

La Historia del Methodismo y su presencia en América Latina (The History of the Methodist Church and its presence in Latin America)

You are invited to meet the Reverends John and Charles Wesley, brothers and both priests of the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. John and Charles lived during the 18th century, John having been born on June 17, 1703 and Charles, 4 1/2 years younger than John, on December 18, 1707. Together they were the primary founders of the Methodist movement in their home country of England. Although it was never their intention to begin a new Christian denomination, but only to reform the Church of England, separation did eventually come about, close to the time of John's death, and Methodism was formed into a denomination separate from the Anglican Church, first in the new colonies of America and thereafter in England. Born and baptized as infants into the Church of England, John and Charles remained members and, in their adult life, priests of the Church of England until Charles' death on March 29, 1788 and John's death, 3 years thereafter, on March 2, 1791.

There was a John Wesley who lived two generations before the reformer John Wesley. This John Wesley was the grandfather of John and Charles. He too was a priest in the Church of England. One of his sons was Samuel Wesley, who was to be the father of the reformers John and Charles.

The grandfather John Wesley died at the young age of 34. But his influence was sufficient that his son, Samuel, also became ordained as a priest in the Church of England in the year 1689. Samuel, the father of John and Charles, was an interesting man. Although a priest he

considered himself also a poet. His first book of poems is called *Maggotts*. An engraving of him in the preface of his book was complete with one of the worm-like creatures on his forehead. He dedicated his work to the Queen of England and she responded by giving him an annual stipend and the dubious distinction of serving a church in north central England named Epworth. It was a remote area and out of touch with modern life. The people of that area were known to be rather uncivilized and unfortunately Rev. Samuel Wesley did not always treat his parishioners in a civilized manner. He often made his parishioners do penance by standing barefoot in the aisle of the church. His temper would grow violent in his sermons. It is no wonder that villagers of Epworth took to expressing their feelings toward Samuel. They maimed his cattle, they set fire to his fields, and they jeered at his children. When Samuel ran up too many debts, they had him imprisoned at Lincoln Castle. For three months he lay there in prison, until his bishop personally paid the money to have him released. The bishop encouraged Samuel to take another pastorate. But determined to bring his people under control, Samuel stayed on at Epworth for a total of 39 years.

Samuel's wife, Susannah, was another matter altogether. They married in 1688, a year before Samuel was ordained. Susannah was as pretty as Samuel was rough. While Samuel was noted for his impracticality, Susannah's feet were placed firmly on the ground. Susannah was both intelligent and respected. Over the course of 20 years Susannah bore Samuel 19 children, including John and Charles; however, 10 of the 19 children died before the age of 2 and one daughter was born deformed. Yet Susannah wrote in her diary, (woman's voice) "All my sufferings serve to promote my spiritual and eternal good. Glory

be to Thee, O Lord.” Susannah did not think it exceptional to bear 19 children, for she was one of 25 children.

Both Samuel’s and Susannah’s fathers were clergymen who were part of a group of clergy called “nonconformists” because they refused to obey an English law of 1662 forcing all clergymen to strictly follow the Book of Common Prayer. 5000 of these Christians died in English prisons for their faith.

Susannah was a well educated woman, given to teaching her children by herself. Beginning at the age of 5 her lessons for the children lasted six hours a day. She taught them Greek, Hebrew and Latin. But she especially taught them the Bible. One son was exceptionally drawn to her religious teaching and that was John Benjamin Wesley, who, along with his brother Charles, would later become “methodical” reformers of the church and keen theologians, following in the “nonconformist” tradition of their forebears.

The first noteworthy event in John’s life was the subject of several paintings in later years. He was six years old when the parsonage suddenly caught fire. Everyone made it to safety except John. Flames engulfed his room, preventing an exit down the stairs. His mother described the event as follows:

(woman’s voice): “My husband, Samuel, heard the child John in the nursery

crying out miserably for help. Finding it impossible to get near him, Samuel

gave John up for lost. And kneeling down, he commended little John’s soul

to God.”

The crowd that had gathered around the burning house was not kneeling. They lifted a man unto their shoulders and rescued John just seconds before the roof collapsed. Susannah said of her son, “Is this not a brand plucked from the burning?” It was an expression John never forgot.

