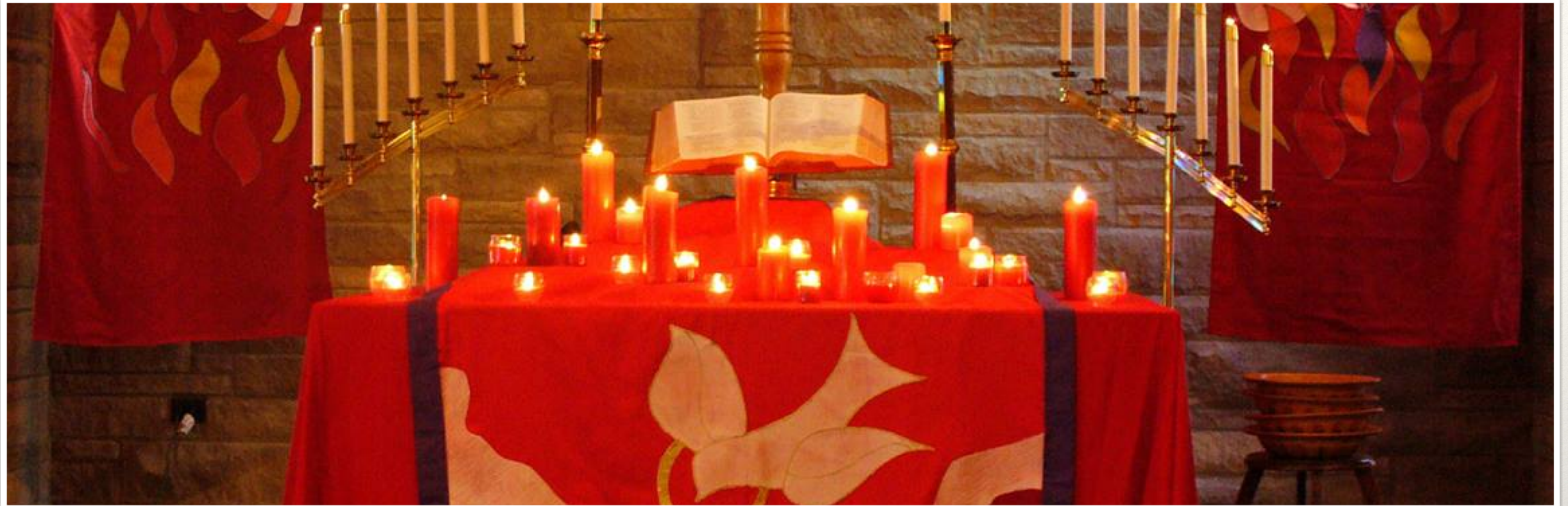


First United Methodist Church Richardson, 2020 Learning Community

Methodist Identity in the 21st Century

Br. Scot
(Rev. Scot Bontrager, OSL, PhD)



Session 2

Who have we been?

The people called Methodist...

You may share/reuse these slides
except those otherwise marked.

From last week

Corporate identity questions

- What do we believe / think
- What do we do
- What do we consume
- What do we produce
- With whom do we associate
- How do we present ourselves
- What can we not give up without becoming something different
- What is our story

Stories

- ❖ “Identity is narratively encoded” - Dr. Bontrager
- ❖ We are the stories we tell about ourselves (to ourselves and to others)
- ❖ We become ourselves by forming and telling our stories
- ❖ One of the most important things we can do is let people tell their stories and validate that they’ve been heard (the core of my theory of pastoral care, and my theory of being a loving human)

Br. Scot's theory of identity formation¹

- ❖ An act performed once
- ❖ A routine performed several times
- ❖ A skill
- ❖ A habit
- ❖ A discipline
- ❖ A virtue (power)
- ❖ Character (brand)
- ❖ Identity

Expressing corporate identity

- Mission / Purpose Statement
- Advertising / Brand
- Constitution (founding documents of identity)
- Practices (hiring, environmental, “drive friendly / Don’t mess with Texas”)
- Communications (web, social media, investor letters, SEC filings, Episcopal letters, resolutions)
- Brand story / History

Who have the people called
Methodist been?



The Standard Story

- ❖ 18th Century England - Church of England (Anglican/Episcopalian) Priests
- ❖ Oxford - educated, upper-class, became tutors/lecturers/fellows at Oxford
- ❖ Ill-fated mission to America, went home in shame
- ❖ Strange heartburn - 1783 (Aldersgate experience)
- ❖ Preaching to the poor 1739 - out in the open (“The world is my parish”)
- ❖ Horseback
- ❖ Organized
- ❖ Singing
- ❖ Sacramentality
- ❖ “A movement, not a church”

The Standard Story (America)

- ❖ 1776 - English Priests ran out of colonies - (a problem for our sacramentality)
- ❖ Wesley “commissioned a superintendent” — who ordained Asbury (printed record of Coke’s sermon entitled “Ordination of Superintendent”) — they quickly took the title “Bishop.” — Coke and Asbury
- ❖ Christmas Conference 1784 - Formation of the new denomination (“A church, not (just) a movement.”)
- ❖ Horseback
- ❖ Organized societies through North America - went west fast

