

**THE METHODIST CHURCH OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA**

ADULT CONFIRMATION BOOKLET



A PARTICIPANTS GUIDE

Developed By: The Education for
Ministry and Mission Unit

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Conversion

Aim of the lesson

- To understand that conversion involves an important and necessary radical change to your life. This is not a once off event but rather an ongoing process towards a deeper relationship with Jesus

Study passage: Acts 9: 1-19

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

If it seems appropriate, bearing in mind the nature of the group, encourage group members to briefly share about their own conversion experience. You will need to allocate time in the program. This sharing should be voluntary. Do not force anyone or embarrass them. Try keep a log on who didn't share in this session as they may build confidence later in the program and so would be nice to give them another opportunity before concluding with the confirmation program. It may be good for the Facilitator to first share their own experience to encourage others to share.

Notes

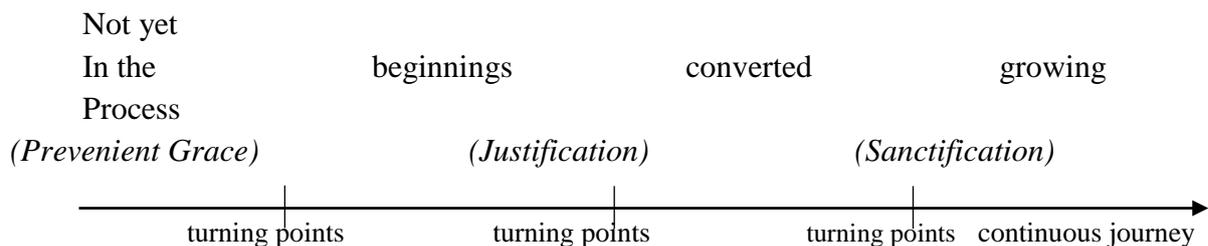
- **The word “conversion”** comes from a Latin word meaning “to turn around” and refers to the change which happens in us when we consciously decide to remove “self” as the controlling force in our lives, and instead put God on the throne of our hearts. Setting aside oneself means to let go your wants and desires and actively look to God's will for your life. It is sometimes referred to as “new birth” and “regeneration”. St Paul describes it as a miraculous work of grace in us: “If any person is in Christ they are a new creation: (2 Cor 5:17)
- **There is no pattern for how conversion happens.** Conversion is different for everyone and it does not happen in the same way at the same pace. For some it is sudden and dramatic (Acts 16: 29-34); for others it happens quietly or over a long period of growth with no particular “moment” of conversion to remember (Jer1:5). Conversion is personal and that is what makes it different. Regardless of how it happens, it is a necessary process if we are to live a meaningful Christian life. There are three main elements in conversion.
 - ◆ ***It involves repentance.*** Repentance has a negative and a positive side. The negative aspect is to admit that we make mistakes which often lead us away from God and we need to acknowledge this and be sorry for the sin in our lives. The positive aspect looks to the future for a sinner who repents, where Jesus promises a new way of living in which our whole life changes direction and we enter a new and right path of life.
 - ◆ ***Being born again.*** Jesus told Nicodemus that no one can see the Kingdom of God if they are not born again (Jn 3:3). As human beings we cannot obey God's will for our lives in our own strength. Therefore, God sent Jesus so that by believing in Him, that is having faith, we can be reshaped and able to follow Jesus through the power given to us by God. Being a

Christian does not mean trying to keep your old life but letting go of self to receive the new life Jesus promises. Just as sin is a radical separation from God, so rebirth is a radical “new creation” when the Spirit of God makes us new people. (Mt 9: 16-17)

- ◆ **Conversion is an ongoing process.** Someone once said that a Christian needs three conversions: a conversion to Christ, a conversion to the Church and a conversion to the world. As we grow in our relationship with Jesus, we will experience significant areas of new growth and turning points. This happens when our eyes are opened to something that needs to change, or when we surrender a new part of our life to God. That is when we gain a higher and deeper understanding of God. This process is a decision you make every day to walk in obedience with Jesus and to live the new life given to you by God.

Questions for discussion

1. Paul was already an extremely religious man before his conversion. In what ways was he religious? Why was “being religious” not enough? Protecting Judaism of which he was born into it. The Facilitator may have to research about Judaism and also ask the participants to research it as well.
2. In what way did Paul’s experience on the Damascus road change him? (see Gal 1:13-14, Acts 22: 1-3)
3. Why do you think Paul was so antagonistic/hostile towards the Christian faith before his conversion?
4. Can we be Christians without being converted?
5. There is usually a process which leads up to conversion, and a process of growth after conversion. Is it true in your own experience? Where are you in the process now? Mark your present position on the line as honestly as you can and share with the group, if you are comfortable to do so.



The Conversion Process Journey

Personal exercise

Meditate on these questions during your quiet time this week.

- What were the most important turning points on my journey to faith?
- Who were the people who had a significant influence on me in this journey?
- What progress have I made since my conversion?

- What new areas of commitment is Jesus wanting me to make?

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection. Do not focus much on the Theological terms for now. You will still deal with them when doing Salvation, but it is good to introduce them.

The Trinity

Aim of the lesson:

- To understand the unity of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Study passages: Romans 8:9-17; 1 Peter 1:1-5,10-12
- To try and understand something of the nature and being of God and how God works.
Study passages: Psalm 8; Ephesians 3:7-21; Matt 13:24-30; Luke 15:11-27
- To try and understand how we can respond to who God is.
Study passages: 1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Timothy 2:13; Hebrews 10:23

Introductory discussion (Facilitator):

What are the ways in which you understand God as Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – one God? Let each person explain. It might be good to bear in mind that people might struggle with oneness and yet distinction.

Notes:

- **I believe in one God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.** This is the doctrine of the Trinity and it teaches that although Christians have always experienced God in three difference ways, as Father, as Jesus Christ (the Son) and as the Holy Spirit, we nevertheless believe in one God, not three. In Christianity, a doctrine is a teaching on a belief, principle or position on a specific subject in order to convey the Gospel message. The word Trinity symbolises the state of being three in one.
 - ◆ **The Father** is God the Creator, a loving God who desires to be worshipped, and is a righteous lawgiver to be obeyed;
 - ◆ **Jesus** is God “become flesh”, and living among us to save us through the Cross and Resurrection;
 - ◆ **Holy Spirit** is the power of God at work in people to enable them to live a Christ-like life.

All three Persons of the Trinity are equal and fully God, all three are distinct Persons with their own purposes, yet they exist in perfect unity and harmony – no competition, intimidation, or undermining – but complement each other. The doctrine of the Trinity tries to describe, though it cannot explain, this **great mystery** of the Christian faith. This is to grapple with the deepest things of God, however, it is not surprising that because of our human limitations we are not able to fully grasp the mystery of God. The relationship between the Persons of the Trinity has been referred to as a dance of love and fellowship that flows through and unites the Persons of Trinity to each other and to us,

- **The doctrine of the Trinity.** The doctrine is never stated clearly in the Bible yet it is implied in many places and is therefore fully scriptural:

- ◆ Passages describing an intimate relationship of all three Persons of the Trinity can be found in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Ephesians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Corinthians 13:13. Jesus said He was one with the Father (John 10:30).
 - ◆ All three Persons of the Trinity are involved in the Creation (Genesis 1:1-2, Colossians 1:15-17).
 - ◆ All three share in the work of revelation and salvation (John 14:23-26).
 - ◆ All three are involved in the Resurrection (John 20:21,22,28; Romans 8:11).
 - ◆ All three promise to come and live in the believer (John 14:23, 1 Corinthians 3:16).
- **Love is at the heart of the Trinity.** God is love and loved us before we knew Him. God's love is central to the act of Creation, to the giving of the Law, to the saving work of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit (John 3:16, 1 John 4:8-12). The Trinity is God saying, in as many ways as God can, that God loves us and wants us to love Him.
 - **The Trinity means fellowship.** There is fellowship in God between the Father, Son and Spirit, and therefore there is fellowship in heaven as there needs to be fellowship here on earth (Matthew 6:10). This sets the pattern for us in that there must also be fellowship between those who love God. God calls us into fellowship with Himself and with others as we read in 1 John. 1:1-7.
 - **The need for balance.** We need to keep a balance in our belief between the Father, Son and Spirit. If we overstress the work of One, we will limit our faith and exclude the work done by God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. We will miss the created ways in which God interacts with humanity. Therefore, it is very important to be aware and careful of the teachings of those who do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. For example: Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons (Church of the Latter-Day Saints). These sects deny that Jesus and the Holy Spirit is also God.

Questions for reflection:

1. In what ways do we experience the different Persons of the Trinity in your Christian lives?
2. The Trinity is sometimes illustrated by referring to water, steam and ice, three different forms of expressions of the same substance. Can you think of similar illustrations?
3. Is it necessary that we fully understand God? Could it be encouraging to realize that God is bigger than our minds?
4. What can we learn about the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit from our study passages?

Personal exercises:

- Reflect your understanding at the beginning of this session. Has it changed in anyway and why?
- Select a passage of scripture relating to each Person of the Trinity and spend some time journaling your thoughts, asking God to reveal something about each Person to you.

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

The Nature of God

Aim of the lesson:

- To grow in understanding of the Divinity and Sovereignty of God and nature of who God is.

