



Early Edition

January, 2026

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[Growing In Interdependence](#)

by Rev. James Parks,

Upper Midwest Conference Superintendent

As I reflect on this past year, I realize much of it was shaped by a long and unexpected health journey. In January of 2025, I went to the doctor because of a loss of strength and mobility in my right (dominant) shoulder. What began as a diagnosis of a torn labrum eventually led to the realization that I needed a total shoulder replacement. Three months later, I was back in surgery, followed by months of physical therapy to regain strength and movement in my new shoulder.

Throughout much of the year, I had to do something I am not accustomed to doing—I had to ask for help. For nearly two months I couldn't drive. For eight months I couldn't reach above my head. Many ordinary, everyday activities required assistance. I still remember one Sunday morning when I had to ask a student to tie my shoe before worship so I wouldn't trip as I preached.

For someone who has taken pride in being independent and in helping others, this season was a lesson in humility. Perhaps that was one of the lessons God was teaching me: we are not meant to do everything on our own. We need one another.

Scripture reminds us of this truth: "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). The body of Christ is not built on independence, but on interdependence.

As I think about our Upper Midwest Conference, I find myself asking a similar question: how interdependent are we? Are we simply a collection of independent churches doing our own thing, or are we learning to lean on one another, to learn from one another, and to be blessed by the variety of gifts and graces present among us? It takes humility to ask another church for help. It also takes humility to notice when another church is in need. And it takes wisdom to offer support in ways that truly serve, rather than in ways that merely reflect our own assumptions.

As we enter a new year, I want to name this as a year of interdependence. May it be a year in which we support one another more intentionally. May partnerships be formed for mission and ministry. And may we reach higher together than we ever could alone, guided by the Holy Spirit who binds us together in unity.

In December, I finally returned to the basketball court—my original goal when this journey began. It was a long road, made possible only through the support of many others, and it was well worth it. Building the kingdom of God together is also a long journey, but it is one the Spirit will faithfully guide us through.



Our Prayer Ends With Our Obedience!!!

by Rev. Dr. Christina Sung Conference Prayer Team Leader

The Conference Prayer team asks you and the church to make **PRAYER** your New Year's Resolution 2026. Hence, we offer some prayer points so we can pray together in one heart, mind, and spirit.

1. **Pray for our nation as America celebrates its 250th anniversary;** thank God for all the blessings we have received and ask for God's guidance, wisdom, mercy, unity, and restoration. Pray for the leaders of the country, teachers, law enforcement, the National Guard, military personnel, and their families. America and its churches may rededicate themselves to the Almighty and be the light of the world for Jesus. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord (Ps 33:12).
2. **Pray that prayer will be the essential ministry of all our churches.** The vitality of the church depends on united, continual prayerfulness. Ask God to cause all our churches to pray and join His mission for His glory. Paul wrote to the Romans, "Day and night I bring your needs in prayer to God. (Rom 1:9)

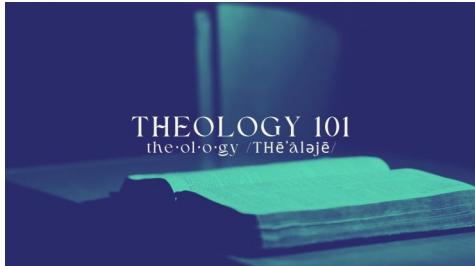
3. Pray for the workers for the harvest locally and globally. We need more workers than ever. "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send out more workers for His fields." (Mt 9:37-38) We often complain about the lack of workers and of funds to meet the needs of reaching out to the community. We don't have it because we don't pray. When the China Inland Mission had 200 missionaries, they felt the urgent need for 100 more workers for unreached districts. They prayed fervently throughout the year. At the end of the year, God sent not only 100 missionaries but also the funds they needed. Praise the Lord!

4. Pray for the GMC and the upcoming General Conference in South Africa, and for an election for the Bishops. God's protection and blessings over the Conference and the delegates, and all who attend. And may God's chosen servants be elected as our bishops.

