



Contact

a publication for the OKUMC connection

DEEPLY ROOTED

The United Methodism 101 Issue



OklahomaConference
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

June 2025 • Volume 7, Number 5



Communications Ministry Staff



Carlos Ramirez

**Director of
Communications**



Jena Barber

**Editor
of Publications**



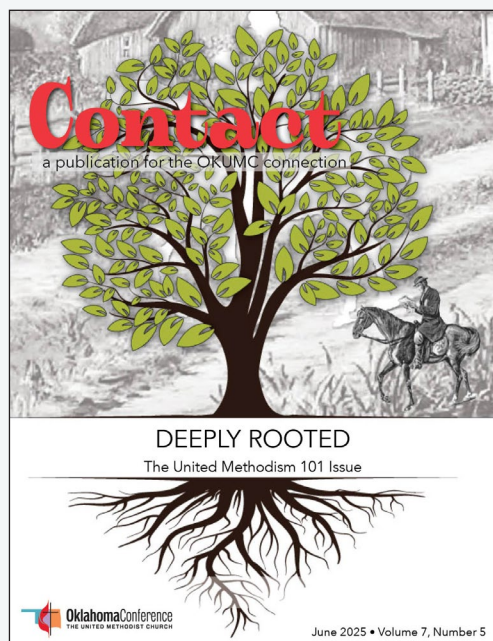
Andrew Himes

**Multimedia
and Web Ministry**



Tabitha Beckman

**Communications
Specialist**



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Cover photo and feature graphics: Deposit Photos & Jena Barber

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The Contact, a publication of the OKUMC Connection (USPS 954-500) is published monthly by The Oklahoma Conference of The United Methodist Church, 1501 NW 24th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73106. Periodical postage paid at Oklahoma City, OK. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "The Contact OKUMC", 1501 NW 24th St., Oklahoma City, OK 73106.

from the editor

I would like to say I'm a lifelong United Methodist, but I'm not. Almost, though. I joined First UMC in Clarksville, Arkansas, when I was in tenth grade. I went through confirmation as a high school kid, with a whole class of people my age. The church was really moving and grooving.

I learned a lot during my high school years that I promptly forgot after college, and especially after two kids and the memory loss associated with them.

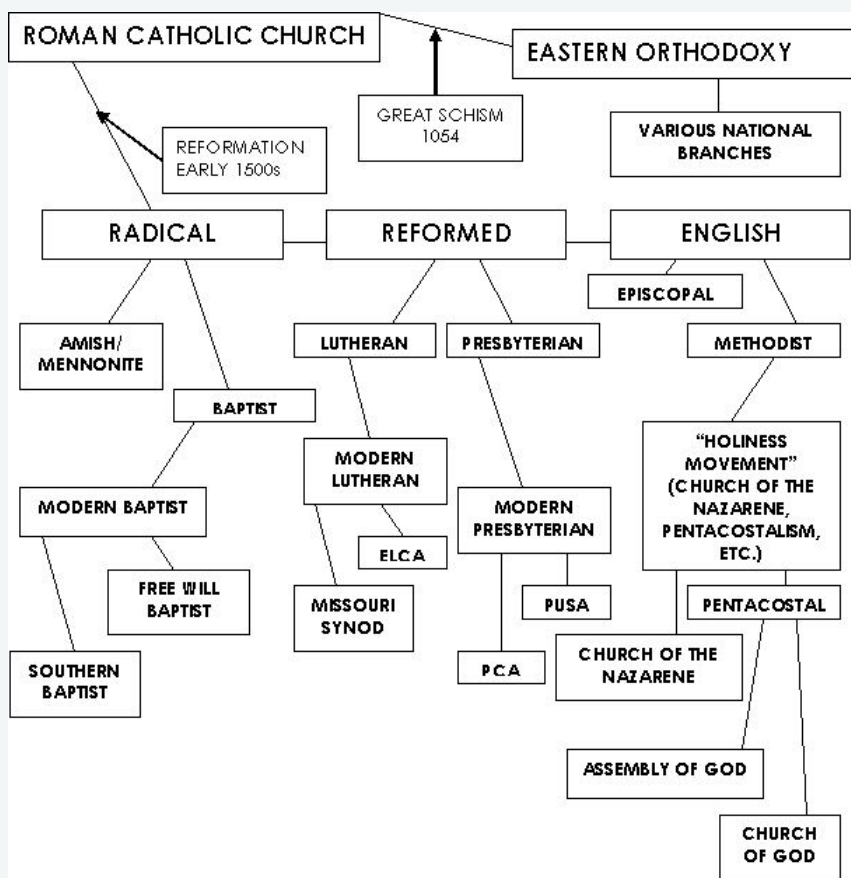
So it was a surprise to me when, during our membership class when Jinx and I joined First UMC in Springdale in 2008, when I learned that there was a "family tree" of denominations, and that we (United Methodists) are on the same branch as my mom's Assemblies of God, and not the same as my progressive friends' Presbyterian church. We have a tree that branches all the way back to Peter!

I was surprised again when the Bishop read out the "family tree" of ordination dating back to John Wesley when my husband was ordained. I kept being surprised every single year because - well, I can't blame my kids for my memory, since they're adults now.

United Methodists have a rich history, filled with traditions, sacraments, creeds, songs, stories, and so much more. It's like living in an old, established town. There's always something new to discover - even if you don't have a bad memory.

We chose to use a lot of root imagery for this issue, for obvious reasons. The theme of this issue is Deeply Rooted.

Read here about all the different ways United Methodists find their roots - and ways in which our branches are still growing and reaching for heights we haven't yet dreamed of.



This is a very basic tree I found on a site called teensundayschool.com. I'm no Biblical historian, but it seems accurate, yet simple enough to understand.