The years that followed for John and Charles were years of education. At the age of 10 John was sent to London to a school called Charterhouse. It was a boy’s school, where John was to live for six years, where he would be a swimmer and a tennis player, and where he was known as Jackey. He was also known as a scholar. At the age of 16 John went to Christ Church College, Oxford University. It was a large, formal school, highly competitive, but, as it turned out, not difficult for John at all. John Wesley distinguished himself in public speaking. He was known for his insight and his wit. But like his mother, he called himself “a person of one book.” And that book was the Bible.

Charles was sent to Westminster School in London at the age of 8. His and John’s older brother Samuel Jr., who was already in his mid-twenties, was a teacher at this school and paid for Charles’ education. While he was a very able student, he was not as outstanding a student as John. Charles followed John to Christ Church College in 1726. He wrote of not being a very serious student at first, but in 1729 his life took a serious turn and, as he wrote to a friend, “I set myself to study. Diligence led to serious thinking.” In 1730, Charles graduated from Oxford and began to work as a tutor there. This life pleased him, however his brother John began to pressure him to also enter the ministry, and finally succumbing to that pressure he was ordained in 1735.

When John graduated from Oxford at the age of 22, his future was set. His father, Samuel, borrowed money for his son's ordination fees and John prepared to become a country minister, just like his father. He preached his first sermon at a little church in South Leigh. About this first sermon he later confessed that he spoke very nervously from the pulpit.

Then an unexpected offer came John's way, a fellowship at Lincoln College. Here he was given a room in which to live, a salary for as long as he did not marry, and plenty of time to study. He did a certain amount of teaching, mostly Greek. An official engraving was done of John upon being awarded the fellowship. He was a small man, barely 5'4" tall, with slender hands and a thin face. His hair was dark and silken, and he wore it long throughout his life. Wigs were in fashion, but John refused to wear them. As often as possible, he chose to be austere. And he continued to be a man of one book.

It was here at Lincoln College that John began living his life so methodically. He arose every morning at 4. He studied all day, every day, a different subject each day: Greek on Tuesdays, philosophy on Fridays. He kept a meticulous journal of everything he did. One day, two years later, John learned that his father, Samuel, had suffered a stroke. So John went home to Epworth and became his father's assistant, carrying out the routines at a nearby country church named Wroote. It was a dismal place, where he wrote in his journal: "I preached much, but I see little fruit of my labor."

After two frustrating years at Wroote he went back to Lincoln College, ending forever his work as a local church priest. It was then that something happened which was to change the shape of his life. John had

always approached religion privately. But when John returned to Lincoln College his brother Charles was now there studying as well, and Charles preferred the company of others in his spiritual pursuits. Therefore, Charles had gathered together a handful of friends who met regularly, studying the classics, seeking a lifestyle that was truly Christian. It was called the “Holy Club.”

John joined the group and almost immediately he became their leader. And John led. He led them to meet every evening for three hours, to pray at least once every waking hour, and to fast every Wednesday and Friday. Not surprisingly, the students at Oxford looked askance at the Holy Club, calling its members various derogatory names. Mostly they were referred to sarcastically as “methodists” because they were so methodical under John’s leadership. The name never left them.

As the Holy Club sought to determine their Christian lifestyle they found part of their answer at Bocardo prison. One of the club members visited a prisoner in the musty old building. He came away appalled at the prison conditions. Men and women were placed in the same cells. Those who could not pay their meals went hungry. And the food that was available was barely edible. Into such depressing conditions the Wesleys and their colleagues plunged. They took the work of hope into a hopeless place. But always they took more: blankets in addition to Bibles, food in addition to prayers. And this is how they were able to do it, with their benevolent account, a record of who gave what. And they each gave sacrificially. The money went not just to prisoners, but to their families also; to widows and to orphans. Their money gone, the Holy Club would gather in the evening for the simplest of meals together: a bit of meat,

some bread and water. John wrote of this time: (a man's voice other than narrator)

“I abridged myself of all superfluities, and many of what are called necessities.”

