collection for the relief of the poor is a hallmark of the class meeting.²⁵ John Wesley exemplified to the early Methodists his passionate concern for the plight of the poor and he acted on his faith. On this Charley Yrigoyen Jr. has more positive marks for John Wesley's spiritual descendants. The founder of Methodism

...went among poor people to declare God's love for them in Christ. They, too, were people for whom Christ died. He aimed to give them a new sense of self-worth. Wesley ate with the poor. He slept with the poor...Some of his contemporaries claimed that he was the most charitable person in England, whose generosity toward the poor knew no bounds. The Methodist people followed his example. Collections of cash, food, and clothing in the societies and classes were used to ease the pain of poverty.²⁶

Dr. William J. Abraham is quick to alert us not to extrapolate John Wesley's theology and ministry in this regard. Methodism's founder did not develop a political theory on a grand scale like Karl Marx, although in practice his theology's impact can be felt to this very day. He did not originate a new theory of evangelical economics that helps us to level up in this complicated science.²⁷

in an era where opposition and temptation come from myriad quarters." Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation – 7th Edition*, 7

²⁴ Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 91

²⁵ Ibid., 51; see also the 2016 UMC Book of Discipline, p. 78

²⁶ Ibid., 60

²⁷ William J. Abraham, *Wesley for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 139; This point about pushing John Wesley's theology, and Christian theology as a whole, into a political or economic ideology, is something that should be carefully avoided. It is extrapolating Christian convictions and perspectives and imposing upon them ideological theories that they don't

This does not preclude the history of Methodism and the works of piety as practiced by John Wesley and his class meetings to be re-written in the twenty-first century. It is precisely because of the class meeting that United Methodists in the Baguio Episcopal Area have found new impetus and momentum to re-invent a precious gem in our heritage. If Methodism is a reform movement, then it continues to be so especially in the fight against poverty.

Covenant Discipleship Groups: Re-inventing Missional Strategy

John Wesley is not merely pre-occupied with charity. He believed that loving God and neighbor involves “thoroughly intelligent, active and practical” ministries. His actions to alleviate the plight of the poor is a powerful illustration of his holistic understanding of the Christian faith.

Dr. William J. Abraham describes his moral sense in this: “He makes astute interpretations of the plight of the poor; he does his best to get to the causes behind their problems; he resolutely refuses to blame the poor for their predicament; he provides all sorts of services and self-help schemes; he harangues anyone in sight to lend a helping hand; he wanders the streets with his bull-horn and collecting box; and he beats the moral drum against the merchants, the distillers, the doctors, and the lawyers who exploit the poor in sundry ways.”²⁸

While I would not propose that we go back to the times when the class meeting was a membership requirement, I would propose that we go back to its value as a “self-help scheme” for engaging in ministries with the poor. The class meeting’s objective in collecting money for the relief of the poor can be re-invented to convert our generation’s covenant discipleship groups as micro-finance ministries.

essentially and originally contain. This is usually my point of departure with ideological narratives that demonize “foreign” governments as international aggressors, imperialists, or colonizers, and try to blame these external governments on the internal corruption, conflict and contradiction that are better understood as national or local inventions and therefore the main national actors are not held responsible.

²⁸ Ibid., 138-139

The class meeting/covenant discipleship group can now be re-focused in terms of the following “paradigm ships” – fellowship, discipleship, stewardship, and worship.

1) Fellowship

Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. reflects on John Wesley’s understanding of Christian relationships. He writes: “The quality of life in the early church was such that the suffering of any of its members was felt by the whole body of believers (Colossians 1:24, Notes). The fellowship of other Christians is a necessity and a channel for God to bless those on the path of holiness.”²⁹ CDG CARE Ministries makes the love of our Lord Jesus Christ deeply felt in our relationships.

2) Discipleship

Discipleship is a disciplined lifestyle that seeks to practice and embrace the means of grace – 1) Searching the Scriptures; 2) Prayer; 3) Fasting; 4) The Lord’s Supper; 5) Christian Conference; and 6) Public Worship.³⁰ Discipleship also requires dedicated commitment to preach the Gospel and organize new communities of faith (Romans 15:20; Acts 20:24, 28; Matthew 28:16-20).