A large tree trunk with a cross-section showing roots. The tree trunk is dark brown with a rough, textured bark. The roots are a lighter brown color and are shown extending downwards into the ground. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The text is overlaid on the tree trunk and roots.

CONNECTIONALLY CONNECTED:

**a primer on
United Methodist Polity**

by Rev. Dr. Derrek Belase

United Methodists are familiar with words like discipline, order, accountability and connection. These words all connect to our polity, or, as Webster defines it, “the form of government of a religious denomination.”

This form of organization is connectional as opposed to a congregational polity. That means that decisions about doctrine, theology, pastoral leadership and property ownership are governed by a relationship with all other United Methodists as opposed to individual decisions made at the congregation level.

Our founder, John Wesley, was steeped in the connectional system of the Church of England. He understood the importance of order in the life of the church, but only as that order contributes to the overall mission and ministry to which we are called.

In a letter written on June 25, 1746, he wrote, “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order? Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God; and to build them up in his fear and love? Order, then, is so far valuable, as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth.”

In the eighteenth century, Wesley would have used the term ‘connexion,’ which referred to the circle of those connected to some person or group, and to the relationship thus created.

The primary way the early Methodist movement was connected came through the Trust Clause or a model deed. This clause has been included in the deeds of Methodist properties since the beginning. By 1750, John Wesley had accumulated three properties as meeting places and ministry sites for the Methodist societies. He wanted to make sure that local

societies could not take control of these properties from the connection he was creating.

In 1796, a form of these deeds, often referred to as “The Model Deed,” was approved by the General Conference for American Methodists. This Model Deed and the mandate for a trust clause in all church property documents first appeared in the Book of Discipline in 1797.

However, it is not only property that connects United Methodist today. A search of the 2024 Book of Discipline reveals the use of the word 266 times. Paragraph 132 contains the most comprehensive statement on our connectional polity.

¶ 132. The Journey of a Connectional People—Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust. Our connectionalism is not merely a linking of one charge conference to another. It is rather a vital web of interactive relationships. We are connected by sharing a common tradition of faith, including Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules (¶ 104); by sharing together a constitutional polity, including a leadership of general superintendency; by sharing a common mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences that reflect the inclusive and missional character of our fellowship; by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our distinctive way of doing things.

If you read closely, you will see the words standards, constitution, general superintendency and conferences. Among others, those four words identify the distinctive elements of our organization.

The constitution of the United Methodist Church, just as it is in the United States, is

the unifying document which governs our connection. It can only be changed by a vote of the General Conference and then by votes in the various annual conferences.

The general superintendency refers to the nature of church oversight that resides with the Bishop and extends from the Bishop to the District Superintendents. The purpose of the superintendency is “for the purpose of equipping the Church in its disciple-making ministry for the transformation of the world” (§ 401).

Bishops are a part of the Council of Bishops, where they are held accountable for their work. District superintendents, appointed from among the elders in the conference, work together with the Bishop to make appointments and order the life of the annual conference.

The interconnected system of conferences may be the most visible way the connection is experienced. Every local church is a part of a charge conference, which is responsible for electing church officers, setting the pastor’s compensation, approving lay servants for service to the church and sending forth candidates for ministry.

All local churches (charges) are a part of the annual conference. There is a yearly meeting called the Annual Conference, but the structure itself exists apart from that gathering as an administrative and programmatic unit of the connection.

Annual conferences make up the General Conference, which meets every four years to make decisions on behalf of the entire

denomination. In addition, each conference is a part of one of five jurisdictions in the United States. The Oklahoma conference is a part of the South Central Jurisdiction. Jurisdictional conferences meet in the same year as the General Conference, with the primary responsibility of electing bishops to serve the area.

Connectionally connected is the best way to describe the United Methodist Church. From the beginning, Wesley believed that the doctrine, discipline and order of the church was only as good as its focus on the mission of the world. Today, we celebrate all the ways that this connection connects us to the world!



Resources for further study and reading:

- *Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions* (published every four years after a General Conference).
- Lacey Warner, *The Method of Our Mission: United Methodist Polity and Organization* (2014).
- Lacey Warner and Kenneth Carder, *Grace to Lead: Practicing Leadership in the Wesleyan Tradition* (2016).
- Thomas Elliott and Anne Burkholder Daniel, *The Quick and Easy Guide to United Methodist Polity, 2nd edition* (2025).
- Kenneth Carder, *Living Our United Methodist Beliefs; The United Methodist Way* (2009).
- Lay Servant Advanced Classes – “United Methodist Polity” and “Living Our United Methodist Beliefs”



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by Sharri L. Hiller

The Book of Discipline describes the Ministry of the Laity in paragraph 127. It says:

The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ's outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist

Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20); every layperson is called to be missional. The witness of the laity, their Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of

the gospel, is the primary evangelistic ministry through which all people will come to know Christ and The United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission.

As Christian disciples, we have accepted the teachings of Christ and are called to assist in spreading that teaching to others. Understanding and interpreting the teachings of Christ is why we attend worship, Bible studies, and Sunday School; do mission projects; and belong to accountability groups. These are the main ways we grow as disciples. Some disciples feel the call to obtain additional schooling and training and commit their lives to ordained ministry. These are our pastors, the clergy of the church.

In 2011, my husband became a part-time licensed local pastor and started serving the Healdton UMC (we lived in Ringling). When I would tell people that Jeff had become a pastor, more than one person looked at me and said, "But I thought it would be you that would become a pastor!"

Even to this day I believe God is confirming my call to ministry as a lay person. There is so much work to be done and people to be reached that can be difficult for traditional clergy. For those of us that don't feel that call to become clergy, we have ministry to do! As lay members of the church, we are called to share the love of Christ to those around us.

When we leave our church on Sunday or Wednesday, we are called to be an example for others in our speech, our conduct, our love, our faith and our purity. We are called to be Disciples in the Marketplace. We are called to show God's love to everyone we encounter every day, no matter where we encounter them!