As Charles began to express the Christian theology and his own personal experiences of faith through the writing of hymns, it is very clear that this prison ministry of the Holy Club shaped some of the hymns which he wrote. For Charles, the condemned prisoner becomes a metaphor for the human condition dependent on the mercy of God for life or death. The metaphors of imprisonment and freedom were real in a society in which the general population was perceived to be languishing in spiritual stupor and in captivity to sin.

About this time John and Charles crossed paths with General James Oglethorpe, a soldier, a member of Parliament and well-to-do. General Oglethorpe had set up an investigation of England's prison system. He found, as the Holy Club well knew, that the conditions were inhumane. Therefore, the General had many of the prisoners released. But doing so created another problem: what was to become of all these homeless, penniless, unemployed people? His grand answer was to create a new English colony in America, in an area called Georgia, and to move these ex-prisoners to this new land across the Atlantic Ocean. He named the colony Savannah.

It was a town designed to look orderly. Off to the left-hand side, by itself, there would be a house for a minister. General Ogelthorpe wanted John Wesley to be the minister for this new colony. After much

prayer, John said “yes.” In a similar manner, Charles also agreed to go to America as a missionary and he was assigned to a colony called Frederica.

Therefore, on October 14, 1735, John and Charles were smiling and waving goodbye to the people on shore as the ship set sail to this “new world” called America. Little did they know what lay ahead. The trip lasted three months, and Charles, who proved to be frailer than John, spent much of the time seasick. The worst part was a fierce winter storm. The ship came close to sinking. Everyone panicked, screamed, and cried. Everyone, that is, except one small group of people, members of a religious community from Germany. They called themselves Moravians and John was so very inspired by their calmness, prayers and songs.

Upon arriving to Georgia on February 6, 1736, John met the leader of this Moravian group, a man by the name of Rev. Spangenberg. Under this man’s gentle prodding, John came to realize that his personal faith was somehow lacking, and that his obsession with being constantly busy could be a defense as well as an attribute. But John was not yet ready to make significant changes. He threw himself into his work, as did his brother Charles. They made it their mission to save the Indians. The work was hard, and the barriers that separated the white settlers from the indigenous people of America were great. Results were slow in coming. Soon they began to feel out of place and their efforts were bearing little fruit.

In addition, so much work had to be done with the settlers in this new American territory, especially with those who had been part of the prison population of England and who in this new territory felt free to conduct themselves as they wished. In Savannah alone there were about

700 transplanted Europeans, many just out of prison, living in the wilds of a foreign swamp. For John and Charles, of course, the solution to bringing order to both the Savannah and Frederica colonies was to be methodical in their ministry. In Savannah, John conducted worship services at 5 am, 11 am and 3 pm, with prayer vigils in between. And colonists were not to pick and choose their service, but John required them to attend every one. John felt it within his bounds to publicly deny communion to certain people who refused to cooperate. He refused to baptize and marry others.

In the Frederica colony Charles was likewise becoming unpopular. He was not able to get along well with General Oglethorpe and he often had quarrels with his parishioners. After developing dysentery, Charles returned to England in 1736, after being in America less than one (?) year.

John stayed on in America a little longer, but this place was to be his undoing. He encountered the worst of conditions, the worst of people, and the worst of himself. His morale was shattered. One December night in 1737, after having been in America for a little less than two years, John secretly stole on board a ship and headed back to England. He wrote in his journal that night: "I went to America to convert others. But I was never myself converted to God."

The trip home for John was excruciatingly painful as he struggled with his failures in America. It was a journey that would divide his life into 2 halves, as he came face to face with his psychological and spiritual shortcomings. He knew that something or someone had to change if he was going to continue as a servant of God.

Shortly after John returned to England from his journey to the United States, he had a long talk with a Moravian minister by the name of Peter Bohler. They prayed together. John wept long and hard, humiliated by his failures in America. A demoralized John said to his friend, "Perhaps I should leave off preaching." Said his friend back to him, "By no means!" "But what can I preach," asked John. Bohler responded, "Preach faith until you have it. Then because you have it, you will preach faith."

It was on Aldersgate Street in London, a few weeks later, that John's life perceptibly changed. On a Wednesday evening, on May 24, 1738, he went to a small gathering of Methodists, not really wanting to be there. As one person was reading Luther's preface to Romans, about being saved not by the things you did, but by faith alone, something happened to John. (a man's voice other than narrator) "About a quarter before nine," John writes in his journal, "while the leader of the gathering 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. An assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine."