Study passages: Psalm 8; Ephesians 3:7-21; Matthew 13:24-30; Luke 15:11-27

Introductory Exercise (Facilitator):

In much the same way as with the last lesson, hand out pieces of paper and pencils and invite group members to draw a picture of God, pictorially or symbolically, in their own understanding. Let each person explain their drawing briefly to the group. (Either choose to do activity or just discuss)

Let each person share briefly their new insights about God. Encourage them to reference these to their old ways of looking at God. How will this new way of looking at God help them to connect better with God?

Notes:

- ❖ **Christian belief about God.** The Bible does not seek to “prove” the existence of God.

The people who wrote the books of the Bible already knew God existed so that was not the purpose for recording the Scriptures. The question to ask is: What kind of God is He? We come to know and understand what kind of God He is by what God freely chooses to reveal to us and through philosophy or trying to rationalise who God is.

God is the creator of all that is and is therefore the only true God. He wants our love and our worship. God is the righteous law-giver (Exodus 20:1-16) who calls us to live moral lives, to stand for justice and mercy and love God in humility (Micah 6:). God is perfect and holy (1 John 1:5-7). He is the “living God” who is present and involved in the world (Jeremiah 16:14-15) and has revealed Himself as a human being, Jesus, our Saviour and Lord (Col 1:19, John 1:14). God loves us, cares for us, saves us (John 3:16) and wants us to know Him as “Father” (John 14:6-7). All of this we know about God because God chose to reveal it to us.

- ❖ **God is our Creator.** The Bible begins with the story of creation because if we rightly understand God as creator, we will rightly understand the whole Bible. Understanding God as creator has certain implications:

- To call God creator is to acknowledge that He is Lord over all that exists. He is sovereign (ruler of all) and transcendent (above all others). God is not part of the creation, as many other religions teach, but is separate from it and above it.

- The creation has no existence of its own apart from God who willed all of creation into being, sustains it, and continues to guide it. It cannot choose to go its own way without God; it remains subject to his Lordship.
 - Creation shows us how we relate to God, that we are totally bound to Him and belong to Him. It also tells us how we relate to the world; in that it is God's world and should be treated with respect and in a spirit of stewardship.
 - Finally, the creation speaks to us about the nature of God. The world is His creation and as we observe it and study it, we discover something about the nature of the One who made it and the gift that God has given us.
- ❖ **Almighty God.** When we consider the immense power of God in creating the universe, we can only describe God as Almighty because God has the power to do anything God wants to do. God can work miracles, heal, answer prayer, even change the course of history if God chooses to do so. But God chooses to limit His power because God has a certain nature and therefore there are some things He will never do. God is Truth and so He would never lie or deceive. His promises are eternal and sure. He is righteous, holy and pure and will never do anything which is morally wrong or evil. God is love, which means He will never act in hatred, spite or un-love. God's love is not selective, all are loved. Even His discipline reflects His love. Despite these limits God places on Himself, He remains all-powerful.
- ❖ **But what about the power of evil?** If God is good and all-powerful, then where do all the bad things come from? There seems to be another destructive force at work in the world and all around us we see evil, crime, corruption, hatred, oppression, war, catastrophe, famine, illness and pandemics. If we are left to draw our own conclusions, it seems there are two powers at work, good and evil, order and chaos, light and darkness. Often it even seems that evil has the upper hand and that God is no longer in control and unable to change anything. So is God really Almighty? Perhaps then, God is struggling to save Creation and is not the one destroying it. Is it then God who is making you suffer or is God struggling with you in your suffering?
- ❖ **The Bible teaches** that God's creation was perfect and harmonious, but that evil somehow got in and spoiled that perfection. It is rather like a computer, perfectly programmed by a master programmer until a virus corrupts it. So too in creation, an enemy comes in the night and messes up the programme so that the programme goes wrong. Now the computer no longer performs the way the manufacturers or the programmer intended. Jesus expressed the same thought in the story of the enemy who came by night, and sowed weeds among the wheat (Matthew 13:24-30).
- ❖ **God allows freedom.** God has not lost control. God gives human beings free will and He respects that freedom. Most of the suffering and evil in the world is the result of humanity's abuse of the freedom to choose what to do. As a result of humanity's abuse of the freedom to choose, we do what is against God's will. God is not defeated by evil and could put the world right today. But God chooses not to force us. He wants our response to come freely and from the heart, because we love Him, not because we are forced.
- ❖ **God the Father (*Parent*).** For the Christian, God is Father in that we have a personal relationship with Him as we are adopted into His family, the Church (Rom 8:15-17).

We know that the most important thing we can say about God is not just that He created and is almighty, but that God is love. Jesus taught that we could call God “Abba”, a very intimate term, something like the English “Dad”, which expresses the deeply caring personal relationship with Him. Though human fathers may fail us, God is infinitely more loving and more patient. God is also stricter because He sees our secret desires and motives and demands goodness and integrity at that level too (Mt 5:27-28). However, because God sees our hearts, He is also fair and just, more than any human father could be.

- ❖ **I believe.** There is a vast difference between saying that we “believe that God...” which is intellectual belief (thinking with your head, logical), and saying that we “believe in God”. This is a total commitment of ourselves, trusting our lives to God and acknowledging His Lordship over us. It is possible to believe that God exists without it making any difference to our lives. When the Christian says “I believe in God”, it is a statement that has implications for every aspect of our lives. We can’t say we believe in God but our lives don’t reflect that belief. This is “saving faith” and involves a complete change of direction for our lives, as we begin to live in a relationship with, and obedience to “...God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth” (Apostle’s Creed).
- ❖ **The Revelation of God:** God has revealed Godself in various ways over time. This means God cannot be confined to anything in particular or specific with only one nature. Here are some, but not limited ways in which we get to know who God is:
 - **Creation** – God has used the very creation to reveal God’s nature. The order and self-sustaining nature of creation shows us that God is a *Sustainer and Provider*. We also see the beauty in the creation of God. This beauty comes as a result of the creation’s diversity. So, we can know God as a diverse God who enjoys diversity. After all, when God had finished creating, God said, “It is all beautiful (some versions say ‘good’). Therefore, we see the Goodness of God.
 - **Bible** – We refer to this as the Word of God. The Bible helps us understand God’s vision and plan for humanity and all of creation. The Bible tells us of God’s love for what God has created, hence, God is love. In the story of Israel and the ministry of Jesus, the protection of the vulnerable is heightened. As a result, some would know God as the *Protector and Advocate*.
 - **Science** – Some of the things we do as people reveal to us that God is at work through us. Medicine and Science that solves some of the challenges in life is an indication that God is a *Healer* who struggles in life together with people and creation.
 - **Worship** – When entering a space of worship, we get to learn new things about God. This can be through music, prayers and sermons for example. This may even depend on what we are going through in life and we discover that God is able to interact with us where we are. No wonder then, God is God yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Is the Bible's account of creation in conflict with science? What other stories that explain God, besides the Bible have you heard of?
2. Why do you think God has allowed men and women free will?
3. Where do we get our clearest picture of what God is really like? What is it that best explains who God is in your life that ties in with Scripture?
4. Have you found any meaningful way of relating to God?

Personal exercise:

- Reflect on your understanding of an earthly parents and a heavenly Parent and find similarities and differences in the two relationships.
- Write your own creed about what you believe about the nature of God. (You may need to explain as a Facilitator what a creed is.)

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

The Story of Salvation

Aim of the lesson:

- ❖ Understanding more about Jesus and what faith in Him means.
Study passages: Philippians 2:1-11
- ❖ Understanding how Jesus saves us from the guilt and power of sin.
Study passages: Genesis 3:1-13; Rom 5:6-10, 6:20-23
- ❖ Having the Methodist understanding of Salvation
Study passages: Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 11

Introductory Exercise (Facilitator):

Invite one or two people to share their testimony with the confirmands.

I believe in Jesus Christ

Notes:

- **I believe in Jesus Christ.** This is the heart of all Christian belief. Jesus is our starting point in the Christian life. Only when Jesus is at the centre can we truly understand the other things we believe: what God is like, what the Holy Spirit does, the purpose of the Church, His will for our lives, etc.
- **“I believe in...”** Christian faith begins with a personal response to Jesus. It is not just concerned with knowledge or opinions. It is something that happens when a person accepts Jesus as Saviour and Lord of their life, enters into a living relationship with Him and begins to be obedient. To have faith means that I trust in Jesus and rely upon Him completely – allowing Him, His values and standards to determine the direction of my life. This is a personal decision which we all have to make and cannot escape.
- **Jesus was a real human being,** a person just like us who lived a real life at a particular time in history. In Him, God became fully human, entering fully into our life and experience (John 1:14). Jesus is “Immanuel”, God with us (Isaiah 7:14). In the incarnation, God identified with humankind in order to save us and to show how much He loved us (John 3:16). In His life, Jesus also demonstrated the true nature of what God wants men and women to be, a perfect example of a person in whom the “Image of God” (Genesis 1:27) has been restored.
- **Jesus is the Son of God.** If He were just a human being, He would have no claim on our lives today. But Jesus is the Son of God and so His claim upon our lives is really the claim of the Creator, the One who created humanity. The whole of God’s being and nature was in the human Jesus (Col 2:9; John 14:9), revealing His will and His character in a deeper way than ever before, and showing us clearly how much He loves us and wants us to be reconciled with Him (Rom 5:8). Jesus, who possessed all

the majesty and holiness of God, chose to come in humility as a servant (Philippians 2:6-8) and through His obedience and suffering, has become our Lord and our Saviour (Philippians 2:9-11).