It has recently been said that "the church" has created a passive model of discipleship. We as the laity have been content to let the "paid professionals," the clergy, do the work. It is not supposed to be that way. The Book of Discipline does not dictate a model of the clergy doing all the work. The Book of Discipline calls clergy and laity to minister to the world as partners in ministry.

For the local church to thrive, laity needs to continue to connect, communicate and serve inside and outside our local churches.

We need to encourage each other to continue our discipleship journeys; growing as disciples of Christ by Bible Study, service and mission, and leadership training.

We need to encourage each other, including the clergy, to take the next new step in our journey of faith so that we all can be showing all we encounter the love of Christ. This is how we make disciples for the transformation of the world.

Sharri Hiller is the Oklahoma Annual Conference Lay Leader.



“You are loved before you change. You are forgiven and accepted. You are healing over time—and you do not walk this road alone.”

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, described grace as the “active, loving presence of God” working in every human life. His theology of grace—structured in three movements: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying—offers not just a spiritual framework, but a deeply human lens through which to understand emotional well-being. In today’s mental health crisis, this 18th-century vision offers an unexpectedly modern truth: grace heals.

As a mental health professional, I’ve seen firsthand the power of grace to transform

wounded minds and hearts. Beyond doctrine, grace offers a therapeutic tool that speaks to the soul—inviting compassion, dismantling shame, and creating space for resilience and restoration.

Grace as Healing Presence

Grace, when embraced in counseling or personal reflection, provides radical permission to be human. It speaks to our most broken places with compassion, not judgment. Many clients come carrying the weight of self-condemnation, believing they must “get better” before they’re worthy of peace. Grace says the opposite: healing begins with knowing you are already loved.

This is the first movement of Wesley’s

framework—prevenient grace, the love that “goes before.” It assures us that no one is too far gone, too broken, or too complicated to be embraced by God. For those navigating depression, anxiety, trauma, or guilt, this is not only freeing—it’s foundational.

Grace as Release and Forgiveness

Grace also invites emotional release. When we hold on to past hurts, resentment can become an emotional stronghold. Grace makes forgiveness possible—not by minimizing the harm done, but by loosening the grip of pain on our present. This release doesn’t rewrite the past, but it reclaims our energy for growth and purpose.

Wesley’s justifying grace speaks here. It lifts the burdens of guilt and offers the assurance of divine acceptance. This inner peace—what Wesley called “a peace that passes understanding”—becomes a quiet strength in moments of mental or emotional distress.

Grace as a Lifelong Journey

The healing journey is rarely linear. Recovery, like sanctification, unfolds slowly—sometimes in spirals, sometimes in long plateaus. Wesley’s concept of sanctifying grace mirrors the process of mental health recovery: an ongoing work of love, not a quick fix.

This grace makes room for imperfection. It honors the courage of every step forward and stays present in every setback. Healing, like holiness, is not about being perfect—but becoming whole.

Grace Creates Safe Space

One of grace’s most powerful gifts is how it shapes our relationships. When we experience grace, we begin to extend to ourselves and to others. Grace fosters empathy, nonjudgment, and connection,

creating the kind of safe environments where healing becomes possible.

In counseling, this might look like holding a client’s pain without trying to fix it. In community, it means making room for vulnerability. When we feel safe, we are more likely to show up as our authentic selves—and authenticity is where healing begins.

A Sacred Resource

John Wesley may not have spoken directly about mental health in today’s terms, but his theology of grace offers a holistic view of human healing—one that integrates body, mind, and soul.

In a world searching for hope, Wesleyan grace declares:

You are already loved. You are not alone. And healing is possible—because grace is real.



Becoming a Person Who Serves

by Brandon Blacksten

Early in his papacy, Pope Francis was approached by a man whose skin was covered with tumors. Without hesitating, the Pope embraced him, holding him for more than a minute before taking the man's face in his hands and kissing it. Photos of the encounter spread across the world as people marveled at the Pope's willingness to embrace someone whom many others would have avoided. Despite his status as the leader of more than one billion Catholics worldwide, he set aside his status in order to lavish love on the people the world ignores and oppresses. Pope Francis was, at his core, a person who served.

That is how Fred Craddock describes the biblical definition of a minister: "a person who serves." By that definition, every Christian is a minister. Your ministry may not be as dramatic as that of the late Pope, and it will surely not receive as much attention, but if you become a person who serves, you can change lives through the power of God's love.

Baptized into Service

In baptism, we are incorporated into Christ's body, and each of us has a role to play in the work of the church in the world. We are not saved to privately enjoy God's blessings until we join God in heaven. We are sent into God's mission in the world, joyfully and gratefully joining Jesus in the work of the kingdom.

Ministry is an expression of our obedience to Jesus' two great commandments: loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. We love God and our neighbor through service in our local churches, in the community, by advocating for the

vulnerable and oppressed, and simply by living our life with a posture of love.

Many Gifts, One Spirit

When we celebrate communion, we pray, "Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world." We are one in ministry, and each of us is part of Christ's body. None of us is gifted in quite the same way as any other, but each of us receives gifts for ministry from the Holy Spirit. (see 1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, and Eph. 4) Paul writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor. 12:7) These gifts empower us to build up the church and serve the world for the common good of all God's people.

The skills and experiences we gain throughout life also create opportunities for us to serve God and others. Skills we learned for a job might also benefit people in need in the community. Our experiences of suffering and challenge can also equip us to help others going through similar circumstances. Sometimes our most painful experiences can become our most powerful ministry to others. Each of us is uniquely called, gifted, and empowered for ministry.

Ordained and Licensed Ministry

Within the church, there are also individuals "whose gifts, evidence of God's grace, and promise of future usefulness are affirmed by the community, and who respond to God's call by offering themselves in leadership as set-apart ministers, ordained and licensed." (Book of Discipline 2020/2024, ¶1301.2) Ordained persons offer themselves to a lifetime

of service to Christ's church and all the people of God. In The United Methodist Church, there are two orders into which persons are ordained: deacons and elders.