The memory of that profoundly personal experience never left John Wesley and Methodists around the world still recognize May 24 as an important date in the life of the church, recalling this profound spiritual encounter that John had with the living Christ, and encounter of important conversion. The memory of that profoundly personal experience never left John, and it freed him to take up life with a new vigor, a vigor which was to last until his death.

Charles had a similar conversion experience that had taken place three days before John's. As he slept, Charles heard a voice saying,

(another voice) “In the name of Jesus Christ, arise, and believe, and thou shalt be healed.” Charles picked up his Bible and his eyes settled on these words, “Truly my hope is even in Thee . . . He hath put a new song into my mouth, even a song of thanksgiving unto our God.” He now found himself at peace with God and his health began to recover. A few days later he wrote the hymn “Where Shall My Wondering Soul Begin.”

After the Aldersgate experience, John began to preach whenever he could, wherever he could. He was quickly known for preaching well - - simply, directly, stirringly. The sermons he composed came across with such emotion and so many people responded so enthusiastically (what we might call today as a somewhat pentecostal or charismatic fervor). Because of such stirring responses to John’s preaching, clergyman after clergyman asked John not to come back to their church. John Wesley offered a spiritual or pentecostal fervor that was uncommon to worship in the Church of England. It was obvious that John’s experience in America among somewhat “lawless” people had reshaped some of his liturgical habits that were the norm in the Anglican Church. In America, he had found himself at times departing from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer as he would pray freely or extemporaneously. His ministry among some of the “rough” inhabitants of America had altered some of the preaching style which was expected of clergy in the Church of England. In America, John had found himself preaching at times without a pulpit, in the open, and with bodily movements that would help to hold the attention of his often restless hearers. Now, back in England, John’s more lively preaching would often illicit a lively response from the worshippers, to the growing dismay of clergy and leaders of the Anglican Church.

The most popular preacher in England during this time was a 25 year old man named George Whitefield. Whitefield was theatrical in the pulpit, he waved and stomped and shouted. He too, like John, was barred from preaching in the Anglican churches of England. And so Whitefield took to the open air, where no one could stop him. He preached and people flocked to hear him, even as many as 5,000 and 10, 000 people! When he decided to take his turn in carrying the gospel to America he needed someone to pastor the crowds he had developed. He needed someone to “methodize” this revival movement. He asked John Wesley to take over as the leader and John said “yes.” Charles likewise continued to preach, to write poetry, and to minister to condemned prisoners at Newgate in Bristol.

It was here in the seaport town of Bristol that John and Charles began their new work. John began doing what he said seemed almost like a sin not to be doing in a church building. He preached in the wide open air, in vacant fields, on factory lawns, wherever there were people. He went to pastures just outside London, and people pushed to be near him and to hear him. He went to the places people worked, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week; to glass factories and coal mines. People turned out by the thousands. Poor people came, common people, people who felt uncared for by the establishment of the Anglican Church. John went downtown to market squares. Even an overnight stop at an inn was reason enough to find a congregation. These evangelistic gatherings angered many local parish priests, because the Wesleys had not received permission from the Church of England to conduct such preaching.

In his late 30's, John began traveling extensively by horseback, crisscrossing all of England. Before he was done he was to ride a quarter

of a million miles (kilometers?). He got so that while he was riding on horseback he could balance a little desk in front of him, reading books and writing sermons as he rode; he writes at several places in his journals that on a few occasions he was knocked from his horse by low-hanging branches while reading and writing. Not once but at least twice a day he preached, and sometimes many times a day.

Charles, on the other hand, in 1749, fell in love with and married Sally Gwynne, a pretty and intelligent woman 19 years younger than he was. The couple lived in Bristol for about 22 years where they had 8 children, although only 3 survived. Sally's parents were sympathizers with the Methodist movement and often opened their home to traveling preachers. In 1771, Charles and Sally moved to London to help further their sons' musical careers. Here Charles remained for the rest of his life, superintending Methodist work in London.