- **Jesus is Lord.** These three words was the creed of the first Christians (Romans 10:9, 1 Corinthians 12:3, Philippians 2:11). To call Him Lord means that we submit to His authority and control. He is not simply one “lord” among the other “lords” to which people subject their lives in this world; He is the only true “Lord”. His claim upon us excludes these other “lords” and cannot be challenged, because He is God who made us, and because He gave His own life for us on the Cross (Philippians 2:8).
- **To call Him Lord also implies obedience.** Faith, if it is real, will always result in obedience to God’s will, and Christian standards of moral conduct. Our obedience is not forced, but flows from our relationship with God and our love for Him. It comes from gratitude, not from fear. As Lord, He is Lord of all things, the whole person, the whole of life, the whole world, the whole universe (Col 1:19-20). He is Lord of my body, mind and spirit; my words, my deeds, my moral life, my social life, my work and my play. We cannot limit His Lordship or say He is Lord of some parts of life and not others. We cannot, for example, say He is Lord of my religious life but not my social or school life. Jesus is Lord and there are no limits to His Lordship (Philippians 2:10-11).
- **“...our Lord.”** So far we have been speaking in a personal way, and it is true that Jesus must be my Lord, or He is not Lord at all. But ultimately, it is not something we can have alone. When we give our lives to Jesus we become part of a community of believers. It is in the midst of our new brothers and sisters in Christ, the Body of Christ, that we discover deeper dimensions of His Lordship and are called to hold ourselves and each other accountable for our obedience to Him.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the most important things our study passage teaches us about Jesus Christ?
2. What does it mean to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord?
3. Why is it so important for us to remember that Jesus was fully human?
4. As we look at Jesus, what important things do we learn about what God is like?

Personal exercise:

- Reflect on your understanding of Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour
- Reflect on what it means to be part of the Body of Christ
- What would you say if you would have to give a testimony?
- Add to the creed you started in the previous session and write what you believe about Jesus Christ as Lord of all.

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

The work of Christ

Aim of the lesson:

- To understand the nature of sin and how Jesus saves us from its guilt and power.
Study passages: Genesis 3:1-13, Romans 5:6-10, 6:20-23

Introductory discussion

What is the experience when there is a separation experienced in a relationship? Otherwise use an analogy that depicts missing the mark to explain sin as a distance between where you are and where God wants you to be more like missing the Bull's Eye

Notes:

- **The sin of Adam.** The story of Adam and Eve reveals that the heart of all sin is disobedience to God. The rules God made for Adam and Eve in the Garden were simple and there for a reason. The rules were there to ensure harmony, peace and life (Genesis 2:15-17). But disobedience destroyed the peace and harmony and cut them off from the gift of life (vs 24). This put a barrier between them and their Creator (vs 8). From now on they and all humankind who followed, were subject to sin and death and separated from God (Romans 5:12). Because we are born into a sinful world, we are deemed as having the original sin.
- **This simple story** teaches us that sin always has certain consequences:
 - Separation from God (Genesis 3:8).
 - Separation from our fellow human beings (Genesis 3:7).
 - Separation from the true life of God (Genesis 3:24).
 - Separation and distance from Creation itself (Genesis 3:14).
- **What is sin?** There are several ways of describing it:
 - **Selfishness** – when what I want is more important than what God wants or the needs and feelings of others.
 - **Pride** – thinking we know better than God and putting our own will on the throne of our lives.
 - **“Missing the mark”** – falling short of what God requires of us (Romans 3:23). Like an archer whose arrows miss the target or cannot reach it, our sinfulness prevents us from reaching where God wants us to be.
- **Sin is separation from God.** Because of Adam's sin, a great gulf is fixed between humankind and God. Everyone is affected (Romans 3:23), and it is this in-born separation which makes us do sinful things. Our sins (e.g. Jealousy, hatred, murder, war, lying, selfishness, sexual immorality, theft, covetousness, idolatry, addiction etc) are a result of the disease of “sinfulness” which has infected our heart. When we have

measles, the doctor does not put ointment on the spots but gives medicine internally to cure the disease within us which causes the spots. In the same way, we cannot cure our sin by dealing with each sinful thing we do; we have to deal with the “disease” inside us which causes the “sins” and makes us disobey God.

- **What did Jesus come to do?** Bring in the Kingdom of God, establish the Church, teach, perform miracles? He did all these things, but there was always one clear focus without which none of them had any meaning: Jesus came to show us God’s love. He came to save men and women from sin and reconcile them with God. We call this the Atonement, literally “at-one-ment”, meaning to “reconcile or reunited” or “restore harmony” between us and God. He did it through His victorious conflict with evil on the Cross, where He broke the power of sin. Even His name, Jesus, means “Saviour” or “He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Salvation therefore, came at a huge price. The love Jesus has for His people cost Him his life. This price was a gift to us as God paid the price for us. We benefitted without doing anything. Salvation is the work initiated by God and not us, therefore we need to have faith in our gift of salvation because there is nothing (no works) that we can do to achieve it (Ephesians 2:8-90)
- **How does Jesus save us?** The Catechism (teaching of Christian religion) tells us “We are saved by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins.” No amount of tears, prayer or good deeds can take away our sin and guilt. We are required to repent of sins and turn towards Jesus for forgiveness. Jesus therefore provides a “bridge” so that we can cross over the gulf and be reconciled with God. Jesus is the bridge. Like the story of the crossing of the Red Sea, God opens a way through the waters (of sin) and enables us to go across on dry ground (Exodus 14:29-31).
- **Our sin is dealt with in two ways:**
 - Our guilt is removed and God remembers them no more (Hebrews 8:12) and treats us as though we had never sinned (we are “justified” – “just as if “ we never sinned);
 - Our “heart” is made new (2 Corinthians 5:17) so that we no longer want to continue being disobedient to Him (we are “sanctified” – free from sin, set apart as holy).
- **Pardon.** Jesus deals with the past by taking away our guilt, and giving us assurance that our sins of the past are forgiven. It is not a cheap forgiveness; it has been paid for with His blood. When we repent and receive forgiveness with the mindset that its ok to sin we can repent later is what cheapens forgiveness. Another helpful way of understanding pardon is how the word ‘forgive’ is constructed ‘for(e)-give’. With the ‘e’ fore means something that precedes, goes ahead of. God’s forgiveness is peace that precedes God’s anger and wrath. God offers us peace even before we ask for it, hence, *for(e)giveness*. It is never a reward, but a gift to us.
- **Power.** Jesus also deals with the present and future by giving us power to overcome sin’s ongoing influence in our lives. It is this power that Jesus asks His disciples to request from the Father (lead us not ‘into’ temptation, Matthew 6:13 – help us to

resist, overcome temptation, rather than giving in to it). The verse does not imply there will be no temptations, but may we find the power to resist and overcome temptations.

- **We are saved by faith.** Salvation comes through faith in Jesus alone, not through anything we can do (works). The cross has power to save but it has no significance for the person who does not know or think they need a saviour. It is not effective for us without faith. It's a bit like being given a cheque which we never take to the bank; the money waits for us but we can't have the benefit of it because we never go and draw the cash. All that Jesus did is of no benefit to us if we do not receive it personally.

- **The 5 ALLs:** John Wesley believed that salvation is not only reserved for some, but for all. This is the Methodist emphasis on salvation:
 - ◆ **All need to be saved**
 - ◆ **All can be saved**
 - ◆ **All can know they are saved**
 - ◆ **All can be saved to the uttermost**
 - ◆ **All can testify to their salvation**

The first “all” is a restatement of Paul’s words in Romans 3:23 – “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”. No exceptions. This includes people attending Church. Nobody has their life in order. Everybody, whether they know it or not, needs salvation.

The second “all” is an affirmation of Paul’s statement to Timothy that God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Again, no exceptions. God has not predetermined to reject anyone. God loves “the world” (John 3:16), His entire creation and all **her** creatures. Christ was the “atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2). There is no obstacle on God’s part to anyone’s redemption.

The third “all” is about faith as an experience. This statement affirms the definition of faith found in the letter to the Hebrews, as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). Faith is a direct awareness of supernatural reality. By faith we can personally know there is a God and that God forgives and loves us as children.

The Fourth, “all” articulates the Wesleyan doctrine of Christian perfection also known as sanctification. As we discussed in chapter 3, God intends to “sanctify [us] entirely” (1 Thessalonians 5:23), make us perfect “as [our] heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), and give us “perfect love” (1 John 4:18). This requires that every day we consciously make a decision to walk in our gift of salvation so that we may

become more Christ-like. The content of this hope is reflected in the prayer at the end of the book of Hebrews:

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete [the Greek teleoteta can be translated as “perfect”] in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (13:20–21)

Yet again, the “you” is plural. God is “working among us that which is pleasing in His sight.” Being saved is becoming “complete in everything good” so that *we* may do God’s will, here and now, to the uttermost.

The Fifth “all” helps us to understand that John Wesley was convinced that he was saved because the Holy Spirit witnessed to his spirit (more than a warm-heart – but never less). It is impossible to be converted without knowing about it, and this experience and assurance brings about the development of Christian attitudes and behaviours that are expressed through visible manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit. As people of faith we strive to become Christ-like as we move closer to Christian perfection. In our journey throughout sanctification we scan testify to the unconditional, all-embracing, all-encompassing, all-forgiving and all-gracious love of God that is for all.