Deacons are called to connect the church to the world, and especially "the most needy, neglected, and marginalized among the children of God." (§1328) Deacons teach the Word of God, serve the world, and work for compassion and justice in community and the world as they seek to connect the two. They also extend the sacramental ministry of the church into the world. Deacons serve in a variety of settings, such as nonprofits, campus ministries, the criminal justice system, public schools, and local churches, to name a few.

Elders are ordained to teach and preach

the Word, serve in church and community, administer the sacraments, and order the life of the church. Elders serve most often in the local church, but they also serve in extension ministry roles such as chaplaincy, teaching, and campus ministry. They may also serve as district superintendents and bishops.

There are also those whom God calls into pastoral leadership, but for whom seminary training is not the best path forward. They may receive a license for pastoral ministry and fulfill the same roles as an elder, except that they may only do so in the context to which they are appointed as pastor. Local pastors are a vital part of the leadership and ministry of The United Methodist Church.



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*"We are
grateful
and
glad."*

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Serving with Humility

While Christians can serve in ministry as laity, deacons, elders, and local pastors, no calling is higher than any others. There is no such thing as just a lay person, just a deacon, or just a local pastor. Ministry is not about gaining status. In fact, as we see in Pope Francis's example, ministry is about laying down our status in humility in order to love God's people. This is, after all, the example we see in Jesus, who "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:8)

Pope Francis's embrace of the man with the skin condition embodied the humble, extraordinary love of Jesus. Whether you are a layperson, deacon, elder, local pastor, or even the Pope, every day and

every interaction is an opportunity to show extraordinary love. Whoever you are, you can become a person who serves.

Rev. Brandon Blacksten is the chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry.



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Where do apportionments go



CONNECTIONAL MINISTRIES 16%

- 1) Annual Conference Council
- 2) Conference Council on Youth Ministry
- 3) Young People's Advisory Board
- 4) Board of Higher Education & Campus Ministry
- 5) Archives and History
- 6) Board of Ordained Ministry of Board of Laity



GENERAL & JURISDICTIONAL CHURCH MINISTRIES 19%

The general funds include:

- 1) World Service Fund
- 2) Ministerial Education Fund
- 3) Episcopal Fund
- 4) Black College Fund
- 5) Interdenominational Cooperation Fund
- 6) Africa University
- 7) General Administration Fund
- 8) Lydia Patterson Institute



MINISTRY TEAMS 17%

- 1) Local Church Development Ministry Team
- 2) Mission and Service Ministry Team
- 3) Leadership Development Ministry Team
- 4) New Faith Communities



MULTI-ETHNIC INITIATIVES 4%

The Multiethnic Initiatives support racial-ethnic congregations and congregations in general as they reach out in mission and ministry in their local communities.



COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY 6%

The Communications Ministry provides leadership for the Conference in communications, public relations and promotion of the Conference's ministries. The Communications Ministry also produces resources that can be used by local congregations.



MINISTRY & MINISTERIAL SUPPORT 38%

All related expenses regarding administrative support (Districts and Conference)



85 ¢
- of every -
\$1.00

**STAYS IN
THE LOCAL
CHURCH**

On Christian Nationalism



by Rev. Jack Terrell-Wilkes

In recent years, a troubling ideology known as Christian Nationalism has gained acceptance in American public life. As people of faith, we are called to understand what this movement represents—and to carefully consider how it distorts both our democratic values and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Christian Nationalism is a political ideology that fuses Christian and national identities, aiming for the U.S. to be governed as an explicitly Christian nation. Advocates argue America was founded as Christian and must be reclaimed for God, a view that distorts both history and the gospel.

This ideology promotes only Christians are truly American, marginalizing others, fostering division, and undermining shared civic identity, thus eroding religious freedom. As United Methodists, we affirm the importance of separating church and state. The First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing a state-sponsored religion or favoring one religion over another. We believe that religious liberty is best preserved when the government does not favor one religion over another. When a political agenda drives a thread of Christianity it has lost sight of Christ. As Adam Hamilton says: “The danger is that it leads Christians to confuse loyalty to Christ with loyalty to America.” (National Catholic Reporter, January 11, 2023)

It is essential to distinguish between patriotism and nationalism. Patriotism is a love for one’s country. It expresses gratitude for the freedoms we enjoy and a desire to serve the common good. Patriotism acknowledges a nation’s strengths while also recognizing its flaws and working to address them.

Nationalism, by contrast, is a belief in the superiority of one’s nation over others. And Christian Nationalism adds a religious layer to that superiority. It seeks to sanctify the nation, often suggesting that America holds an exceptional place in God’s plan. It’s a kind of idolatry, placing the nation on the same level as God. While patriotism invites humility and community, nationalism often breeds fear, exclusion, and division.

The consequences of Christian Nationalism are not just political, they’re deeply spiritual. It distorts the gospel message by associating Christianity with power, control, and exclusion. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors, welcome the stranger, and care for the “least of these”. But Christian Nationalism rejects those values, replacing them with a desire for dominance.

Perhaps even more troubling is how this ideology overlaps with other harmful systems. Research by sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry has shown that individuals who strongly identify with Christian Nationalism are significantly more likely to express negative views toward immigrants, racial and religious minorities, and to downplay the existence of systemic racism (PRRI Report, 2023). It often provides cover for white supremacy, antisemitism, xenophobia, heterosexism, misogyny, and other forms of injustice. These views stand in direct contradiction to United Methodist belief that all people are made in the image of God (Imago Dei).

