

CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

History Series: The History of John Wesley and the Methodist Church

Compiled by John H. Evans

SABBATH FEBRUARY 4, 2007

PART 17: A NEW BEGINNING

We have been following Wesley's development and from even this sketchy summary it should be evident that he was struggling mightily to attain forgiveness and experience the love of God. The struggle came to fruition in the "heart warming" experience of May 24, 1738 and the descent into the "vileness" of field preaching on April 2, 1739. Now things develop rapidly and with many controversies and physical attacks. We will take note of just some of the more historically significant events.

The First Methodist Building

On Wednesday May 9 1739, Wesley and the people of two Bristol societies took possession of a piece of ground near St. James' churchyard in Bristol. The objective was to build a room large enough to hold both societies. Wesley appointed eleven feoffees (or "trustees" as we would call them) of whom he remarks, "on whom the burdens would fall." However, as he goes on to say, "I quickly found my mistake. First, with regard to the expense; for the whole enterprise had stood still had I not taken upon myself the payment of the workmen, so that before I knew where I was, I had contracted a debt of over one hundred and fifty pounds." Whitefield and John's brother Charles wrote with stern warnings that they would not help raise funds unless Wesley took full control, which Wesley did. The clinching argument was, "such feoffees [trustees] always would have it in their power to control me; and if I preached not as they liked, to turn me out of the room that I had built." This set a pattern. Wesley always maintained total control. This is the first Methodist building.

Wesley began in earnest his itinerant preaching, many times to almost unbelievable numbers. The Church of England divided the country into parishes and a priest from one parish could not preach in another unless allowed by the local priest. Thus, Wesley was ordered by the Bristol priest to "get thee hence." This called forth a famous statement from Wesley of which the conclusion is "God in Scripture commands me, according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous. Man forbids me to do this in another's parish. That is, in effect, to do it at all seeing I have no parish of my own, nor probably ever shall. Whom shall I hear, God or Man? I look upon the world as my parish."

The First Public Use of The Name "Methodist"

Sunday Aug. 9, 1739 – "I declared to about ten thousand in Moorfields, what they must do to be saved. My mother went with us, about five, to Kennington, where there were supposed to be about twenty thousand people." [Almost unbelievable numbers!]

Sunday Aug. 16, 1739 – "I preached at Moorfields to about ten thousand, and at Kennington common to, I believe, nearly twenty thousand. --- at both places I described the real difference between what is generally called Christianity and the old Christianity, which under the new name of Methodism, is now everywhere spoken against."