- **Our response:** We can respond to God’s salvation through the following means:
 - ◆ Worshipping regularly (having Holy Communion and partaking in services of Baptism – these are known as ordinances which are religious sacraments)
 - ◆ Living a life of prayer
 - ◆ Studying Scripture everyday
 - ◆ Being in fellowship (classes, fellowship groups, home cells, youth groups or organisations)
 - ◆ Observing the Methodist rule of Life: Although there is no evidence that the words below actually originated with Wesley, they do resonate closely with his writings.

Devotional Life

“Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can!” In 1743, John and Charles Wesley established three general rules of life for Methodist societies: “First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind. Secondly, by doing good, by being merciful after (your) power. Thirdly, by attending on all the ordinances (commands) of God.”

Questions for discussion:

1. Which description or definition of sin makes most sense to you?
2. Why is it so hard to accept responsibility for our own wrongdoing? Does this affect our ability to recognise our need for a Saviour?
3. How does sin spoil our lives? Do you think we take sin seriously enough?
4. How would you explain to an unbeliever what it means to be “saved”?

Personal exercise:

- Reflect on the sin in your life. Think of Paul’s statement – the things I want to do I don’t do and the things I don’t want to do, these I do (Romans 7:15)
- Reflect on the meaning of the “4 All’s”
- How can you apply the Rule of Life and your response to the gift of God’s salvation in your life today? What changes do you need to make?

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

The Church

Aim of the lesson:

- Understand the Christian concept of Church
- Gain an understanding of the MCSA
- Understand the work of the Church
- Have a personal response to the above

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

Create an opportunity to have the group meet up with the different leaders of the church, this then helps them start a relationship with those leading the different ministry opportunities. Makes it easier than to get involved.

Notes:

- ***Introduction: Christian concept of Church***

The concept of Church is differently understood by many people in the MCSA. Many see the Church as a place of gathering, of fellowship and engagement meeting with friends who they may not see during the week. Others such as Church leadership may see the Church as a place of worship, prayers and encountering God. So right from the start the concept of Church has a quite different meaning and if this is not brought to the fore, then our endeavours to engage many in Church activities will be found wanting because we have not addressed their perspectives.

The Body of Christ

This is a New Testament metaphor for the Believers in Christ as their Lord and Saviour. This is how it can be understood from various perspectives:

Title: In the Letter to the Romans, the Church is referred to as the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5).

Unity: This sense of unity is emphasised in 1 Corinthians 10:17 as one body.

Membership: There is also 1 Corinthians 12: 27 that also seeks to forge the idea of oneness as different members.

Purpose: Ephesians 4:12 helps us to understand that this gathering of people helps with ministry and serving God and the building of the Body of Christ.

Reaching Out: Paul encourages the Hebrews to remember those in prison and mistreated.

Structured: The Body of Christ is structured as Paul reminds the Ephesians that the Church as the Body has a Head who is Christ (Ephesians 5:23).

Modelling: If Christ died for us as sinners showing us so much of God's love, then those called to gather in the name of Christ should surely emulate Jesus by loving others (Romans 5:8).

- ***How do people gain an understanding of the MCSA?***

The purpose of existence for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa can be found in the **Mission Statement** – God calls Methodist people to proclaim the Gospel of Christ for healing and transformation.

This profound statement is an invitation to all Methodist people to take an interest in what Jesus did, is doing and will do. The work of Christ for the MCSA is not left for certain individuals, but we all take part in doing it according to our gifts, talents and offices. For instance, some people are called to sing in the Choir, others preach from the pulpit, whereas some exercise their faith in God by looking after the sick like the Bible Women. There are some who pray whilst others reach out to the community to serve the hungry as there are those who stand at the door and greet people as they arrive. All these create a sense of Christ's presence in the world bringing healing and transformation.

The Vision: Our vision is that we should have A Christ Healed Africa For The Healing Of The Nations. We therefore see ourselves as not isolated from the other Methodist families in the Continent. It is no wonder we are not just the Methodist Church of South Africa, but the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and we call ourselves a Connexional Church. There are other kinds of Churches like Congregational where the emphasis is localized, ours caters for a region in the SADC.

The Structure of the MCSA

Our Church is divided into various segments to allow work to happen better and make sure that we connect with one another because we are a Connexional Church. Here is the structure of the MCSA:

Societies: This is the local membership whose members belong to Classes of about 12 people. Each class is led by a Class Leader. These Class Leaders are administered by the Society Stewards who ensure that all the work is happening as it should be. A minister will then oversee all this work and offer Spiritual nourishment for all the Societies.

Circuits: A group of Societies is referred to a Circuit. All the Class Leaders and Society Stewards come together once every three months in what is called the Circuit Quarterly Meeting to discuss the work of the Societies and make decisions. The Superintendent Minister will Chair these Meetings. The Circuit Stewards shall ensure that the decisions of the Circuit Quarterly Meeting are adhered to by all the Societies.

Synods: A group of Circuits when they come together is known as a Synod. In the past it was called a District. This gathering reviews the work done by the Circuits and how best can the Circuits carry their Circuit work. There are delegates who represent their respective Circuits including the Circuit Stewards and all the Ministers in the Circuit. The Synod Bishop chairs these meetings.

Connexion: This is a group of all the Synods. These Synods cover the following countries Mozambique, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, Eswatini and South Africa. Some Synods cover specific countries whereas mostly they cover more than one country. We do not follow political boundaries, but a fair distance that can be covered by a Bishop. These Synods send representatives to a gathering once a year known as a

Conference. This gathering discerns, decides on the work the Circuits need to do by receiving comments from the Circuits through the Synods. Once a decision is taken by Conference, then it becomes applicable to all Methodists in our Connexion. The Presiding Bishop Chairs these meetings.

Mission Groups

The MCSA in 2005 declared that we are a Mission driven Church through the Mission Congress. At this congress the MCSA came up with 4 mission pillars that were later revised to 5. There are:

- Spirituality
- Evangelism & Church Growth
- Justice, Service & Reconciliation
- Development & Economic Empowerment
- Education & Christian Formation

This work is mostly carried out by Mission Groups at times referred to as Organizations like the Women's Manyano, Young Men's Guild, Wesley Guild, Women's Auxiliary, Men's League, etc. These Mission Groups help the Body of Christ to be faithful to our vision and mission statement. The membership to these begins with the membership to the Church. They are all accountable to the Circuit Quarterly Meeting.

Ministries

Each Society may have a particular emphasis in doing the work. For instance, some Churches have Choirs whilst others have Worship Teams. There are people called into these ministries as a way of their own witnessing (proclamation according to our Mission Statement). Members of the Society are invited to join these ministries in order to encourage personal Spiritual growth and the growth of the Society. This is what we call the Priesthood of All Believers where each member exercises ministry.

The process of sharing with the candidates the work of the Church can entail the following:

- Provide an overview of the organogram of the MCSA and its various functions
- Introduce the various organizations and their roles and functions
- Role play the activities of these organizations so that the candidates can be actively engaged towards understanding the work of the Church
- Focus on the missional aspects of the church and show them how they can become involved in mission among their friends, at their homes and in Society

- Allow the candidates to write down what their perspectives are of the work of the Church, what they would like to see the Church doing for the community and how they would want to be part of such solutions
- **Conclusion:**
The Church needs to reinvent itself to become relevant to all, to address their needs, to show care and compassion and to listen to their voices even if they critique in their way. It is only when the Methodist Church becomes a listening church that we will be able to respond to the needs of all through our confirmation classes.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you think the church is still relevant today?
2. Why do you think people leave the church? What are the ways in which we can keep people within the Church?
3. How can the church be more inclusive?
4. Should new members be part of the leadership structures in the MCSA? Why? How can we encourage new members to be part of the life of the Church?
5. How can the church assist to encourage and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ?

Personal exercise:

As part of their confirmation training, allow candidates to participate in Church services to the level that they are comfortable with, e.g. read the Word of God, do offertory prayers, take the collections, serve as door stewards and take congregation members to their seats should we return to services in building. Tasks confirmation youth can do:

- Reflect on why many are not interested in the current Methodist Church and then ask them to state possible solutions that they think can bring people back to the Church
- Ask candidates of the class to interview their peers/friends in their friendship circle and perhaps at workplaces to find out what they believe in? The questions can be structured along the following way:
 - ◆ Is there a God?
 - ◆ If so, why do you say so? If you do not believe in God what do you believe in and why?
 - ◆ What do you think is the role of for the Church? If so, what?
 - ◆ Do you know anything about the Methodist Church or any other Church that appeals to youth?
 - ◆ Do you think the Church is still relevant today? Of so why?

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

Methodism

Aim of the lesson:

- To understand the origins of the Methodist Church
- To understand Methodism in the South African context
- To understand what Methodists believe and teach
- How do we respond?

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

Watch a movie on how Methodism, the Methodist Movement, came into being, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRRqKe3QB5c>. End with a discussion or Q&A.

Notes:

- **The origins of the Methodist Church**
Methodism has its roots in 18th century Anglicanism. John Wesley, its founder was a Church of England minister, who courageously challenged the religious assumptions of the day. While being at Oxford, he and others met regularly for **Bible study** and **prayer**, to receive **communion** and do acts of **charity**. They became known as 'The Holy Club' or 'Methodists' because of the methodical way they carried out their Christian faith. Later John used the term Methodist to mean **the methodical pursuit of biblical holiness**.