September 19, 2024 the Council of Bishops released a statement denouncing “authoritarianism and secular and Christian Nationalism, [saying it] foster centralization and abuse of power, accompanied by racism, xenophobia, tribalism, and misogyny. Nationalism is a

political ideology that defies God's love by pitting the interests of one group of people against others."

Christian Nationalism also damages the Church's witness. When Christianity becomes associated with exclusion, hate, or political power, people turn away from the faith, not because they reject Jesus, but because they cannot see him in the actions of his followers. As Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry put it, "Christian Nationalism is not just a threat to democracy—it's a threat to Christianity itself." (The New Yorker, January 2021)

Christian Nationalism is incompatible with our Christian faith because as our Doctrinal Heritage says "love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and the renewal of life in the world." (UM Book Of Discipline, p 53). Thankfully, Christians across the country are beginning to speak out. Organizations like Christians Against Christian Nationalism are calling people of faith to reject this ideology and reclaim the heart of the gospel.

Bishop Kennetha Bigham-Tsai (co-preside over of Iowa & Illinois Great Rivers Conferences) reminds us that Christian Nationalism is a false gospel, a distortion that harms our witness to the love and grace of Jesus Christ. In response, we are called to re-center our lives on Jesus: compassion, courage, and a vision of beloved community. This means having honest conversations in our churches and communities. It means forming relationships across lines of difference. And it means advocating for laws and policies that protect religious liberty for all people, not just for Christians.

The good news is that we are not powerless. We can respond, not with fear,

but with faith. Not with silence, but with truth. We can choose to be a Church that lives the love of Jesus in public, not just in private.

As a student of history, it has saddened me to see how often the Church has chosen silence in moments of moral crisis. Again and again, when the Church has aligned too closely with the State, the result has not been greater holiness but greater harm. Like oil and water, the two do not mix. When we stay quiet in the face of injustice, we become complicit through our inaction.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote from a Birmingham jail cell: We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.

Let us not be silent. Let us be the Church that speaks out, that welcomes all, and that boldly proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ—a gospel not of fear and exclusion, but of love, grace, and redemption.

Understanding the Issue

What is Christian Nationalism, and how does it differ from healthy patriotism? How have you seen this ideology expressed in today's culture or politics?

Faith & Practice: How do Jesus' teachings challenge the values of Christian Nationalism? What does it look like to love your neighbor in a polarized society?

Church/State: Why is it important for the State to maintain separation from the Church? Has the Church in history or today failed to speak out? What can we learn?

Personal Reflection: Have there been

times when you've stayed silent on an issue of justice? How might God be calling you to respond today?

Hope & Action: What can our church community do to stand against Christian Nationalism? How can we build bridges and foster unity in our broader

community?

Go Deeper: Review a resolution

Calling The Church To Oppose Christian Nationalism at <https://www.okumcforequality.org/christian-nationalism/>

PATRIOTISM VS NATIONALISM

The love and affection for one's country, stemming from the ideals and values of that country



Views the nation as great insofar as it lives into its stated values



Looks toward the future as an opportunity to more completely live out the values



Criticism and protest are opportunities for improvement



Appreciates the good in other nations



Can be a Christian virtue insofar as the national ideals coincide with the love of neighbor

The love and affection for one's country, stemming from the belief in the superiority of that country



Views the nation as great regardless of whether it lives into its stated values



Looks toward the past as a "Golden Era" and strives to return to it



Criticism and protest are unacceptable and perhaps treasonous



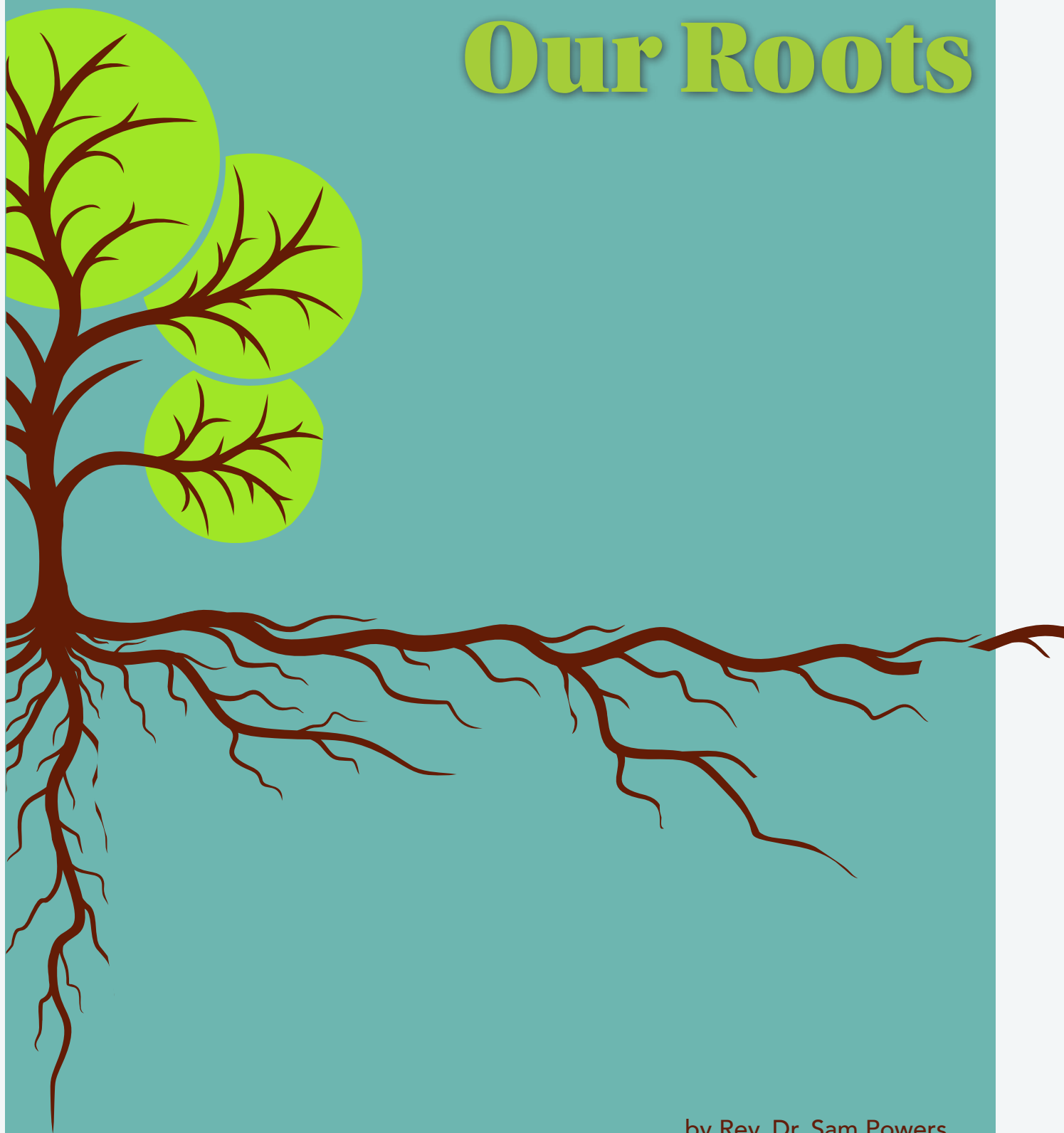
Views other nations as threats and inferior



