

# Important Information for Leaders

## We Belong To One Another:

All small groups within Davidson United Methodist Church are connected to a specific area of ministry. You belong to us. We are here to assist you in every way. We will help to promote awareness for all of our groups and studies, and we will advocate for you. We ask you do the same. Help us to know what you are studying, and when you are taking breaks from meeting (email or call Linda with this information). And as a leader, there are always situations that can get stressful or questions that you may not be able to answer. Pastor Linda can help, anytime.

## Resources:

For those small groups that use curriculum, we have a resource room full here, and at the Conference office, an enormous amount to choose from for free.

**DUMC resource room** is #207. Please let Linda know what you are taking out and when you return it.

**WNCC Resource Center** ([wnccumc.org/resourcecenter/](http://wnccumc.org/resourcecenter/)) - and they would welcome you to visit anytime.

If you wish to check out a resource, contact **Susan Cavasinni** to do so. She will alert you when it arrives.

When you are finished, return it to Susan for us to mail back to them.

## Theology:

As a Leader at DUMC, it is expected that you know what we believe as United Methodists.

First, our Christian roots:

**God** - God, who is one, is revealed in three distinct persons.

**Jesus** - We believe in the mystery of salvation through Jesus Christ. God became human in Jesus of Nazareth; and his life, death and resurrection demonstrates God's redeeming love.

**The Holy Spirit** - The Holy Spirit is God's present activity in our midst. When we sense God's leading, God's challenge, or God's support or comfort, it's the Holy Spirit at work.

**Human Beings** - Genesis 1:27 asserts that we've been made in the image of the Creator. Like God we have the capacity to love and care, to communicate, and to create.

**The Church** - The church is the body of Christ, an extension of Christ's life and ministry in the world today.

**The Bible** - We believe that the Bible is God's Word and is the primary authority for our faith and practice.

**God's Reign** - The kingdom or reign of God is both a present reality and future hope.

And, here's our Wesleyan distinction (from [umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage](http://umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage)):

### Distinctive Emphases

Wesley and the early Methodists were particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God's grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. They placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action. This emphasis on what Wesley referred to as "practical divinity" has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today. The distinctive shape of our theological heritage can be seen not only in this **emphasis on Christian living**, but also in **Wesley's distinctive understanding of God's saving grace**. Although Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in salvation by grace, he combined them in a powerful way to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life.

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## Grace

Grace is central to our understanding of Christian faith and life. Grace can be defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. We read in the Letter to the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Our United Methodist heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God’s grace. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, described God’s grace as threefold:

- prevenient grace
- justifying grace
- sanctifying grace

### Prevenient Grace

Wesley understood grace as God’s active presence in our lives. This presence is not dependent on human actions or human response. It is a gift — a gift that is always available, but that can be refused. God’s grace stirs up within us a desire to know God and empowers us to respond to God’s invitation to be in relationship with God. God’s grace enables us to discern differences between good and evil and makes it possible for us to choose good. God takes the initiative in relating to humanity. We do not have to beg and plead for God’s love and grace. God actively seeks us!

### Justifying Grace

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). And in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul wrote: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). These verses demonstrate the justifying grace of God. They point to reconciliation, pardon, and restoration. Through the work of God in Christ our sins are forgiven, and our relationship with God is restored. According to John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, the image of God — which has been distorted by sin — is renewed within us through Christ’s death. Again, this dimension of God’s grace is a gift. God’s grace alone brings us into relationship with God. **There are no hoops through which we have to jump in order to please God and to be loved by God.** God has acted in Jesus Christ. We need only to respond in faith.

### Conversion

This process of salvation involves a change in us that we call conversion. Conversion is a turning around, leaving one orientation for another. It may be sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. But in any case, it’s a new beginning. Following Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, “You must be born anew” (John 3:7 RSV), we speak of this conversion as rebirth, new life in Christ, or regeneration.

Following Paul and Luther, John Wesley called this process justification. Justification is what happens when Christians abandon all those vain attempts to justify themselves before God, to be seen as “just” in God’s eyes through religious and moral practices. It’s a time when God’s “justifying grace” is experienced and accepted, a time of pardon and forgiveness, of new peace and joy and love. Indeed, we’re justified by God’s grace through faith.

Justification is also a time of repentance — turning away from behaviors rooted in sin and toward actions that express God’s love. In this conversion we can expect to receive assurance of our present salvation through the Holy Spirit “bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16).

### Sanctifying Grace

**Salvation is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the ongoing experience of God’s gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be.** John Wesley described this dimension of

God's grace as sanctification, or holiness. Through God's sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love neighbor.

Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God's will and testify to our union with God. We're to press on, with God's help, in the path of sanctification toward perfection. **By perfection, Wesley did not mean that we would not make mistakes or have weaknesses.** Rather, he understood it to be a continual process of being made perfect in our love of God and each other and of removing our desire to sin.

### Faith and Good Works

United Methodists insist that faith and good works belong together. What we believe must be confirmed by what we do. Personal salvation must be expressed in ministry and mission in the world. We believe that Christian doctrine and Christian ethics are inseparable, that faith should inspire service. The integration of personal piety and social holiness has been a hallmark of our tradition. We affirm the biblical precept that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (James 2:17).

### Mission and Service

Because of what God has done for us, we offer our lives back to God through a life of service. As disciples, we become active participants in God's activity in the world through mission and service. Love of God is always linked to love of neighbor and to a passionate commitment to seeking justice and renewal in the world.

### Nurture and Mission of the Church

For Wesley, there was no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. In other words, faith always includes a social dimension. One cannot be a solitary Christian. As we grow in faith through our participation in the church community, we are also nourished and equipped for mission and service to the world.