In 1738 John Wesley had a profound spiritual experience. "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins." This experience transformed Wesley and inspired him to become one of the greatest preachers of all time. He began preaching to crowds of working-class men and women in the outdoors. This 'field preaching' became a key feature of the Revival, when thousands came to hear Wesley preach up and down the country. He formed local societies of those who converted and encouraged them to meet in smaller groups on a weekly basis. He insisted that they were to attend their local church as well as the Methodist meetings. Every year Wesley travelled the country visiting the societies and preaching. Wesley's radical preaching caused him to be denounced, his meetings were disrupted, and he was even physically attacked and threatened with death.

- **Methodism in South Africa**

Methodism came to South Africa with the soldiers of the British garrison stationed at the Cape and was firmly established as the 1820 settlers (some Methodists) arrived. Our early Methodist missionaries began their work long before the Great Trek, and their work is a tribute to their personal courage, faith, and self-sacrifice. In 1814, Rev Barnabus Shaw set out from Cape Town to Namaqualand, establishing the famous Lilyfountain mission on the Kamiesberg.

In the Eastern Cape from 1823 onwards, our missionaries lead by William Shaw moved north of Grahamstown. Chief Kama of the Ciskei was converted and the first of our mission stations. Wesleyville, was established.

The first Xhosa New Testament was printed at Mount Coke in 1846 and by 1859 the whole Xhosa Bible was completed. Shaw's dream of a chain of mission stations extending from Grahamstown to Natal finally became a reality. Something exciting was also emerging in the Transvaal and Eastern Free State. In 1822, Rev Samuel Broadbent founded a mission at Makwasi just north of the Vaal River (Near Klarksdorp) where work was being done to put the Tswana language in written form. In 1833, Chief Moroka, Rev James Archbell, and Rev John Edwards moved nearly 12 000 people of the Barolong from a place near Kimberley to more fertile land at Thaba 'Nchu which was purchased from Moshoeshoe I Of Lesotho. Five mission stations were established.

Our mission stations also spread northwards into the Transvaal and Natal and later Methodist work was planned in Mozambique by Robert Mashabe, who, despite persecution and imprisonment without a trial, returned to carry on the work among his people. Built on these secure foundations, Methodism in Southern Africa has continued to expand and grow. Methodism has made a vast contribution to education through early mission stations having schools and the possibility of printing vernacular resources.

When the South Africa government took over in the 1950's, all black education in the Methodist Church had schools and well-established teacher training institutions producing many of our black leaders, ministers, teachers, doctors, lawyers and administrators. The loss of these institutions was a great loss leaving Kingswood, Kearney, Epworth and St. Stithians to continue the legacy of the Methodist schools of excellence.

Medical care was part of the Methodist mission from early on. Our four large hospitals were also taken over by the government leaving them with only one remaining mission hospital in the Lesotho mountains. We continue our medical and caring mission with the children's homes and numerous old age homes around the Country.

Since the days when John Wesley began to publish pamphlets and inexpensive books for people, Methodism has always been involved in the work of publishing good Christian literature. The Methodist publishing house, which has been in operation for

over 100 years, has shops in most of the major centres providing resources for many different language groups. Our involvement as a church in Africa has seen the birth and growth of a number of powerful organisations who continue to be very devotional and evangelical.

The Methodist Church is outspoken about any unfair treatment due to race, gender or sexual orientation. Methodists continue to have a strong voice proclaiming justice for all as the Church in its many factions continue to play a positive role in bringing a clear message of hope to a uniting South Africa which is based on the solid truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- **What Methodists believe.**
Ephesians 2:1 to 10 and Matthew 5:43 to 48

The Methodist church does not have a special creed which is different from other major Christian Churches. We accept the Apostles Creed as a basic expression of our faith.

We do however lay special emphasis on four important aspects of the Christian teaching.

There is no simpler or better way of presenting these distinctive emphases than by using the four statements that are collectively called the 'Four All's'.

1. All people need to be saved.
2. All people can be saved.
3. All people can know they are saved.
4. All people can be saved to the uttermost

Salvation is by faith alone. We are not saved by our 'good works' but by the free, undeserved grace of God. We cannot earn it, we can only receive it by accepting Jesus as our Lord and saviour. Once we have truly experienced the gift of salvation, 'good works' will be seen in our lives as evidence of the new life we have received.

Everyone needs salvation and no one is excluded. In contrast to some churches which teach that only certain people have been predestined, will be saved. Methodism has steadfastly taught that all may turn to God and find full salvation. All have sinned and need reconciling to God through Jesus Christ (Romans 3:22-23). It is not just 'bad' people, but even those who seem to live good lives that need the 'rebirth' experience of a living faith in Jesus and an acknowledgement of their sinfulness and separation from God.

Assurance. Christians can know they are saved. God does not leave us in a state of doubt and fear regarding the reality of our salvation. The deep inner witness of the Holy Spirit, Who has internal access to our lives, 'bears witness with our spirit that we

are the children of God (Romans 8:16). We can say with assurance that ‘I know that I am saved.’ (2 Timothy 1:12).

Christian Perfection. God wants us to be perfect in our spiritual life and our moral life and to rid ourselves of all sinfulness (Matthew 5:48). John Wesley described Christian Perfection as ‘perfect love’ towards God and love for our fellow person. This must be the aim of every disciple of Christ. This teaching, more than any other, distinguishes the Methodist church and gives a special message and mission among the other Christian denominations. Not only forgiveness but goodness, good moral behaviour, is the gift and goal of God through Jesus Christ.

Grace. We believe that it is God who loves us first and we respond to that love. God loves us not because we have done anything to impress God, but purely because God’s love is unconditional. We see this love in Jesus who is declared by John that through Him, God so loved the world (John 3:16). It is this love that is given to us long before we could know anything of it. Mr Wesley calls this **Prevenient Grace**. It is this grace that makes God to look at us not as sinners, but righteous children of His Kingdom. By accepting this truth we call such love as **Justification**. All this is through faith. Our response to this justifying grace helps us to live in a manner that honours God. The more we honour God, it is the more we grow in our righteousness towards attaining perfection. This love that draws us closer to becoming like Christ is known as **Sanctification**. It is a journey that each one of us can embark on and grow into. Although we do not initiate this process of Salvation, we are called to respond to it. We can repent by confessing our sins. We can remain true to God by worshipping God. We can continue to honour God by serving God. We cannot serve God without sharing our resources and time. In this way our lives become a means of proclamation and generosity.

In the true Methodist tradition, theory and practise Has always gone together. ‘There is no holiness but social holiness’. Holiness does not exist in a vacuum but in right relationships. Methodism has always upheld the need for a balance between deep spirituality and involvement in the real issues and needs of society.

Questions for reflection:

1. In what ways do you see that the Methodist church has been a radical voice of hope in a broken and hurting land?

“A Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations.” As members of the Methodist Family our challenge is to share more deeply God’s passion for healing and transformation. We believe the Holy Spirit is guiding us to continue the pilgrimage which has led us through Obedience 81 and the Journey to the New Land to the present day. We recognize the importance of the local church and rejoice in the many Circuits and Societies where life-giving mission is taking place. In trust and obedience, we commit ourselves to

the four imperatives for mission in our time: A deepened Spirituality as individuals and a Christian Community. Justice and Service in Church and Society. Evangelism and Church growth which build up the people of God. Empowerment and Development which give dignity and new purpose to those who have been deprived. We resolve to take intentional and sustained action to implement these imperatives in such areas as: The Healing Ministry. Deepening our understanding of African and other spiritualities. Co-ordinated programmes for Christian Education, information, and communication. Building meaningful relationships that transcend racism, sexism and all other forms of discrimination. A vigorous response to the crisis of HIV and AIDS. Informing our prophetic ministry by research into socio-economic issues. Identifying land for sustainable livelihood. 4 2020 Sacrificial giving. Becoming a church in solidarity with the poor. Providing training in evangelism. Training ministers for the African context. Implementing anti-bias training. Becoming a more Youth and Child centred Church.

2. Is it arrogant to claim that we can know that we are saved? What can we base our claim on?
3. What does Christian perfection mean for us in practical terms in our own personal lives and our relationship with others?

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

Social Holiness - Doing Life Together

Aim of the lesson:

- To understand the meaning and application of social holiness
- To be able to understand the purpose of life as a Methodist and as part of a Christian community
- To understand the context of Christian fellowship and faith
- Study passage: Matthew 22:37-40

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

Facilitate a discussion with the confirmands on how they experience social life in the world and how they experience church life.

Notes:

- We live in a world that has become over-obsessed with self, we have become the ‘selfie generation’, all we need to do is open any of our social media platforms and we are flooded with selfies of people, some of them are our friends, others we may not even know, all of them taking selfies of themselves, what they are doing and post them online for all the world to see. This has become a new way of social living. John Wesley believed that people could not believe in God and live in isolation from each other and that God created us to be social beings. Therefore, we also cannot live out our faith in isolation.
- “The Gospel of CHRIST knows of no Religion, but Social; no Holiness but Social Holiness.” This is one of the famous quotes by Rev John Wesley¹ and is found in the introduction to a book² of hymns and poems that he and his brother, Rev Charles Wesley, put together and published in 1739. Wesley wrote those words as he was speaking about the importance of doing life together through fellowship with other Christians while speaking into the world of his time, a world that was becoming divided along both socioeconomic and political lines. Many of the problems Wesley was addressing in his time are still with us in some of the social-ethical problems that we see in the world around us today, both at the individual level and systemic levels of our society. Problems such as racism, poverty, nationalism, ethnocentrism, sexism and structural domination of women (patriarchy), violence against women and children, discrimination of LGBTQIA+ community and all other forms of systemic violence that bring devastation and destruction of the human community.³
- From the founding moments of the Methodist Movement⁴ Rev John Wesley and the Methodists that have followed in his footsteps have been working towards the

¹ Rev John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement which later has become the Methodist Church, the church tradition that we call home and are seeking to become Full Members of through Confirmation.