During these years, John continued preaching and evangelizing all over England. Both John and Charles developed certain theological emphases that would become the center of Methodist theology. Out of John's and Charles' similar "conversion" experiences came the affirmation of God's forgiveness, His justification of sinners by grace alone, not by any works that one is able to do in order to be saved. God's justification is received by faith, that is, by acknowledging and trusting that it is through Christ's perfect obedience on our behalf that we are all justified. Sinners are brought to a place of repentance and faith through the "preventing" work of God. The word "prevenient" literally means "to come before," and as used by the Wesleys refers to the gracious forgiveness and love of God that works in the sinner even before one is ever aware of it, wooing a person into a place where one becomes

receptive to God's work of salvation. It is through God's work of prevenient grace that one's eyes are awakened to sin and that one perceives the need to be transformed and becomes intimately acquainted with the One who alone can transform human life from sin to righteousness.

As John's and Charles' experience of faith in Christ grew and their understanding of the work of God's Spirit in every believer matured, their theology and hymn writing evolved into a stronger emphasis on the grace of sanctification that follows upon prevenient and justifying grace. Sanctification was understood by the Wesleys as the work of the Holy Spirit in imparting to believers the gifts of the Spirit and in nurturing the believer into a life of perfect love.

These essential ingredients of the Methodist theology were widely taught and preached throughout England. In 1763, Wesley drafted a Model Deed which stipulated that the pulpits of the Methodist chapels were to be used by persons who preached only those doctrines contained in his New Testament notes and his four volumes of sermons. If a preacher didn't conform, he was replaced within three months.

Charles further reinforced these emerging theological emphases of the Methodist movement through the some 6000 hymns that he wrote. Because of the poetic gifts of Charles the people called Methodists became known as those who sing their faith.

Throughout the years of the Methodist movement, one of the rules that John employed from the beginning, one he never changed, was that no Methodist service was to be held at the same time as a regular Anglican service, because he never intended to replace the Church of England with the Methodist movement. So when John went to his home

church at Epworth, and asked to preach, and was turned down, he went back later that afternoon and he stood on his father's tomb and preached his heart out. The crowd that gathered was many times larger than had been at church that morning.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there were those who were none too happy with him. Local clergy were known to organize groups of opposition. In the back country of Wednesbury a rowdy crowd gave John one memorable reception. In attendance were both a policeman and a minister who egged the ruffians on. The day was saved when one of the leaders of the mob, struck by John's courage and calmness, changed his mind and decided to protect the clergyman. John's brother Charles was also introduced to his full share of threatening gestures and angry acts. Others who followed John and Charles in this revival movement were likewise subjected to the same treatment. Methodists had their homes torn apart and their families mistreated. Taunting became almost an accepted practice. Yet Methodism continued to grow, and even prosper.

And John continued to methodize the movement, dividing everyone into small groups called "classes" which met every week to read the Bible, to sing, to pray together, and to "watch over one another in love," holding one another accountable for their practices of daily living as Christians. "Grace upon grace" summarized the Wesley's understanding of the Christian life. Discipleship begins in grace, grows in grace, and finds its ultimate completion in God's grace. Grace is God's unmerited love, restoring our relationship to God and renewing God's own image in our lives. The Wesley brothers modeled accountable discipleship and continued to develop structures that affirmed each Christian's need of others to successfully complete the journey of faith. They used small

groups, bands and classes, in which persons provided mutual encouragement and genuine care for one another.

Fellowship in small groups was just one “means of grace” in a constellation of spiritual practices or disciplines, the purpose of which was richer communion with God through Christ. In addition to Christian fellowship the Wesleys also included prayer and fasting, Bible study, and participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion among what they called the “instituted means of grace.” They also called these “works of piety.”

The Wesleys, however, both found it impossible to separate their personal experience of God and devotion to Christ from their role as ambassadors of reconciliation and social transformation in the world. John stated that “there can be no personal holiness without social holiness.” Therefore, the life of Methodists consisted of balancing works of piety with works of mercy, which was a commitment to the poor and advocacy for the oppressed. In this way the Christian life was viewed as wholistic, with works of mercy paralleling the more interior works of piety.