The Standard Story (America part 2)

- ❖ Became largest non-Catholic denomination in the US
- ❖ Established institutions of education, social services, and health
- ❖ Involved in every major American conflict
 - Civil War (both sides)
 - Prohibition
 - Voting Rights
 - Civil Rights
- ❖ Helped define American identity
- ❖ Got off horseback, settled into the suburbs
- ❖ Became quite respectable

Intellectual Heritage

- ❖ High-Church Anglicanism
 - ❖ Legacy of 200 years of religious wars
- ❖ Enlightenment Rationality
 - ❖ Logic and reason
 - ❖ Science
- ❖ “Revivalism”

Intellectual Heritage (epistemology)

- ❖ John Locke (1632 - 1704) - Wesley & Edwards were born 1703
 - ❖ The Reformation wars and English civil war — how do we know who has it right?
 - ❖ “Enthusiasm” — It is right because it feels right; the spirit testifies to my soul — is the problem (according to Locke)
 - ❖ Solution: Tolerance and empiricism. Feelings and appeals to revelation are wonderful in the chapel, but out-of-bounds in the courts and legislature

Intellectual Heritage (epistemology 2)

- ❖ Luther: *sola scriptura*; any doctrinal claims must be found in the Bible (things not excluded are permitted) (reason is assumed, but self-evident scriptural truths trump it)
- ❖ Calvin: *sola scriptura*; anything we claim to be true must be found in the Bible (doctrines not included are not permitted) (reason is so corrupted by sin that it is useless)
- ❖ Catholic: scripture and tradition are co-equal authorities, only the magisterium can interpret scripture correctly (reason is implied as long as it holds with the magisterial interpretations)
- ❖ Orthodox: scripture is written tradition; scripture and tradition interpret each other; the *regula fide* (the creeds) provide the foundation of all interpretation (reason is implied so long as it doesn't contradict the rule of faith)
- ❖ Anglican: *sola scriptura* interpreted through the traditional teachings and practices of the Church and the light of human reason (*lex orandi, lex credendi*)

Wesley taught logic at Oxford

- ❖ Wesley read and commented on Locke
- ❖ Wesley was deeply concerned with “enthusiasm” and being seen as irrational
- ❖ Wesley defended the role of emotions and “experience” as augments to reason
- ❖ Wesley engaged with Edwards’s work on affectations (emotions / experiences)
- ❖ “That some consciousness of our being in favour with God is joined with the Christian faith I cannot doubt; but it is not the essence of it. A consciousness of pardon cannot be the condition of pardon. You are not to judge by your feelings, but by the Word of God.” (letter to Joseph Benson, May 21, 1781)
- ❖ Wesley shifts over the course of his life, but tends to think that the experience of pardon is always an assurance of the truth of pardon, but not necessary to be pardoned. The feeling does not create the pardon, but confirms its reality. We can know we are saved when we have the feeling of being saved, but we might be saved even if we never have such an experience; we can have assurance even without a heartburn experience.

Beliefs (what do we affirm)

- ❖ Creedal Christianity (Apostles / Nicene)
 - ❖ Trinity, Incarnation, etc.
- ❖ Anglican heritage (*via media*, neither Catholic nor Protestant)
- ❖ Protestant influence (esp. view of scripture)
- ❖ Orthodox influence (sanctification & *theosis*)
- ❖ Enlightenment Rationality
- ❖ “Revivalism”

Beliefs (what do we reject)

- ❖ Anti-Calvinistic

- ❖ Morally significant freedom (“free will”) — God’s sovereignty and will don’t mean what Calvin thought they meant
- ❖ We can lose our salvation through our own choice and action
- ❖ We are sinful, but not totally so; *imago dei* was not lost in the fall, just distorted
- ❖ God chooses THAT some will be saved, but not WHO is saved
- ❖ God’s saving work in the world is potentially for everyone — God wills that all are saved, but not all will be.
- ❖ Grace can be resisted, we can refuse God’s offer

Emphases

- ❖ Love - our peculiar definition: giving not consuming; freedom enhancing not restricting
- ❖ Grace - our peculiar definition: not just forgiveness of sins
- ❖ “Think and let think” (what are the bounds?)
 - ❖ You need not be Methodist to be Christian
- ❖ Perfection / Sanctification
- ❖ The Method - which only exists for a goal: Perfection
- ❖ Social Justice
 - ❖ My perfection is never about me, but perfection for God’s purposes in the world
 - ❖ Perfection is always in love

What do (did?) Methodists do? The Method...

❖ Works of piety

- ❖ Searching the Scriptures
- ❖ Prayer
- ❖ Holy Communion
(Corporate Worship)
- ❖ Fasting
- ❖ Healthy Living
- ❖ Christian Community

❖ Works of mercy

- ❖ Doing good
- ❖ Visiting the sick and
prisoners
- ❖ Feeding and clothing people
- ❖ Earning, saving, and giving
all one can
- ❖ Opposition to Slavery

What do we consume/refuse?