² Hymns and Sacred poems

³ Collins, K. J., 2003, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Pages 93 to 97.

⁴ In 1739

spreading of holiness, through spreading scriptural holiness throughout all the land. This scriptural holiness is the work of living out, in all that we do and say, the Greatest Commandment that Jesus gave us, which we find in Matthew 22:37 – 40, Mark 12:28 -34 and Luke 10:25 – 27, when Jesus teaches us ³⁷ *Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”*³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.*³⁹ *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’*⁴⁰ *All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*⁵

- The work of spreading scriptural holiness is being part of a loving relational community with God and with other people, through doing life together in a loving relationship with God and with other people. As Methodists of today, we are called to do this work as well.⁶ This is a work to which you are committing yourself through becoming a Full Member of The Methodist Church of Southern Africa, through your Confirmation.

We see this commitment through the promises that you will make to God and the Church at your Confirmation Service, as you publicly confirm your faith in Christ through making three promise:

1. Do you repent of your sin and renounce all evil? To which you will respond, ‘I do.’
2. Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour? To which you will respond, ‘I do.’
3. Will you obey Christ and serve Him in the Church and the world? To which you will reply, ‘With God’s help I will.’⁷

Through these promises, you are first, committing yourself to live in a loving personal relationship with God. Through the first two promises, we confess that we know that we are sinners and that we trust in Jesus as the one who, through God’s grace, sets us free from sin as we place our trust in Jesus as our Saviour, and that we will submit to Jesus’ Lordship over our lives. Secondly, we commit ourselves to obey Christ. We commit ourselves to follow what we are commanded to do in the scriptures and to live this out in the community with other Christian people as we together form the church and serve Christ in the world. You are committing yourself to live out these relationships through the way you live out your life, through your words and deeds towards God and other people.

- In our Methodist Book of Order, the Laws and Disciples of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, we are told in chapter three which deals with church membership, what our Methodist ethos is:

⁵ Matthew 22:37 – 40 from the New International Version of the Holy Bible

⁶ Collins, K. J., 2003, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey*. Nashville: Abingdon Press. Pages 93 to 97.

⁷ Methodist Church of Great Britain. 1992. *The Methodist Service Book*. Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House. Page A22

- As the law of love is the law of Christ for all His disciples, the spirit and practice of Christian love is an indispensable condition of faithful membership in the Methodist Church.
 - The spiritual and ethical ideal of this fellowship has always been, and still is, that its members should constantly seek to be made perfect in love – ‘pure love filling the heart and governing all words and actions’. The standard set by the Apostles is the high vocation of the Methodist Church. ‘With all possible wisdom we warn and teach them in order to bring each one into God’s presence as a mature individual in union with Christ’.
 - Sharing in Christian community is therefore impressed upon every Member of the Church. The distinctive Methodist institutions of the Class Meeting, the Love Feast, and the Covenant Service are based upon the assumption that those who love the Lord Jesus and seek to do His Will shall become helpers one of another. None is excused from this debt of love. The Church owes special and tender care to those who have excluded themselves from the means of grace.⁸
- As Methodists, we believe that sharing in the Christian community is the duty of every Member of the Church. As Christians, we share in the Christian community with fellow Christians because we believe that we grow in our Christian faith together with other Christians, this doing life together is social holiness. The Bible is full of examples of this, see Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12 to 27, Ephesians 3:6, Ephesians 4:15 – 16, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18 & 24. We are the Body of Christ together, with Christ as the head of the body, which is his Church.
 - As Methodists we express this Christian Community through deep and intentional fellowship with each other, we become helpers of one another, through Class Meetings or Bible Study/ Fellowship Groups in the life of our church. Where we gather together to grow together, and for mutual accountability about our Christian faith. This has been a tradition and central part of our Methodist Church structure from the beginnings of Methodism, with Rev John Wesley dividing those coming to faith in Christ into Class Meetings. These Class Meetings would meet together weekly for Christian fellowship around the word of God and to be held accountable to each other for the state of their Christian lives, this was done by the asking of a set of questions:⁹
 1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
 2. What temptations have you met with?
 3. How were you delivered?
 4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it is sin or not?

⁸ Methodist Church of Southern Africa. 2016. *The Methodist Book of Order. 12th Ed Revised 2016*. Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House. Page 25.

⁹ Wesley, John. *The Essential Works of John Wesley* (p. 862). Barbour Publishing, Inc. Kindle Edition.

- To help us better understand this... There was a church member who had become discouraged by life and the many troubles in his life and suddenly stopped coming to church, he even avoided visits from his church friends and family, no one knew why. When his minister heard about this the minister decided it was time for a home visit to this member. It was a cold winters day and as the minister arrived, the man reluctantly let the minister in and warned the minister that he would not be very good company. The minister was welcomed into the home and made to sit in a large chair in front of a fireplace. There was a warm fire in the fireplace, the minister and the member sat there quietly keeping company with each other, without saying a word. After a long-while the minister got up and used the fire tongues to take a piece of burning coal out of the fire, the minister gently placed it to the side, on the stone floor next to the fire, and then went and sat down. The member sat there puzzled but remained silent, they both sat there watching this coal. Gradually the coal began to lose its glow, finally, it grew dark and cold until it died, had no heat left in it. At this point the minister got up and gently picked up the piece of coal with the fire tongues and placed it back into the fire, soon the coal was burning again and glowing brightly. Then the member looked up at the minister and said that he would be back in church the very next Sunday.
- This is the power of social holiness; we grow and are sustained in our Christian walk by doing life together in community with our brothers and sisters in Christ. As we live in community, our growing social holiness should challenge us as individuals and as the community to take seriously the commandments Jesus gave us; to love God with all of who we are, and to love to our neighbours. It is a call for us to live out our confirmation, community life and promises. Firstly, ‘Do you repent of your sin and renounce all evil?’ Secondly, ‘Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?’ and lastly, ‘Will you obey Christ and serve Him in the Church and the world?’ As we take these promises seriously, they challenge us to examine our lives, and how we and our community live out our lives, to examine both the known and unknown sin in our lives. It asks us questions of our relationship with other people, of power dynamics within our lives, of how we earn and use our money, of being sensitive to the needs of the wider community that surround us.
- **How do we do this?**
As Methodists we have a Rule of Life¹⁰, a social-ethic, that helps us navigate these challenges, this simple Rule of Life was given by Rev John Wesley to the Methodist people, and consists of three simple rules: 1. Do no harm, 2. Do Good, 3. Stay in love with God (Constantly attend upon all of God’s ordinances). You will notice that these three rules sound very similar to your three Confirmation Promises. Let me expand on these rules to help us understand how we can use them in our daily lives, as we seek to live out our promises:
 - 1. Do no Harm.**
This rule links up with the first promise, ‘Do you repent of your sin and renounce all evil? We need to ask ourselves what sin do we have in our lives

¹⁰ Methodist Church of Southern Africa. 2016. *The Methodist Book of Order. 12th Ed Revised 2016*. Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House. Page 25.

and what harm is our sin doing to others? What sin is present in the world around us? We need to be careful not to overlook the sins and harm that has become socially acceptable in our lives, by using God's standards, the great commandments as our guide. Some examples of sin and harm could be, but are not limited to; taking the name of God in vain, working on the Sabbath, fighting and arguing with other people, returning evil for evil, bargaining in buying or selling, unloving and unnecessary conversation that hurts ourselves or others, doing to others what you would not desire they should be doing to you; doing what we know is not for the glory of God. These harms would also include racism, poverty, nationalism, ethnocentrism, sexism and structural domination of women (patriarchy), violence against women and children, discrimination of LGBTQIA+ community and all other forms of systemic violence that bring devastation and destruction of the human community.

2. Do Good

This rule links up with the second promise, 'Do you trust in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour?' We need to ask ourselves can people tell that I am a Christian? As we grow in relationship with God, we generally become more loving and begin doing good because of the love of God building up within us, healing us into the image of God within us. This is a love for God, remember the commandment; love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. We also begin showing *agape* love to others, by doing good selfless works for other people, loving others and caring for other people. So the question is, are we sharing the Good News of God with others through the way we live out our lives? Are we sharing with others what Jesus has done and is doing in our lives? Are we helping others through the good we are doing, not for our interests, to be able to boast, but for theirs? Are we bringing peace and doing good to all people by helping address issues of racism, poverty, nationalism, ethnocentrism, sexism and structural domination of women (patriarchy), violence against women and children, discrimination of LGBTQIA+ community and all other forms of systemic violence that bring devastation and destruction of the human community?

3. Stay in love with God (Constantly attend upon all of God's ordinances)

This rule links up with your third promise, 'Will you obey Christ and serve Him in the Church and the world?' We need to ask ourselves, what are we doing to grow more in love with God? And the people, church community, of God as we seek to live out together the commands of God? These would include; regular attendance at public worship of God, regularly partaking of Holy Communion, through being at the Lord's Supper, working at being an active part of the Christian community of faith, having regular times of private prayer, reading the Scriptures, and habits of self-discipline. The

practise of family worship, encouraging your family to worship God with you.