The Covenant Discipleship Group is one United Methodist missional strategy to mentor, monitor, mobilize, multiply and model disciples who are obedient to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

3) Stewardship

CARE for the Margins is the belief that in following the example of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Covenant Discipleship Groups can become a “self-help group” to serve and empower the poor. CDG CARE Ministry re-invents the class meeting to fit a 21st century missional context in Philippine Methodism. Through its savings and credit ministries, the CDG CARE Ministry seeks to live up to the vision that “Christ Assures

²⁹ Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., *Belief Matters: United Methodism’s Doctrinal Standards* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 35

³⁰ Charles Yrigoyen Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*, 41-53

Resources for Everyone" (*Philippians 4:19*). The book *CARE for the Margins* encompasses the principles and practices of this vision.³¹

4) Worship

Worship celebrates the unfailing grace and saving love of God for all people. It is especially meaningful in the life of prayer and devotional meditations of CDG CARE Ministries (*Colossians 3:15-17*; *Acts 2:41-27*; *4:32-35*).

To re-invent the Wesley Class Meeting into CDG CARE Ministries today is to develop a missional strategy that challenges socio-economic paradigms and accelerates the momentum for evangelism and church planting.

United Methodists in the Baguio Episcopal Area cherish their Wesleyan heritage as they make CDG CARE Ministries as their missional strategy. If the Christian faith is truly the foundation of a reviving, renewing and reforming movement, then what happened in England can still happen today. Episcopalian scholar Dr. Patrick Sookhdeo refreshes our memories:

"Wesley practically changed the outlook and even the character of the English nation," wrote Archbishop Davidson. Many historians credit Wesley and Whitfield with saving Britain from the bloody revolution movement that was sweeping across Europe at the time. As the nation turned to help the poor, repented of their sin, turned their hearts towards God and each other, a national transformation was taking place without the need for violence or revolution.³²

Today, we witness the inequitable distribution of wealth worldwide. The 2017 Oxfam Report tells us that 82 percent of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1 percent of the global population. The 3.7 billion people who make up the poorest half of the world's population saw no increase in their wealth, according to Oxfam International last January 22, 2018.³³ More

³¹ Pedro M. Torio Jr., *CARE for the Margins* (Baguio: Baguio Episcopal Area, 2017), 83-88

³² Patrick Sookhdeo, *The Death of Western Christianity: Drinking from the Poisoned Wells of the Cultural Revolution* (McLean: Isaac Publishing, 2017), 136

³³ Oxfam International Website, January 22, 2018 Report; (Date: February 22, 2018); The Baguio Episcopal Area also launched an earlier program in 2013 to help poor church workers – Pastors and Deaconesses. This "credit union" just finished its 4th Annual General

than ever, we need the spirit of John Wesley and the early Methodists to ignite our hearts for revival, renewal, and reform.

Questions That Challenge Our Vision

Can poor people survive in a world ruled by economic oligarchs? Can poor livelihood ventures compete with business monopolies?

Can poor people have access to available resources through self-generated collective funds for their small-scale enterprises? Can they succeed in cooperative micro-finance Christian ministries in order to leap above the reality that many poor people cannot access savings and credit services from big banks and financial institutions?

Can UMC congregations in urban and rural settings initiate and sustain CDG CARE Ministries as dynamic movements for mentoring, monitoring, mobilizing, multiplying and modelling disciples? Can UMC congregations implement CDG CARE Ministries for children, youth, men and women – to the end that we realize the Four Areas of Focus and prevent net loss in membership?

Can UMC congregations destroy our scarcity/poverty mindset as well as our culture of dependency? Can UMC congregations excel in discipleship and stewardship without dole-outs?

In so doing, can we insure stability and sustainability for all our mission programs and adequately contribute to our national and global connectional obligations?

Can CDG CARE Ministries help United Methodists in prayer-filled revival, renewal and reform? Can UMC congregations maximize their Christian witness to become more fruitful in evangelism and church planting?

Assembly last July 23, 2018. It is called GEMS E Network Credit Cooperative. CDG CARE Ministries was officially launched in 2018 but it was introduced in 2017 through the 2017 Aldersgate Mission Conference. CDG CARE Ministries focus on lay people. The General Board of Global Ministries vigorously supports GEMS E Network Credit Cooperative while the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry provided the writing, printing and training funds to make CARE for the Margins available and accessible to all the nine (9) Annual Conferences of the Baguio Episcopal Area.

CARE for the Margins through its emphasis on CDG CARE Ministries is an attempt to pursue the vision that says "YES" to all these questions.

This vision is possible because the United Methodist Church in the Baguio Episcopal Area has seen the initial results of CDG CARE Ministries. We still have a long way to go. But already, the nine (9) Annual Conferences have started to embrace the vision. Evangelism and church planting are vital performance indicators. We established 28 new local churches in 2013-2016, 6 in 2017, and 5 in 2018.