5. Pray for yourself and your family for God's provision, good health, protection, forgiveness, healing, salvation, and an intimate relationship with God.

6. Pray for the peace of Christ where there is conflict: for ourselves and our home, church, workplace, and community; for our nation, Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Europe throughout the world, where there is conflict, hatred, and division.

I pray that we all intentionally make prayer our priority in our personal and church lives so that we may experience God's amazing grace and blessing in our homes, churches, and our nation throughout 2026, and we may live the life that is worthy of His calling. Please remember prayer ends with obedience. Blessed Awesome New Year, Upper Midwest Conference!



The Wesleyan Understanding of Salvation

Part 1: Preventive/Preventing Grace

by Rev. Dr. Travis Stevick

Pastor, Grace Methodist Church, Marcus, IA

youtube.com/tstevick1 • traviststevick.substack.com

I would like to take several of these articles to unpack the Wesleyan understanding of salvation. I am hardly the first person to do this, so this may sound somewhat familiar. I am hoping to put the most important issues right up front and then spend a bit of time highlighting implications that don't always get raised for those who want to go just a bit deeper.

The first stage on the way to salvation from a Wesleyan perspective is Preventive or Preventing grace. I am including both of those terms because, while you are much more likely to hear the term "preventive grace," Wesley just as often, or even more often, talked about "preventing grace." At their core, they are both saying the same thing: this is the grace that God gives to us before we even give a thought to him.

From Wesley's perspective, there was not a single person in the world who has not received some measure of this preventient grace. This is what he writes in one place. "No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called *natural conscience*. But it is not natural: It is more properly termed *preventing grace*. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waits not for the call of man" (Sermon 85, "On Working Out Our Own Salvation, III.4). That is to say, when we talk about people having a conscience or knowing good from evil, Wesley taught that this is not a sign of what it means to be human, but what it means to be someone already embraced by the grace of God.

To be clear, there is a *huge* difference between someone being "embraced by the grace of God," and being "saved." Just because God has reached out to everyone doesn't mean that everyone responds to that call. This is no form of universalism. What it *is*, is a powerful theological basis for why we always reach out to those who have not yet given their lives to Christ. We are *never* making the first move. We proclaim the Good News of Jesus because we believe two things: first, that God genuinely wants all people to be saved and so we need to direct the call to all people. Second, that God has already been working in the hearts and lives of everyone we meet. When we talk about people being able to choose or reject God, it is not because we believe that we can do that by nature, but because God has given us that power through grace, through Christ, and by the Holy Spirit.

Probably every person who has become a Christian can bear witness to the work of preventing or preventient grace in their lives. They can look back to their life before they ever sought God, or even when they were actively running away from him, and see God at work. By the way, this is the kind of thing that Wesley meant about taking "experience" seriously in our theological work. It isn't that our experience can tell us what is theologically true, but that if Scripture teaches something to be true, we should expect to experience it in our lives. Wesley taught about this kind of grace not just because he was convinced that it was a Biblical doctrine, but because he saw it confirmed over and over again in people's lives.

When people talk about reclaiming a distinctively Wesleyan witness, part of what we mean is to reclaim this doctrine of preventient grace. Wesley did not invent the doctrine (the term shows up at least in Augustine in the fourth century). However, it has been denied, usually quietly, by groups of Christians over the centuries. There are some who have interpreted the Bible as teaching that God does not, in fact, want all people to be saved and so only died for some, only calls some, and only saves some. Those traditions will still have some way of saying that God blesses even those who are not chosen, usually using a term like God giving "common grace" to them.

Sometimes you may even hear that "common grace" is the same thing as "preventient grace." Some people might interpret them the same way, but the doctrine of "common grace" is at home and has its origin in a tradition that considers it completely apart from "saving grace."

That is to say, "common grace" has historically been understood as "the grace God gives to people he is not going to save." In the Wesleyan tradition, preventer or preventing grace is understood as the first step on the journey toward salvation and always has salvation as its goal, even if specific people resist it.