As you make your Confirmation Promises, and as you publicly confess your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, you are confirming for the world that you are a child of God and that you are part of the Body of Christ, the Church, your spiritual family. That you are committing yourself to become an active part of this community of faith, as we seek to grow in our relationship with God and do life together as brothers and sisters in Christ. May God be your helper.

Questions for reflection:

1. The world we live in is sometimes viewed as a self-involved and self-important way of life? Why is this the case?
2. What influences our lives, our thinking and our relationships with God and other people?
3. How can you live a life of social holiness at church, in our workplaces, neighbourhood and in your family life?
4. How can we incorporate social media living into social holiness?

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

Baptism

Aim of the lesson:

- **To understand the meaning of the Sacrament of Baptism.**
Study passages: Romans 6:1-14, Acts 19:1-6.

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

Plan for the group to attend a baptism service – and can be used as an opportunity for those within the group that have not been baptized to be baptized as they would need to before being confirmed. Allow for a time of Q&A.

Notes:

- **The Sacraments:** Baptism and Holy Communion, are ‘outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace’. God’s grace is of course not limited to the moment of administration of the Sacrament. Grace is at work throughout our lives, before we come to faith (prevenient), in our conversion (justifying) and as we go on to live out the Christian life (sanctifying).
- **Baptism marks our point of entry into the Christian community.** It is administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit by immersing the person fully or partially in water, or by sprinkling. This signifies at least five things for us:
 - ◆ Participation in the death, resurrection and new life of Jesus (Romans 6:3-4)
 - ◆ Forgiveness and cleansing of our sin (1 Peter 3:21, 1 Corinthians 6:11)
 - ◆ The death of our old self and our commitment to a new way of life in Christ (Galatians 3:27, Acts 2:37-39)
 - ◆ Our incorporation into the Church, the Body of Christ, the Covenant community of God (1 Corinthians 12:13)
- That the Holy Spirit has been given and has begun His work of renewal and sanctification in us (Acts 19:5-6, Romans 6:22 & 8:23).
- **Infant Baptism.** Our Church baptizes the children of Christian parents because we believe it is in harmony with scripture that children should have a place in the Christian community (Acts 2:39 & 16:44, Mark 10:14, 1 Corinthians 7:14). This practice goes back to the earliest days of the Church. Here the sign of God’s redeeming grace is given *before* the person has come to personal faith, and the parents undertake a solemn obligation to do everything in their power to see that their child will one day come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord. This event is usually celebrated in confirmation.
- **Believer’s Baptism** is for those who have found faith and have not been baptized before. They enter at once into the fellowship and responsibilities of membership of the Church.
- **Believers versus Infant Baptism?** There should be no conflict here. Our Church practices both. In Methodism we have a strong infant baptism tradition, but we also freely baptize adults who have come to faith. We do not however allow re-baptism because we believe baptism is an unrepeatable act (‘we believe in one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’ – the Creed) (Ephesians 4:5). It would also imply that the first baptism was invalid. We can be baptized only once. We do not for example get re-baptized every time we sin or backslide and return to faith. In both Believer’s and Infant Baptism, the stress is on what God has done for the believer rather than what we are doing; our response and our faith. Also, in both, the Church promises to nurture and support those who have been baptized and help them to grow in their faith.

Questions for discussion:

Romans 6:1-14, Acts 19:1-6

1. What do our study passages teach us about the meaning of Baptism, either directly or indirectly? Examine them carefully. Share your thoughts as a group.
2. In the Acts passage, why do you think the baptism of John the Baptist was not enough? What more does Christian Baptism offer?
3. Some parents want their children baptised for the wrong reasons. What are some of these wrong reasons? What are the right reasons?
4. What responsibilities and obligations do Christian parents undertake when they have their children baptised?
5. Do you have any other problems about Baptism, or is there something you would like clarified? Share it and discuss it with the group.

Group Exercise:

Make sure each person in the group has a copy of the ‘Book of Offices’ or ‘The Methodist Service Book.’ Read through the orders of service for infant and adult baptism. Discuss the meaning of each part of the service as you go through it.

Personal exercise:

- Why not start having ‘family prayers’ with your family if you are not doing so already? Find a convenient time when you are all together – sometimes a mealtime is such an occasion. Spend 10 to 15 minutes on the exercise. Read the Bible and pray. Spend a short time in discussion about what you have read.
- Remember and celebrate the date of your Baptism every year as you do your birthday. Relight the candle that was lit for you as a symbol of Christ’s light in you and you being the light in the world.

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

Holy Communion

Aim of the lesson:

- To understand something of the mystery of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.
Study passages: Luke 22:7-23

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

Allow confirmands to ask questions regarding sacraments.

Notes:

- **The Last Supper.** Every year the Jews remembered the deliverance of Israel from slavery and oppression in Egypt. They recalled how God had acted in their history. On this night, as Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, His life was at a very low ebb. He would soon be betrayed into the hands of His enemies. Tomorrow He would die a cruel and humiliating death. Yet He chose this moment to institute a new rite which Christians would use to remember Him to the end of time. Taking some of the familiar elements of the Passover meal He gave them a new meaning and made them symbols of a new Passover, a new deliverance of God, a new Covenant, a new relationship between God and humankind (vs 20).
- **“Do this in remembrance of me”.** The sacrament of Holy Communion is a constant reminder of what Jesus has done. It proclaims His salvation and His death until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11:26). The main focus is of course on His death on the cross; on His broken body and His sacrificial blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. But it does not stop there. It is a remembrance of all that He is to the Christian, His Resurrection, His Ascension, His life, as well as His death. We remember therefore, not just Calvary, but an empty tomb and a Lord who is enthroned in glory at the right hand of God. Clearly the early Church saw the Sacrament as being ultimately connected with our Lord’s Resurrection because they celebrated it on the first day of the week, the day of the Resurrection (Acts 20:7).
- **A means of grace.** Holy Communion is not just a time of remembering. It is also a real channel of God’s blessings and grace. We are united with Jesus through the consuming of the elements. Here we receive power and nourishment to grow in the Christian life as the deep meaning of the Sacrament intersects with our lives. Somehow God takes these simple elements and through them all the benefits of Christ’s saving work are communicated to us.
- **Union with Christ.** Here we are one, in a very deep way, with the living risen Jesus. ‘His presence makes the feast’. He dwells in our hearts by faith and goes back with us into life. We are one with Him, and He is one with us, like the Vine and the branches (John 15:4-7).
- **Union with other believers.** Our union with Christ also unites us with other Christians (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). This unity transcends all barriers, not just of culture, race, sex and status, but of time and space as well. We are one with Christians of the past, in other parts of the world, and even in the future. This is what is meant by the ‘communion of the saints’ (Hebrews 12:1). Here we anticipate by faith the perfect banquet prepared in heaven for all the faithful (Luke 14:15, Is 25:6).
- **The importance of regular Communion cannot be stressed strongly enough.** Clearly Jesus intended us to take Holy Communion often (1 Corinthians 11:26). John Wesley also urged Methodists to make regular use of the Sacrament, at least once a week if possible.

Questions for discussion:

Luke 22:7-23

1. From memory what comparisons can you find between the deliverance of God in the Exodus and the deliverance of God in Jesus Christ?
2. What new meaning did Jesus give to the Passover feast? (vs 17-20)
3. Can you remember a particular Holy Communion service that has meant more to you than others? What made it so special? Share with the group.
4. How ought we to prepare ourselves to take Communion? How can we get the maximum blessing from it?
5. Why is it important to take Holy Communion regularly and often?

Group activity:

Minister to close with a Holy Communion (optional)

Personal exercise:

- What are the elements and objects that are used in Holy Communion? What does each one symbolise?
- What significance does the table hold for you?

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.

Spiritual disciplines

Aim of the lesson:

- To understand the means of grace
- To be able to respond through personal reflection on how to keep one's faith alive

Introductory exercise (Facilitator):

Ask church members who have experience with various spiritual disciplines to share their story.

Assist the confirmands by explaining how a prayer journal works.

- ***Introduction:***

The Spiritual Disciplines is not an easy ask for most of today. Many spend much time on YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. So to ask them to make space in their lives for a time-out alone can be a very big challenge. Many want to stay connected with others in a manner that does not transform their lives for God. Therefore, the Confirmation Program must be so structured that all will find it meaningful to set time apart to be by themselves, to be in the mode of reflection or meditation. To others this may not be so difficult as many of them do yoga sessions, which is in particular a very much of an alone activity. At the same time the candidates may have many unanswered questions for which they seek answers from all kinds of sources. The challenge is to have them come to a point where they can be introduced to the Source of all answers about who is God the Father. It therefore requires a well thought through plan of action which involves them as part of the activities as they work towards finding God as they explore in faith and seek answers in which they can bring fulfilment, satisfaction and peace in the lives.

- ***Means of grace:***

John Wesley in his Sermon on the Means of Grace¹¹, asked the question. “Are there, under the Christian dispensation, any means ordained by God, as the usual channels of His grace?” He further states that “the whole body of Christians agreed, that Christ has ordained certain outward means for conveying His grace into the souls of men[sic]”. He further quotes Acts 2 verses 42-44¹², stating “all that believed were together, and had all things in common, they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the Apostles and in the breaking of bread and in prayers”. He then elaborates and states that by the “Means of Grace”, Wesley understands it as “outward signs, words or actions, ordained of God and appointed for this end, to be the channels whereby He might convey to men[sic], prevenient, justifying or sanctifying grace”. In other words, he defines a sacrament as “an outward sign of inward grace” and a means whereby we receive the same.