Many poor communities succeeded with their internally generated resources providing relevant microfinance ministries. The Bishop, District Superintendents, Pastors and Deaconesses are establishing their own groups. They have a Christ-centered vision that captivated their passion. E. Paul Harvey underscores the importance of our vision for men, women, youth and children in CDG CARE Ministries:

A blind man's world is bounded by the limits of his touch; an ignorant man's world by the limits of his knowledge; a great man's world by the limits of his vision.³⁴

FB Meyer gives this litmus test for our Covenant Discipleship Groups: "You do not test the resources of God until you attempt the impossible."³⁵ With this, we continue to attempt something new.³⁶

And when we attempt to do something new, we are actually reclaiming an important part of our heritage in doing ministry with Covenant Discipleship Groups. Mitchell Lewis refers to the work of Dr. Jayson Byassee and Dr. L. Gregory Jones of Duke Divinity School in a 2009 article of "First Things." The "article focuses on Wesley as the inventor of what is now known as the micro-

³⁴ Book 4: CCF DNA, Second Edition (Pasig City: Global Leadership Center, 2015), 29

³⁵ Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation – 7th Edition*, xxiv

³⁶ The predecessor for CDG CARE Ministries was the work of former National UMYF President Jowey Celzo. He has already established a microfinance network for government-based Self-Help Groups in his work as Municipal Social Worker (Department of Social Welfare and Development). The Bishop's Office will again seek his support for a UMC-based microfinance network to unite all CDG CARE Ministries in the Hundred Islands Philippines Annual Conference. This is the way forward to sustain CARE for the Margins.

loan or the micro-credit movement.”³⁷ The CDG CARE Ministries truly celebrate Wesley’s class meetings through micro-finance ministries.

Defining the Future Today

To define the future today is to go back to our roots. To define the future today is to gather the ministry gems of our past. The Wesley class meeting – now the CDG CARE Ministry – is one of those gems. True to its historic teachings and ideals, it’s now our platform for mission.

Let us dig deep into our heritage and celebrate who and whose we are. We belong to God. The future of The United Methodist Church is in the loving hands of God.

The CDG CARE Ministry is an adventure to re-claim our historic identity – who we are and what we do as United Methodists. To do so is to go back to what is essential. Gil Rendle emphasizes that this is what the Roman Catholics did in their Counter-Reformation.

Rendle quotes Father Thomas Tifft, professor of Church History at St. Mary Seminary: “Never before had so many priests and religious women abandoned the church, with as much as 50% of Europe embracing Protestantism. The response, 20 to 30 years later, was the Catholic Reformation, which did not try to reestablish relationship or reunite with Protestants but set out Catholic doctrine in the areas of papacy, episcopacy, and the pastoral role. The church responded by going back to what was essential [to Roman Catholics].”³⁸

Defining the future today does not mean rejecting our heritage. In the words of Bishop Ray Owen: “It is rather telling that we, as present-day United Methodists, need to *call ourselves* to address poverty and human deprivation, when it is the very soil in which Methodism took root. It is rather telling that fewer and fewer of our churches are located in those areas...By visible

³⁷ <https://milewis.wordpress.com/2015/12/19/whitfield-wesley-rope-of-sand>; August 16, 2018

³⁸ Gil Rendle, “Be Strong and of Good Courage: A Call to Quiet Courage in an Anxious Time,” Texas Methodist Foundation, August 2016, p. 19; quoted from Gil Rendle, *Journey in the Wilderness: New Life for Mainline Churches* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 4

witness, we mean a lifestyle of readiness for labor at all times, anywhere human hurting is taking place in the community.”³⁹

Bishop Owen then quotes the *Bishops' Initiative on Children and Poverty* – a wake-up call for CDG CARE Ministries in their holistic mission:

Methodism was born among the impoverished of 18th century England...It was a movement of the poor, by the poor and for the poor. A church separated from “the least of these” is separated from the resources of its identity, i.e., the God who is among the most vulnerable as the crucified and risen Christ.⁴⁰

May the Holy Spirit of God lead us to be faithful. Through CDG CARE Ministries, we will go back to what is essential. Revival, renewal, and reform are possible. To God be the glory!⁴¹



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³⁹ Ray Owen, *The Witness We Make To Heal our Dividedness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 57

⁴⁰ Ibid., 71

⁴¹ Pete Torio presented this paper to the 14th Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, August 12-19, 2018, at Pembroke College, Oxford.