The other major way that the Wesleyan understanding of preventer grace is quietly denied is when people argue that "free will" is something that we have just because we are human. The argument is usually that God just had to give us free will because it just wouldn't be fair if he didn't. If there had never been a Fall, maybe we could come to that conclusion. The problem is that the Fall broke our ability to choose God on our own strength. If God didn't act to restore our ability to choose by grace, not one of us could be saved. The fact that we have a choice in the first place is because God has shown grace and mercy to us before we were even capable of choosing him.

A Wesleyan understanding of this first step toward salvation can be summarized this way: God wants all people to be saved, so God restores our ability to choose him by grace and through the Holy Spirit. Because of that, we are empowered to respond by faith and we share the Good News with the whole world because we know that every person we meet has also received the grace of God, even if they don't know it yet.

It is no coincidence that the Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century led to the first massive modern movement of international missionary activity. We must reclaim and emphasize this crucial part of our heritage as we live into God's call for our lives in faithfulness!

[Will YOUR Church](#)
[Join the Conference Mission Challenge?](#)
by Norma Morrison

The Upper Midwest Missions Team is excited to announce that we have approved Blessman International (www.blessmaninternational.org) as a Conference endorsed mission! (It is also endorsed by the Global Methodist Church.) It's a perfect match as South Africa is our partner Conference!

Their ministries are located in South Africa where they provide food for over 55,000 children each week. There are regular outreaches supplying shoes and socks, eyeglasses, and hygiene kits to students at different schools and so much more.

One of the most exciting projects are the wells they drill, which in addition to clean water allow for drip irrigation in a center's garden, and even building Envira-loo toilets. Can you imagine running a Day Care Center or Creche (preschool) for up to 100 children with no water?! Water is life... and also safety.

This is where your church comes in. The cost of one well is \$12,500 and we are challenging all churches in our Conference to raise funds to purchase 3 wells (at least!) to celebrate our upcoming 3rd anniversary as the Upper Midwest Conference. Perhaps you will make the Blessman Well Project one of your Lenten offerings... or have a weekly or monthly "noisy offering" (Kids love collecting this money in metal buckets!)... or have a fundraising dinner or soup supper or potato bar after a worship service or that you share with your community... or... or... ??? The opportunities are endless!

The foundation scripture for the Conference Missions Team is Acts 1:8. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." We want every church to grow in their missions so there will be some kind of support locally (in Jerusalem), regionally including in the Upper Midwest Conference (in Judea), cross-culturally (in Samaria), and in the most un-reached people groups in the 10/40 Window (to the ends of the earth). This Blessman Well Project in South Africa is the perfect mission for your "Samaria" outreach!

If you have questions or ideas email missions@uppermidwestgmc.org. We'd love to share your pictures and ideas in future newsletters!

Will your church join the challenge?

UPPER MIDWEST ANNOUNCEMENTS

Missional Giving Opportunities for 2026

If your Church is looking for missional giving opportunities for 2026 please consider supporting the Upper Midwest Conference in one or more of these areas: **South Africa, Ethnic Ministry, Seminary Scholarships, Church Plants** You can give online on the [Upper Midwest Conference Website](#)

Or if you prefer mailing please note our new giving address below and be sure to note your check in the memo section with your chosen ministry.



Please make sure the Treasurer of your Church has this important information.

We Have A New Mailing Address!

Our new mailing address for the Upper Midwest Conference including **Connectional Funding payments** is:
Upper Midwest Conference
PO Box 113
Enon, OH 45323

Please begin using this address effective immediately and bear with us as payments sent recently to the old address may be delayed in processing and clearing your bank due to mail forwarding.



2026 Summer Camp Opportunities

Iowa

Camp Bear Creek in Wyoming, Iowa

<https://bearcreek.camp/>

Grades 1 – 12

Summer Games University, Grinnell, Iowa
<https://sgu.camp/> June 29 – July 3, 2026
Students who have finished 6th through
12th grades.