- Let us then examine the various Means of Grace:

- **Prayer** – is the communication, spoken and unspoken that takes place. Well we need to pray because we were created for friendship with God and have been reconciled to Him in Jesus Christ. We pray to Him because we trust Him and we want to do His will in everything. We further pray to him because we depend on Him and seek His guidance, strength and comfort in terms of direction, weakness and feeling down and heartbroken. It is important that we as the Youth realise that prayer is not just uttering words, but that there are various aspects of prayers we

¹¹ John Wesley's ,1944 Sermon XII, The Means of Grace pp 134 -150, In John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons, Epworth Press, London

¹² NIV Study Bible, 1995, Acts 2 v 42-44, p.1651, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, USA

should be informed about which we should try to include in our prayers. These are:

- a. *Adoration* – we Praise and Worship God for who He is
- b. *Confession* – we admit to God what we have done wrong, we admit what we are and seek forgiveness
- c. *Intercession* – we Pray to God on behalf of others
- d. *Petition* - we Pray about our own needs and concerns
- e. *Thanksgiving* –we thank him for all that He has given us, especially for our Salvation in Jesus Christ
- f. *Meditation* – we reflect quietly on the nature of God and what He has done and wait for Him to speak to us.

In your young life, you can pray a combination of these elements of prayer and you do not have to use all of them at the same time but God can lead you to know what to pray when you pray. You may find at times that you do not have the words to pray. Well Jesus taught us “The Lord’s Prayer” in Matthew 6 v 9-13¹³, which is both a prayer for us to use and a model for our own prayers. John Wesley states that all who desire the grace of God are to wait for it in the way of prayer¹⁴. He further points us to the Sermon on the Mount and says “...Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you...”¹⁵. So you can see in your young life that when you pray, it is a 2-way communication. You ask God and then you listen for His reply. A good practice is to choose everyday a time to talk with God, in other words to pray to Him. But remember you can pray anywhere, because God is Omnipresent (He is everywhere) and Omniscient (He can be reached anywhere). That is why we sing the chorus “Reach out and touch the Lord as He passes by, you will find Him not too busy to hear your hearts cry...”

- **Searching the Scriptures** – God directs us to the Scriptures so that we might believe in him¹⁶. In Acts 17 v 2 St Paul says “...That many searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so...” In other words, we can find in the Bible what Christians believe, the Bible is a self-revelation of God himself supremely in Jesus Christ, and is a means through which He still reveals himself, by the Holy Spirit¹⁷. It must be noted that all scripture is given by the inspiration of God, so consequently “...all scripture is infallibly true. And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” As recorded in 2 Timothy 3 v 16¹⁸. In our young lives the scriptures serve as a light upon our feet and provides guidance when we are overcome by the darkness of our sin. There are

¹³ NIV Study Bible, 1995, Matt 6 v 9-13, p 1447, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, USA

¹⁴ See “Means of Grace” *ibid.* p. 139

¹⁵ NIV Study Bible *ibid.* p 1448

¹⁶ See “Means of Grace” *ibid.* p. 143

¹⁷ A Catechism for the use of People called Methodists. 1952, p 26. Methodist Conference. Methodist Publishing House

¹⁸ NIV Study Bible *ibid.* p 1847.

many books that have been published but the Bible has stood the test of time. It was used by our late great grandparents, it is used by us and will one day also be used by our great grandchildren. God's Word endures forever and is eternal. If we go to the Book of John in the New Testament, we read in John Chapter 1 v 1 that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This word is the Lord Jesus Christ. So how can you pray? How can you do so? It is suggested that you choose a daily time, when there is quiet in your home, e.g. at night or early in the morning, when the others in the home are still asleep, to open your Bible and read a Scripture. Sometimes even just one verse is sufficient. You then ask God to show you how He wants you to live out that scripture during the day. He will be faithful and will guide you to know what to do through that "small still voice" inside you called the Holy Spirit.

- **Receiving the Lord Supper** – In your young life, you may ask yourself. What is the Lord's Supper?¹⁹ Why is it not called Breakfast or Lunch? In the Lord Supper Jesus Christ is present with His worshipping people and gives Himself to them as their Lord and Saviour. They receive him in faith and with thanksgiving. They give thanks with the whole Church for Christ's sacrifice of Himself once and for all on the cross. The Lord Supper recalls Christ's last Supper with the disciples. It proclaims Christ's passion, death and resurrection, unites the participants with Him so that they are a living sacrifice in Him and give them a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. In the Methodist Church we have 2 Sacraments. Now you may ask what are Sacraments? It discloses and proclaims what God has done for the world in Jesus Christ and convey its benefits to the community of believers. They are also signs of our allegiance to God. Protestant Churches of which we are one, recognize two Sacraments, that is, Baptism and The Lord's Supper²⁰.
- **Fasting** – You may have heard that Muslims, some of them may be your school friends, every year have a fast ceremony called Ramadan. They do not eat from sunrise to sunset and then eat only after the sun goes down. During this period of fasting, they do good deeds to Allah, the God they worship, by giving food to the poor and helping those who are very less fortunate and who need assistance very desperately. In the Christian Walk, we also fast. John Wesley in his 22nd Sermon²¹, refers to great Men [sic] of God who fasted, e.g. Moses and Elijah and more important, Jesus Christ also fasted, without breaks or intermissions, 40 days and 40 nights. It is also during this time that our Church refers to *Abstinence*, which can be used when we cannot fast entirely, by reason of sickness or bodily weakness. John Wesley describes the lowest form of fasting is not eating pleasant food e.g. if we go read about Daniel, who refused to eat the King's meat (Daniel 1

¹⁹ A Catechism for the use of People called Methodists.1952, p 24. Methodist Conference. Methodist Publishing House

²⁰ Ibid, p 22

²¹ John Wesley's ,1944 Sermon XXII, "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" pp 287- 304, In John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons, Epworth Press, London

v 8)²². Daniel describes that when a person is under severe emotion of the mind you care not to eat, e.g. Saul when the Philistines war against him²³. Another reason why people fast, says John Wesley is many of those who now fear God are deeply sensitive of how often they have sinned against Him, so they go into fasting. There is also the natural grounds for fasting, that is, one who is under deep affliction, overwhelmed of the sorrow of sin and a strong apprehension of the wrath of God e.g. we see this in the life of St Paul, after the Damascus experience, for 3 days did “he neither eat or drink, (Acts 9 v9)²⁴. Another reason for fasting John Wesley says, is punishing ourselves for having abused the good gifts of God, by wholly refraining from them. Further he states that fasting is also a help to prayer. He further notes that even the heathens fast e.g. in the case of Jonah in Nineveh, when Jonah declared 40 days of fasting and put on sackcloth, even here the King of Nineveh was in sackcloth and in ashes.

Finally, what is the manner in which we fast? John Wesley reminds us to keep our eyes fixed on the Lord. Let our intention be to glorify the Father. Fasting is the only way which God hath ordained wherein we wait for His unmerited mercy. Further he says we must proportion our fast to our strength and when we fast pour out our hearts before the Lord God in penitence and in prayer.

- **Conferencing (Communion and Fellowship)** –The Methodist Church is a Connexional Church, that is, we have one Centre. It is not a Federal Church where Synods can do as they wish but instead we receive the direction from the Presiding Bishop Malinga e.g. with the current Covid 19 pandemic, the Methodist people await the direction from the Presiding Bishop instead of each Society deciding when it wants to open the Churches for services. In so doing we have one structure called Conference which meets annually with elected representatives from the 15 Synods, as to the direction of the Church as we go forward. This Conference represents the Connexion which demographically consist of 6 countries, namely, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland. The annual Conference decides on the way forward and what we do as Church and gives direction to the people called Methodist. Further, the Conference, led by the current Presiding Bishop Rev Malinga, is informed by the Connexional Executive decisions, e.g. on Stationing, which is where ministers are to be stationed, and which consists of Bishops and Lay Leaders each representing a Synod. It further includes other Church officials, e.g. the Treasurer, the Mission Director, the Ecumenical Director and the Youth Director. So this Means of Grace assists the Church to receive direction from the Conference which provide guidance, takes decisions on behalf of the people called Methodist and once taken

²² NIV Study Bible, 1995, Daniel 1 v 8, p. 1291, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, USA

²³ NIV Study Bible, 1995, 1 Samuel 28 v 15-20, p. 412-413, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, USA

²⁴ NIV Study Bible, 1995, Act s 9 v 9, p 412-413, p. 1663, , Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, USA

these decisions are then relayed via Bishops to Synods, Circuits and to Societies for the local Ministers to implement.

- **Conclusion:**

It can be seen from the discussion above that the Means of Grace is not a means to an end but that it has several components which needs to be exercised as daily spiritual disciplines in our lives irrespective of the age group we fall into. It is always advisable as a youth to start at this age to implement the Means of Grace so that as you mature in your faith in God these spiritual disciplines become part of your lifestyle.

Questions for reflection:

Allow for an open time of Q&A and/or prepared questions to facilitate the journey in spiritual disciplines

Practical application:

1. Prayer – when and where will a pray every day...
2. Scripture – when, where and how and how often will I ready scripture...
3. Fasting – how am I able to fast, why do I want to fast, how will I fast...
4. Sacraments – how often will I receive the sacrament of Holy Communion...
5. Community – how will stay faithful in living and serving in community...

Personal notes: (Facilitator) Explain and encourage the importance of journaling and give guidance on how to practice reflection.