



# the Harbinger Newsletter

\* United Episcopalians ~ Littlewood Chapel ~ Bartlett Family Circle \*

[www.fremontanglicans.com](http://www.fremontanglicans.com)

#4 Lady Day 2017

## Our Olden Roots:

Several statements from the last issue (*Harbinger* #3) will probably demand clarity over time. These clarifications ought to cover both the pro-chapel vision of making a circuit of scattered households in the South Bay, if not Northern California, as well as the UEC's new openness for mustering a lay-agency.

Since the relocation of our Presiding Bishop to the East Coast, the region of the Pacific states is left with an extremely small number of clergy. While this has been the case well before Mr. Robinson's departure, the transfer of episcopal residence highlighted an ongoing question: Can the harvest be great with so few workers?

Methodist polity can provide an answer. But why 'methodist'? First, early-methodism was essentially Anglican, never claiming to be an independent sect but only a *supplement* to the Church, namely, as a religious or 'disciplinarian' society. By 'disciplinarian' a common rule is meant and, thereby, a system of moral monitoring. Wesley's original intent was keep his societies under the care of ordained ministers, but the lack of clerical interest in the societies demanded more laic involvement. Thus, Wesley felt compelled to enlist large numbers of lay-preachers to fill the gap. Naturally, this created tensions with the established Church.

Secondly, unlike other Protestant holiness movements, Wesleyan Methodism constructed a complete system of lay-led organization. Methodism was designed to supply pastoral care where parish clergy were otherwise absent. Although lay-preachers typically had little education, under the scrutiny of the Society (i.e., the person of Wesley who had final oversight of the Rules) bad leaders and doctrine were often checked. Nonetheless, the Wesleyan plan of lay-agency succeeded in forming congregations where the Anglican church could not.

In America, the resources of both the United Societies and Church of England were scant. Despite the spectacular tours of George Whitefield during the 1740's, Methodist beginnings were late, depending on *irregular* lay-ministers. In a Methodist context, this meant self-appointed preachers who drew their own circuits and itinerancies without Mr. Wesley's oversight. The irregular ministries of Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge during the 1760's are examples

of such lay-initiatives that lacked proper subordination or connexion.

Where distance was vast and clergy few, early-methodism's lay-activism supplied diasporic Englishmen with a (sometimes thin) 'relation' to the Church of England. Indeed, where regular attendance at an Anglican parish *could not* be had, Wesley expected his Methodist people to avail themselves either the daily office from the Prayer Book or an abridged version of same—aka. 'Wesley's Sunday service'. If neither of these were doable, then Wesley wanted a minimum of calendar lessons with psalm and occasional collect. Such regulations for worship were an official part of the discipline by 1786, hoping to endear the Methodist people to England's liturgy.

What's curious about Wesley's worship regulations was *how little they differed from the domestic practice*. The spectrum of private devotions in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century England ranged from an entire reading the BCP's daily offices to an abbreviated selection of lessons, psalms, with a scattering of collects. Indeed, during the 1800's, the Authorized Bible (KJV) bound together the scripture with prayer book Kalendars & Tables, ensuring the least burdensome devotions be kept. So, Wesley's regulations essentially codified private worship as it was known among Anglicans.

In sum, Wesley's discipline provides a convenient and complete system for evangelical Anglican spirituality in private. Perhaps the advantages of the Wesleyan system are apparent for regions like Northern California where no parish situation exists, allowing families to experience historical Anglican worship if not a connexion with the United Episcopal Church through Evening and Family Prayer at home.

## From Circle to Class

On the website, we've had some difficulty explaining the relation between family circles and to class meetings. We've tried to cross the bridge by speaking of a Covenant service, but this is not quite right. Nor is family circle devotion contrary to the class meeting. A better understanding of circles to classes perhaps comes from the history of the earliest Methodist societies in America.

In *Methodism on the Headwaters of the Ohio*, Dr. Smeltzer relates the story of a widow, Mrs. Gant,

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who, during the early-1740's, founded Pittsburg's first class from her intimate family relations.

"She [Mrs. Gant] had Wesley's sermons and Fletcher's checks with her. On getting to her brothers who had three daughters, she could find no Methodists in the town. She felt she must introduce it, and began to speak with her nieces, who were led to see their need of Christ. Their Aunt would read one of Wesley's sermons and pray with her nieces until they were converted, when she formed them in a Class and met with them in that capacity regularly."