Is idolatry

Pastor David Hansen
Instagram, July 2, 2024.

Exploring Our Roots



by Rev. Dr. Sam Powers

The Constitution within the Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church is our starting place for being connectional and no one around the globe within the denomination is exempt. It is within our Constitution that we make an early claim for ecumenical relations. As United Methodists, we play well with others!

Our article on this position states that we are a part of the church universal and that we believe Christ is calling all Christians "to strive toward unity." We are to work with others who are Wesleyan in origin but also with "other denominational traditions."

We come to this belief because of a strong sense of God's prevenient grace at work among us. This grace can be defined as God's reaching out to all the world. As John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world..." rather than just our corner of it. Because of this grace, United Methodists understand that everyone is a child of God whether they claim it or not. We claim it for

them because we believe in God's prevenient grace.

Practically, we see God at work in other Christian traditions, even though they may differ from ours. Within our understanding of the Sacraments, we see that we are fundamentally ecumenical in practice here as well. United Methodists fully accept the baptism of people who transfer from other Christian denominations. We practice an Open Table for Holy Communion which allows not only people from other traditions to participate but even

welcomes those who claim no faith at all.

And so theologically, we are to acknowledge kinship with our siblings from around the globe. Some of them think as we do. Others may love as we do. There may be those who do neither, which makes relationships more challenging. Fortunately, we are partnering with God's grace which helps us overcome the challenges – and lets us lean into God's sanctifying grace which helps us to be more Christlike.

As we discover our Christian heritage, we find that we are connected in ways that we may not have understood. We also see that when there are human beings involved, there will always be different ways of thinking and even different understandings of how we can best love each other.

As we look at the early church, there were a variety of ways to think about how we understand Jesus which led to many of these being declared heresies. Orthodoxy or right thinking evolved over time as the Holy Spirit moved us down the road as the church. At the Council of Nicaea, we developed the Nicene Creed as a response to the heresy of Arius who did not hold to the idea that Christ was present in the creation of the world. His followers would chant "There was a time when he was not" which came from the understanding that the Father begat the Son. And so, the Nicene Creed makes the point of the divinity of Jesus by stating, "eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father."

The followers of Arius were not part of the Christian church that moved forward – that being churches in the east (Eastern



Orthodox) and the west (Roman Catholic). These bodies had their own leadership structures but would continue to gather in councils through the years to work out other agreed upon Christian doctrine. United Methodists can trace their theological heritage back to both bodies as they influenced one another.

Unfortunately, these two expressions began to bicker on which leader had spiritual authority over the other. Each church excommunicated leadership from the other body in 1054 and this division lasted for 911 years until it was lifted by the pope and patriarch in 1965. This may give some perspective to recent conflicts within The United Methodist Church!

Of course, the Protestant Reformation came when Martin Luther tacked (figuratively or literally) his 95 Theses to the Wittenberg Castle Church door in 1517. This sparked a revolution of theological ideas as people began to question the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and whether the church always acted as a stand-in for God's will. This led to the English Reformation in 1534 where the King of England, Henry VIII declared himself as the head of the Church of England rather than the Pope. King Henry's reasons for separation were not quite as noble as Martin Luther's. This new Anglican Church would be the route out of which Methodism arose. In 1571, under the reign of Elizabeth I, the Church of England finalized and adopted their Thirty-nine Articles of Religion which became their doctrinal standards.

In the 18th century, John and Charles Wesley, priests within the Church of England, began a network of lay accountability groups within the church. Named as Methodists for their routines

and organization, they tried to help each other become more Christ-like in their day-to-day living. They emphasized a religion of both head and heart – of both personal piety as well as social justice. With this balance, Wesleyans model the command of Jesus to love God with all our being but to also love our neighbors as ourselves. As the movement spread, it found its way to the colonies of America. When the American Revolution saw Anglican priests returning to England, John Wesley sent Thomas Coke across the Atlantic to help the Americans retrieve the sacraments as only ordained clergy from their tradition could baptize or celebrate Holy Communion. In 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church began in the newly formed United States. John Wesley truncated the Articles of Religion through editing and deletion to Twenty-Five for the Methodists in America.

Methodists in their origin were abolitionists due to their belief in prevenient grace. But unfortunately, sometimes racism interferes with these higher doctrines. Racial segregation and disrespect led Richard Allen to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) in 1816 which was the first black denomination formed in the United States. Other similar denominations emerged from the Methodists such as the AME Zion in 1821 and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) in 1870. Even though our separations were painful at the time, today, all three denominations have full communion with The United Methodist Church. This means we allow clergy to oversee sacraments in each other's churches and there is an easier path for clergy from these bodies to serve in each other's denominations.