The people called Methodists also began generously contributing financially during their class meetings. Members of the classes would contribute one penny a week and those pennies made pounds (the currency of England), and those pounds made a common fund; a fund not for themselves, but for others. The Methodists were the first benevolent loan society, loaning money to people who could not get credit anywhere else. They aided prisoners, such as those at London’s Newgate prison. They started homes for orphans, like the one in Newcastle. They instituted Sunday Schools for youth who received no education at all,

except for that which Methodists provided. John started the first dispensary for poor people in London and he often worked there himself.

John Wesley was so concerned about the physical well being of people that he wrote and published a book on medicine. He purchased an electrification machine, which, when hands were held in a circle, would put a strong jolt through the body. So equipped, John took on that perennial medical problem of baldness. He wrote:

“Rub the part morning and evening with onions . . . rub afterwards with honey . . . and then electrify daily.”

All this activity emanated from one place: The Foundry, located outside of London. Once it had been a cannon factory. An explosion destroyed the roof and it sat vacant for twenty years. Under John’s supervision the filthy factory was turned into a clean chapel that could hold 1500 people. There was also room for a school, a stable, and, up above, a small apartment for John himself.

It was during these growing years that John trained people to be the leaders of the small groups he started. He wrote a book for them, telling them how they were to serve in his place until he returned from one of his circuits. John Nelson was one of the first of these leaders. By day he was a laborer, by evening a minister. In time John allowed such leaders to preach, even though his brother Charles was more hesitant to do so.

As implied, John and Charles did not always agree on everything. For example, John was much more inclined to allow enthusiastic (or pentecostal) expressions in worship, even the speaking in tongues; but Charles was very suspicious that such activity was often not genuine.

Later, John conceded that some persons were indeed acting rather than authentically moved by the Holy Spirit; however, at times John also experienced such gifts of the Spirit as genuine and allowed them to be expressed.

John and Charles also did not agree when John decided late in life that it was now time to affirm the Methodist movement as separate from the Church of England. Charles was heartbroken by John's decision in 1784 to sign the Deed of Declaration, which guaranteed the existence of the Methodist Conference as an independent body. Charles was not supportive of John when his brother began to ordain ministers for the work in America and when he revised the Anglican Book of Common Prayer for the newly independent Methodist church in the United States. While there were differences of opinion between John and Charles they loved and respected each other greatly.

As John chose persons to lead the classes that were formed as well as persons to preach, he naturally outlined his expectations very clearly, beginning with the agreement "not to listen or willingly inquire after any ill concerning each other." Later rules of conduct included "never be unemployed a moment," "touch no woman," and "contract no debt without my knowledge." He even had instructions for preaching, including "never thump the pulpit and avoid the odious custom of spitting while speaking."

It was in 1744 that John called together his first annual conference of preachers who were aligned with his renewal movement. Present were six Anglican clergymen and four lay preachers. At annual conference 35 years later, in 1779, there were 450 clergymen.

John encouraged all the ministers to remain single, if they could, but he himself could not. Having been close to marriage several times, John at the age of 48 married Mary Vazeille, a wealthy widow 8 years his younger. The marriage was a mistake for a man as married to his vocation as John was, and for a woman as possessive as Mary. Eventually they separated. When she died in 1781 she was buried before John was even informed of her death.

It would be unjust, however, to judge John Wesley only on the basis of his marriage. For during that same time he was the inspiration for a movement that rose from obscurity and became a dominant influence in English life. By his later years he had the ears of the influential as well as the powerless, the rich as well as the poor. He led Methodism to become an institution that built its own chapels like the one on City Road in London. He led Methodism to start its own schools, and to offer its own brand of education. He and Charles changed religious music forever.

John directed the spread of Methodism to America, where it became an independent denomination called the Methodist Episcopal Church even before such happened in England.

It was in 1788 that Charles died peacefully at the age of 81. His family was at his bedside and his daughter heard him speak these words, (another voice) “Lord – my heart – my God.”

After Charles’ death, John lived on for another 3 years. During these later years John remained remarkably able. Into his 80’s he still preached throughout all of England. His only concession to age was to ride in a carriage rather than on horseback. Even in his last days, at the age of 87, he maintained his heavy correspondence. One of his last

letters was an encouragement for his followers in America to uproot slavery.