Consume

- Grace
- Fellowship
- Accountability
- Learning / Education

Refuse

- “Spiritous Liquors”
- Wearing gold
- Gambling
- Songs or books which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God
- Softness & self-indulgence

What do we produce?

- Disciples... for the transformation of the world
- Saints, people perfected in love - Br. Scot
- Worship
- Community
- Hospitals
- Colleges
- A transformed world

How do we present ourselves?



Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors.

The people of The United Methodist Church®

Search For...



WHAT WE BELIEVE

HOW WE SERVE

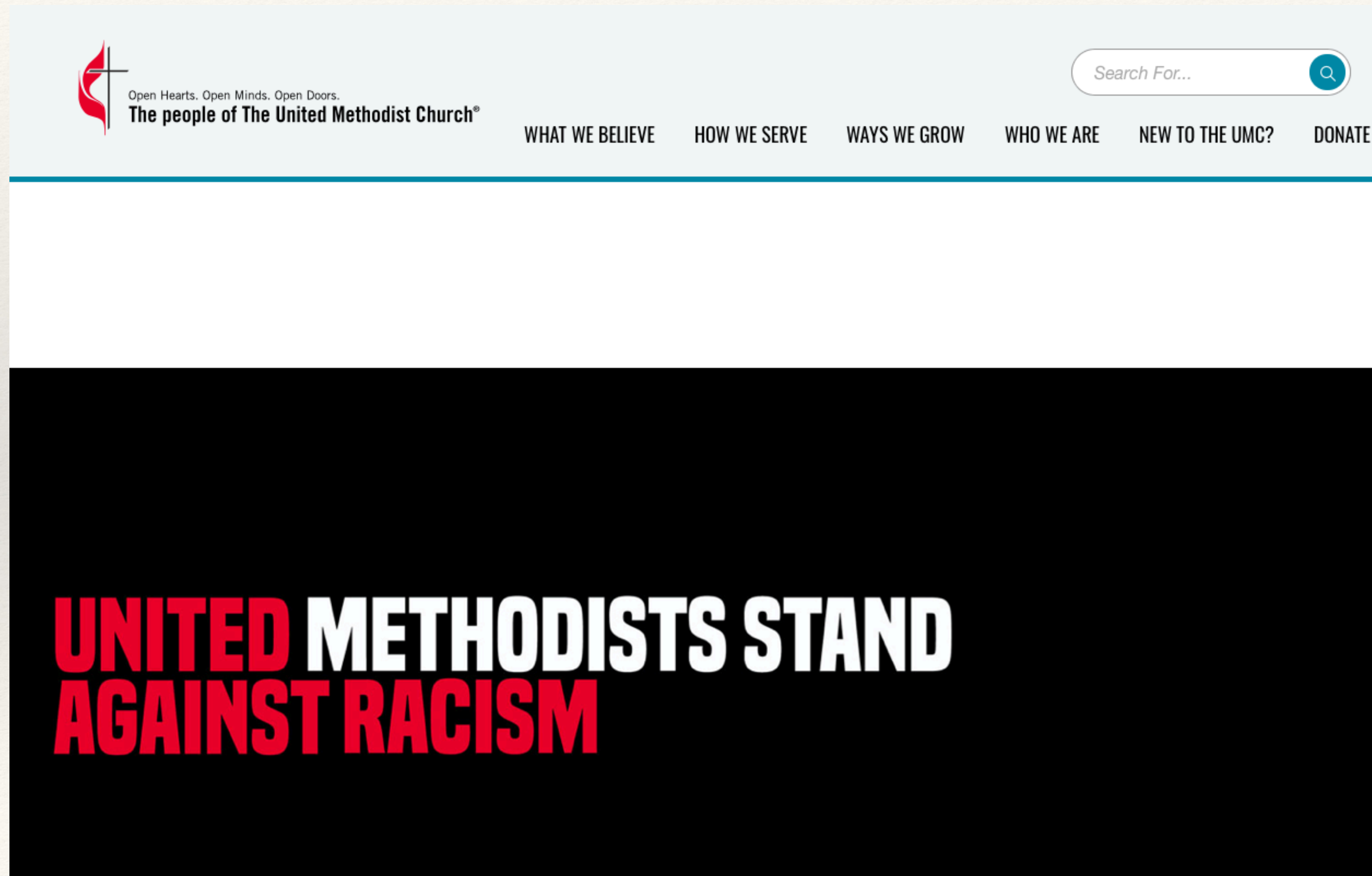
WAYS WE GROW

WHO WE ARE

NEW TO THE UMC?

DONATE

How do we present ourselves?



What did you notice on UMC.org?

Breakout groups

Suggested topics:

Observations from our history (and Br. Scot's biased telling of it)
What did Scot leave out/ignore/forget? What was surprising/new?

If you had one word to describe Methodism, what would it be? (Br. Scot: "nice")