As Holiness or right living became an emphasis that arose from Wesley's

teachings on sanctification, groups would often diverge from the main Methodist denomination. These were usually more fundamentalist in their views on scripture and include the Free Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Pentecostal movement which contains a variety of denominations, and very recently the Global Methodist Church.

Many of these divergent traditions with Wesleyan roots continue to gather for worship and celebration as a part of the World Methodist Conference every five years. We recognize our similarities and affirm our relationships with other Wesleyan denominations around the globe.

Because of our ecumenical nature, we have solidified Full Communion relationships with the following bodies: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, The African Union Methodist Protestant Church, The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Uniting Church of Sweden, The Union American Methodist Episcopal Church, and The Moravian Church, Northern and Southern Provinces. In a full-circle moment, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church voted in 2024 to embrace Full Communion with The Episcopal Church (an American expression of the Anglican Church) pending their approval in 2027 at their General Convention.

While we have distinctions from each of these denominations, we do not view them as barriers to our cooperation and shared witness to the world. It helps that our understanding of prevenient grace allows us to see God at work in other places outside our own church. We celebrate this when we engage in World Communion

Sunday every October as we recognize that we are partaking of the sacrament with many other Christian expressions globally.

Our history reminds us that we are a part of the church universal or the “holy catholic church” as we proclaim in the Apostles’ Creed. Our baptismal vows begin with a profession of faith so that we become Christian before we decide to live out our Christianity as United Methodists. I’m proud to live with a generous faith that sees God working in a variety of ways rather than limiting God as to only working within my context. I also believe that this understanding is attractive to people that don’t profess any faith. How does our understanding of our church’s history allow us to see our common heritage with one another? And how will this impact the way we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?



People of One Book

by Rev. Carlos Ramirez

Earlier in my life, I wanted to pursue a Ph.D in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament). I have always found a new message each time I dedicate time to study the Bible. I take my studies very seriously. For United Methodists, from the beginning of our movement, studying the Word of God has been essential.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, identified himself as “homo unius libri” meaning ‘man of one book.’ This does not mean that Wesley only read the Bible. There is plenty of evidence that John Wesley was a man who spent his life reading all kinds of books. By ‘man of one book’ he meant that all other books were compared to the ONE book – the

Bible. Therefore, we United Methodists are people of ONE book, the Bible, but we use other tools in order to discern God’s message for us today. The Bible is the Living Word of God, and as such, God keeps talking to us.

So, how do we United Methodists go about discerning God’s message for us today? These tools are: Reason, Tradition and Experience.

Reason.

By Reason we understand all the scientific disciplines at our disposal that allow us to better understand the context in which the text was written and to make sense

of the message for us today. Disciplines such as history, archeology, literature, anthropology, linguistics, among many others, help us to recreate the "world" in which the text was written.

We try our best to know who wrote a particular text, the intended audience, and the period in history (political, economical and social conditions) in which the author was writing. We also study the words used and their meaning.

The Bible, for the most part, was written either in Hebrew and in Greek. As a person who can speak another language, I can attest that when we translate a word or a phrase, many times we lose something or we need to over-explain the possible meanings of a particular word or phrase.

Linguistics, semiotics, exegesis and hermeneutics are tools that aid us in extracting the meaning from the text.

Then we still need to ask the question: we have all this information and research... So what? We then discern what God is telling us (personally and as a community of faith) today. We use other disciplines - oratory (preaching), didactics (teaching), sociology or psychology in order to make God's message be heard for our "modern" ears.

Tradition.

Tradition is the accumulated knowledge of over 2000 years of Christian thought. Tradition is not "the thing we always do." In this case, tradition (lower case) is a repetitive action (Linda sitting on the third row of pews, or singing the same song on our dismissal, or the joke the pastor always says).

The Traditions (capital T), I am referring to are all the things Christians have said about God that form part of our Tradition.

Creeds (Apostles' or Nicene for instance) are Tradition.

The early mothers and fathers of the church and their writings are Tradition. The works of Augustine of Hippo, Joan of Arc, Thomas Aquinas, Hildegard of Bingen, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Martin Luther King Jr., and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (just to name a very few of the theologians throughout history) are part of our Christian Tradition.

Perhaps we do not often think too much about Tradition, yet every Sunday morning during the pastor's message, a Sunday school lesson, weekly Bible study, you are partaking of a summary of Christian Tradition. We Christians stand on the shoulders of countless saints who told us the stories of Jesus.

Experience.

We know that our faith does not reside in our head (Reason), nor is it a relic that lives in an ornate cathedral (Tradition). Our faith is alive.

When we hear a hymn, when we light a candle as part of worship, when we participate in the sacraments, when we pray, when we practice a spiritual discipline (mediation, contemplation, silence, etc.), we feel something. Often we cannot explain what we feel, but just like Wesley, we feel our hearts strangely warm...better yet, on fire!

These experiences confirm what we have learned (Reason) and what we have received from others (Tradition). Experience is the confirmation and affirmation that the Holy Spirit resides within us that is moving us to repentance, forgiveness, and healing. Experience is the tangible connection between us and God... better yet, our acknowledgment of

God's presence in our lives.

We United Methodists are certainly people of One book, yet we use these other tools in order to discern God's guidance in our lives and for the life of our community of faith.

You will see these tools in play in the life of the congregation. Many UM congregations are filled with songs, shouts, raising hands, dancing and actively responding to the message. These congregations emphasize Experience.

Other UM congregations would feel more solemn, adorned with Christian symbols, burning candles (even incense), and worship filled with litanies, Scripture readings and creeds. These congregations emphasize Tradition.