On March 2, 1791, with his closest friends nearby, John knew his time to die had come. Not surprisingly he remained conscious to the end. Just before he died he raised his voice to offer his farewell message. He said, "The best of all is - - God is with us!" Then for emphasis he said again, "The best of all is - - God is with us!"

The legacies of both John and Charles Wesley is contained in that affirmation. As they both spread the news of the infinite love of God, as revealed through Jesus Christ, and as they so dramatically lived out the bold truth of God's saving grace, John and Charles did more than begin the Methodist Church. They proclaimed the enduring message that God's word is for everyone, of every station of life, and that people of God are called to reach out, to demonstrate that they care, to be intentional about both the public and private practice of their faith. Looking back upon their lives, it is easy to agree that God **WAS** with John and Charles Wesley and with the movement that they began.

Methodism in the United States grew steadily both before the Wesley's deaths and afterwards. Already in the 1760's there were those influenced by the Methodist movement who were working and preaching in America. Wesley himself began to send preachers for the specific purpose of caring over Methodist communities in America and to further the growth of the movement there. Francis Asbury was one of those whom John chose to lead the Methodist movement in the United States. Asbury arrived to America in 1771, and he is the one who is generally referred to as the foremost leader of the Methodist movement in America, although there were others who preceded him. As a circuit rider

he traveled an average of 8,000 kilometers a year on horseback. During the Revolutionary War between the United States and England, Asbury sided with the new American republic. John Wesley wrote to leaders of the Methodist movement in the United States expressing his opposition to the American Revolution. Much of his disapproval of the revolution had to do with the issue of slavery; for there were Methodists in America who owned slaves and John Wesley spoke strongly against any Methodists owning slaves. He asked how Methodists could justify fighting for their own freedom from England when they themselves denied freedom to their slaves? When independence from England was won by America in 1776, it was necessary to form an American Methodist church. John Wesley sent Thomas Coke, an Anglican clergyman, to the United States as superintendent of the new church, which was named the Methodist Episcopal Church. The church was officially formed on December 24, 1784 in Baltimore, Maryland, at what became known as the Christmas Conference.

The Methodist Episcopal Church was organized with Asbury and Coke as joint superintendents. Regardless of Wesley's opposition, these two men allowed themselves to be called "bishops," a term which comes from the Greek word "episcopal" or "overseer." In 1792, about a year after John's death, a general conference was formed to be the lawmaking body for the church. By 1796, because of growth and geographical distance, the Methodist Episcopal Church was divided into separate conferences.

During the 19th and 20th centuries there were several splits within the Methodist Episcopal Church. The most serious took place over the issue of slavery. The conference of 1784 had outlawed slavery in the

church, but as slavery became entrenched in the southern areas of the United States it became necessary to modify this position. By the 1840's, as the United States was itself becoming seriously divided over slavery, so too did Christian denominations. The Methodist Episcopal churches in the southern region of the United States split off from the Methodist Episcopal Church in May 1845 and started calling themselves the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

In the northern section of the United States blacks had formed their own Methodist organization. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, led by Richard Allen, was organized in 1816. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church was founded in New York in 1821. Both arose because of the struggle between whites and blacks. A third black organization was formed after the Civil War. It was made up of members who withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Today it is known as the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

Other splits within the Methodist Churches also took place during the 1800's and 1900's, some of them also came about because of their opposition to slavery, but also because of opposition to the Episcopal system and some because of the lack of "enthusiasm" or spiritually charged worship within the main, established Methodist Episcopal Church.

One of these movements that separated from the Methodist Episcopal Church called themselves the Wesleyan Methodist Church of America (now known as simply the Wesleyan Church). They split largely over the issue of slavery, arguing that the Methodist Episcopal Church did not hold a strong enough position against slavery. The Wesleyan Methodist Church, which began in the state of New York, also championed the rights of women.

Another movement that separated from the “mother” Methodist Episcopal Church began to call themselves “Free Methodists.” They formed in 1860 in New York in opposition to the Methodist Episcopal Church’s weak stand on slavery, because they opposed the paying of money in order to gain the right to sit in the pews closest to the pulpit, and because they criticized the spiritual laxness of the church hierarchy.