The account continues,

"After sometime a young man named Wigfield came to Pittsburg from Maryland. He was a Methodist, sought out this nucleus of Methodism, and united with them. They soon appointed him the class-leader. He married [a niece]. After their marriage their Aunt made her home with them while she lived. They removed to a home on the Frakstown road. Robert Ayres, the first preacher they saw, found them, and they had him preach to them. Here then was the first Methodism in Pittsburgh." (p. 95)

From Smeltzer's story we see how domestic devotions (such as reading the KJV and prayer) converted souls, moving a deeper piety. At this point, the small family circle became a class, eventually including their (male) in-law as class leader. Upon preacher Robert Ayres visitation, their home became a preaching-point (or 'prochapel'), eventually joining Br. Ayres's circuit. This sort of bottom-up and *irregular* making of classes was typical in places like the American frontier. There is also a debt owed to Irish pioneers who knew of lay-activism from Ireland.

The account of Methodism's founding in New York is similar, starting with Philip Embury and Barbara Heck's families. But, unlike Wigfield, Embury was a licensed lay-preacher, though placed on reserve by Wesley after leaving Ireland for America. Nonetheless, we see (in dramatic fashion) how the class meeting might emerge from relatively close family ties.

"Naturally Barbara Heck went to visit her brother Paul, and he and his friends visited the Hecks. Despite their somewhat puritanical upbringing, some of them had begun to relish card playing. It seems to have been in Barbara Heck's kitchen that a group was playing when she came in and found them. According to John Lawrence, she indignantly 'lifted up a corner of her apron, swept the cards from the table into it with her hand, went to the fire, and cast them from her apron into the flames.' After delivering a scathing rebuke, 'she put on her bonnet and went to Philip Embury, and said to him, 'Philip, you must preach to us, or we shall all go to hell together, and God will require our blood at your hands!' His faltering reply, 'where shall I preach?' brought the swift response, 'Preach in your own house!' 'But who will come to hear me?' he asked. She replied, 'I will come to hear you.' They fixed the time, and she was as good as her word. His first congregation comprised Barbara Heck and her husband Paul, their Black servant Betty, and one of

the card players, John Lawrence. This was about October 1766".

The story of the family circle transforming into a class meeting was similar with preacher Strawbridge's household. The point is the class often grew out of Anglican domestic worship, supposedly reinforcing the latter by a General Rule that required members to attend their parish church as well as continue diligent family prayer at home.

### Love Feast Hymns

Since last issue, we promised to discuss another aspect of the Love Feast—their hymns. Of course, the first Wesleyan songs for agape meals have a close relationship to Moravian song and were lyrically descriptive of fellowship. By 1780 there were several dozen poems used by Methodists, but the most 'standard' was **Hymn 505** from Wesley's *Collections*, "Come, and let us sweetly join". Hymn 505 was frequently used as the opening song at the Love Feast meetings. Another staple was singing the *Te Deum* as the Feast's closing hymn, testifying of the prayer book culture that rooted Methodism.

Song was also given as a sort of grace 'before' and 'after' the distribution of cake & tea. Singing grace at the Love Feast was common until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Metered graces were popularized by penny pamphlets, basically providing rhymed prayer at common meals of all sorts, even the small home. The most famous Table Grace was written by lay-preacher John Cennick. Found in his *Sacred Hymns for the Children of God*, it read,

#### **Grace Before Meat:**

*Be Present at our Table, Lord;  
Be Here, and Ev'ry Where ador'd;  
Thy Creatures bless, and grant that we  
May feast in Paradise with Thee.*

#### **Grace After Meat**

*We bless Thee, Lord, for this our Food,  
But more for Jesu's Flesh and Blood;  
The Manna to our Spirits giv'n,  
The Living Bread sent down from Heav'n;  
Praise shall our Grateful Lips employ,  
While Life and Plenty we enjoy;  
Till worthy, we adore thy Name,  
While banqueting with Christ, the Lamb.*

As mentioned previously, until we reach a capacity to better finance clerical visits, we will replace quarterly Holy Communion with Love Feasts. Since common meals require no ordained men, the Love Feast can be officiated by anyone. It also keeps our fellowship optimally open to other Christians regardless of denominational loyalties.

Hymn 505, the *Te Deum*, and the two Table Graces from above are staple songs at our Agape meals. We highly recommend their use, keeping a historical commitment to religious society use, so we might keep as close to Wesley's original plan as possible. **Next issue will provide some final remarks on the private usage of Love Feasts.**

**Upcoming Events:** #Every Sunday 4pm, **Evening Prayer** w/ Church catechism;  
Every Wed. & Fri. 6pm, **Family Prayer**. Both services @ prochapel #