Yet other congregations are selective in the words they use to refer to God, in the hymns the singing and sermons read more as academic lectures. These congregations emphasize Reason.

However, all of these expressions of United Methodism are not better than the other, they are just different.

Lastly, perhaps you have heard (or perhaps you have even said it yourself) the phrases: "I just read the Bible," or, "we are Bible believing people, we only are guided by the Bible."

Usually these types of assertions come from sisters and brothers from a charismatic or pentecostal tradition. Sometimes, we United Methodists feel out of place or as if people look down on us because we read our prayers or we recite a Creed. The reality is that, knowingly or unknowingly, we all don't just "read" the Bible. We have our favorite book or books and our favorite passages - passages that

inform our faith and that have transformed our lives.

Furthermore, because all Christians share the vast ocean that is Tradition, when we interpret a passage, we are not interpreting a passage in a vacuum; we are joining many saints in the past who have had something to say about the passage or subject matter at hand.

Because we take the study of Scripture seriously, we, United Methodists, are respectful of the writer's historical period and intention and we avoid at all cost stringing passages together from different authors, with different intentions in order to provide a rationale for a thought we may have.

We do not "cherry pick" passages in order to justify a belief. We study and wrestle with a passage and we are careful in making associations with other parts of the Bible. We United Methodists engage head on with the complexities of life when a passage was written and the complexities of life as we try to discern God's message for us today.

Wrestling with the Holy Text does not make us less "Bible believers." On the contrary, it makes us mature and responsible Christians who seek to understand God's will for us today.

United Methodists are people of ONE book, who use Reason, Tradition and Experience to better understand and discern God's message for ourselves, for our communities of faith and for our world.



Across the country, Americans celebrated Juneteenth with events and observations this past Thursday. We ran this article by Jacqueline Deveraux in the Connection, but as important as the message is, we wanted to run it again in this June issue of the Contact. Please read on about the importance of this, America's second Independence Day.

AMERICA'S SECOND INDEPENDENCE DAY

By: Jacqueline Devereaux

On July 2nd, 1776, the Continental Congress voted in favor of independence, and two days later the Declaration of Independence was adopted. From 1776 to the present day, July 4th has been celebrated as the birth of American independence - but not all people living in America were declared free on that day.

IT WAS JUNE 19, 1865 that the entire country was actually free. In 1863, during the American Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared more than three million enslaved people living in the Confederate states to be free.

It took two years for the news to reach African Americans living in Texas when the state's residents learned that slavery had been abolished. The formerly enslaved immediately began to celebrate with prayer, feasting, song, and dance.

"Juneteenth" commemorates the day when the last enslaved African Americans in the United States were freed. The holiday's name, Juneteenth, first used in the 1890s, is a portmanteau of the words "June" and "nineteenth," referring to June 19, 1865, the day when Major General Gordon Granger ordered the final enforcement of the Emancipation

Proclamation in Texas at the end of the American Civil War.

Wesleyan Tradition

The view that every human being is created in the image of God and thus possesses inherent worth and dignity strengthened John Wesley's determination to abolish the inhumane and barbaric practice of slavery in America and England. He was an ardent abolitionist preaching against slavery and leading many slaves to follow the Methodist tradition.

The first official Juneteenth celebrations took place in Texas. African Americans were often prohibited from using public facilities for their celebrations, so they were often held at churches involving church-centered community gatherings. They spread across the South among newly freed African American slaves and their descendants and became more commercialized in the 1920s and 1930s. Participants in the Great Migration brought these celebrations to the rest of the country. The original observances included prayer meetings and the singing of spirituals, and celebrants wore new clothes as a way of representing their newfound freedom. Within a few years, African Americans in other states were celebrating the day as well, making it an

annual tradition.

It is officially Juneteenth National Independence Day, a federal holiday in the United States celebrated annually. Although Juneteenth falls on June 19, it has often been celebrated on the third Saturday in June. Every U.S. state and the District of Columbia has formally recognized the holiday in some way.

A Federal Holiday

In 2021 Juneteenth was made a federal holiday when the 117th U.S. Congress enacted and President Joe Biden signed the Juneteenth National Independence Day Act into law. Reflecting what he'd also said about the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre weeks prior, Biden said the same sentiment at the White House signing for Juneteenth: "Great nations don't ignore their most painful moments. They don't ignore those moments of the past. They embrace them. Great nations don't walk away. We come to terms with the mistakes we made. And in remembering those moments, we begin to heal and grow stronger."

Celebrations have continued across the United States into the 21st century and typically include prayer and religious services, speeches, educational events, elaborate large meals, family gatherings, picnics, and festivals with music, food, and dancing. Juneteenth celebrations often include lectures and exhibitions on African-American culture. The modern holiday places much emphasis on teaching about African-American heritage and helps instill a sense of pride in black youth. The celebration is an opportunity for our churches to promote community outreach and unification.

Oklahoma City Celebrations

In Oklahoma City "Juneteenth on the East" stretches through the heart of the East End District, on NE 23rd St. between N. Kelham Ave. and N. Hood St. The festival for 2025 will bring together families, local businesses, and community leaders to celebrate freedom through educational events, vibrant performances, and creative gatherings. There will be a Black creativity panel; 5K run; performances; community gatherings; local artists and performers; food trucks and vendors. Historian Mitch Kachun considers that celebrations of the end of slavery have three goals: "to celebrate, to educate, and to agitate." The holiday is considered the "longest-running African-American holiday" and has been called "America's Second Independence Day."

Find details of the Oklahoma City celebration activities here:

<https://allevents.in/oklahoma-city/juneteenth>

<https://www.withloveokc.org/juneteenth>

<https://runsignup.com/Race/OK/OklahomaCity/JuneteenthOnTheEast5K>

<https://www.facebook.com/JuneteenthOnTheEast/>

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