Yet other splits came about in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s as part of a “holiness movement” that put strong emphasis upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit and upon a very personal, spiritual experience of the Holy Spirit. One of these was the Primitive Methodist Church which sought to restore the enthusiasm of the Holy Spirit to worship and bring about spiritual renewal within the church.

Methodism in the United States, in its variety of expressions, began sending out missionaries to Latin America during the late 1800’s. Before this time and even during the time when the first Protestant missionaries arrived, Latin American countries had many restrictions that allowed only Roman Catholic Christianity to be practiced, along with indigenous religions. Roman Catholic Christianity was predominant throughout Latin America because of the vast conquest of the Spaniards beginning in the late 1400’s.

Some Protestant missionaries to Latin America, such as Methodists and Presbyterians from the United States and Europe, were persecuted because they saw Protestantism as an attempt to undermine Catholicism. There were Latin American leaders who wanted to be sure that Roman Catholicism remained the sole Christian expression of faith in their country. However, in some countries, such as Argentina, Chile, Peru and Guatemala, more liberal governments opened the way for Protestantism,

which they saw as a counterbalance against some of the conservative stances of Roman Catholic leadership. Although Protestant expressions of Christianity, especially Pentecostalism, have made very strong inroads into Latin America countries, in many places Roman Catholicism still carries immense influence.

Methodism came into Latin America not only from the United States, but by way of British Methodism as well, as some came or were taken to Latin America from the British West Indies. In addition, in some places, such as in Cuba, there were exiles who left Latin America and became Methodists while abroad, some even were trained as Methodist pastors, and then returned to their home country taking Methodism with them.

Today, the nature of Methodism in Latin American countries varies according to which Methodist missionaries began the church in that country, along with each country's unique Protestant history over the past 130 years. Methodism also varies from country to country depending upon the manner in which it was accepted and practiced among indigenous people. In Peru, for example, the Methodist Church was brought to Peru around 1888 by missionary Francisco Penzotti of the American Bible Society; and today in the Lima area the Iglesia Metodista del Peru remains very much shaped and influenced by the North American and European church. It was only around the 1970's that Methodists within Peru, along with missionaries from the United States, began evangelizing the indigenous highland population, such as the Quechua and Aymara people.

Methodism also differs in Latin American countries depending on the particular Methodism in the United States that sent missionaries. The

General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church in the United States, formerly known as the Missions Board, has sent many missionaries to Latin America since the early 1900's. In the past twenty years there has developed a competing mission agency run by United Methodists in the United States but not officially recognized by the United Methodist Church, called the Mission Society. There are many instances within Latin American Methodism where the General Board of Global Ministries and the Mission Society have found themselves in competition and in disagreement, sometimes leading to splits within Latin America Methodism. In some countries, therefore, there are two competing branches of the Methodist Church, and even two separate seminaries, such as in Costa Rica.

The Methodism that one finds in Guatemala, in Central America, did not grow out of the United Methodist Church. Rather, it was brought to Guatemala by missionaries of the Primitive Methodist Church in the United States around the early 1920's. Methodism in Guatemala is only present in the western part of the country, predominantly among the Mayan people of the highlands. The Primitive Evangelical Methodist Church in Guatemala split in 1982 forming another Primitive Evangelical Methodist Church in that country, but one which uses the word "National" within its name. The National Evangelical Primitive Methodist Church of Guatemala is supported by the General Board of Global Ministries of the UMC, while the Primitive Evangelical Methodist Church has maintained ties with the Primitive Methodist Church of Pennsylvania, in the United States, from whence came the first missionaries.

Every country of Latin America has its own unique history with regard to the entrance and formation of Methodism within that country.

Many of the Methodist Churches throughout Latin America have recorded their own unique history. If your church has not done so, you are encouraged to record and preserve your history.

One thing that Methodists around the world can certainly agree on is that John and Charles Wesley would certainly not be very pleased by the many separations in this movement of renewal that they began more than 250 years ago. We can be sure that as they sit among the saints of the Church Triumphant that they are encouraging us to be constantly vigilant and courageous in the ever-continuing renewal of the Church through the work of the Holy Spirit.