Minnesota

Red Rock Camp, Painesville, Minnesota
<https://Redrockcamp.org>

Nebraska

Comeca Camp & Retreat Center
Cozad, Nebraska <https://comeca.camp/>

The Crossing Retreat Center,
Lexington, Nebraska
<https://www.crossingretreat.org/>

Nebraska, cont.

Covenant Cedars Bible Camp,
Hordville, Nebraska <https://www.cedars.org/>

Bethel Bible Camp, Wellfleet, Nebraska
<https://www.bethelbiblecamp.org/>

North Dakota

Prairie Bible Camp, Lehr, North Dakota
<https://prairiebiblecamp.wixsite.com/pbc4him>, <https://www.facebook.com/prairiebible.camp>

Contact Kara Scherbenske:
karascherbenske@gmail.com

South Dakota

Cedar Canyon Youth Camp,
Rapid City, South Dakota
<https://www.northwestdistrict.org/event-details/cedar-canyon-youth-camp>

7-12th grade students

Byron Bible Camp, Huron, South Dakota
<https://byronbiblecamp.com/>





Congratulations!

NEW APPOINTMENT

Bruce Brossman

Central Church in Milbank, SD

MOVING TO SENIOR STATUS

Rick Baarda

January 1, 2026

GLOBAL METHODIST ANNOUNCEMENTS

General Conference 2026



As we look ahead to the 2026 Global Methodist Church General Conference, you won't want to miss the latest updates and resources being shared!

The **Beauty of Holiness 2026** website is your go-to destination for news, event details, registration information, and insights to help you prepare for this historic gathering of Methodists from around the world.

Visit www.beautyofholiness2026.org to stay informed, get inspired, and join the movement of spreading scriptural holiness across the globe.

"This is a significant moment in the life of our church. Hosting the conference in South Africa offers us an opportunity to celebrate the rich diversity and growing witness of the Global Methodist Church across the world. It's not just a conference location—it's a visible expression of who we are becoming."

• Rev. Mike Grant, Chair of the Commission

Prayer for General Conference 2026

Please pray the following prayer points for the 2026 General Conference gathering of the Global Methodist Church:

EVERY MEETING conversation, decision, and thought of the current commissions will be led by the Holy Spirit, as they prepare diligently and faithfully for the upcoming General Conference.

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears. He will also declare to you what is to come." –John 16:13

GOD WOULD LEAD equip, and empower those He is calling to volunteer in various areas during the General Conference. He would also provide the necessary resources and provision for them to travel to Johannesburg and faithfully answer His call.

"Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever." –Hebrews 13:20–21

Please go to the following site for the prayer guide for General Conference:

<https://irp.cdn-website.com/4829cd2f/files/uploaded/January-February+prayer+guides++Flyer.pdf>

MORE INFORMATION

Be the First to Know!



Sign up for our Upper Midwest Newsletter

[Newsletter | UpperMidWestGMC](#)

****Note:** The Deadline for Newsletter Articles/Info
is the 20th of the Month.

Global Methodist Church Across the Globe Newsletter

<https://www.globalmethodist.org/connect>

Don't miss out on the latest updates, inspiration, and more—
delivered straight to your inbox. Sign up now!



June 19–21, 2026
Upper Midwest Annual Conference

August 30–September 5, 2026
General Conference in Johannesburg, South Africa

View the full Upper Midwest Conference Calendar.

[Calendar - Upper Midwest Conference of the Global Methodist Church](#)

Upper Midwest Prayer Opportunities



The Upper Midwest Conference Daily Noon Prayer

Can you imagine what would happen in the spiritual realm if we prayed the same prayer together at noon daily?

Join Us and Let's Find Out!

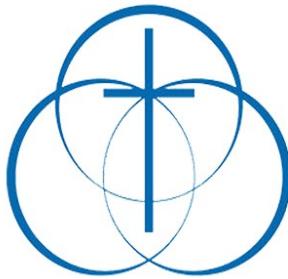
<https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/prayer>

Scheduled Zoom Prayer Meetings

Please click the button below and let us know that you would like to join and we will send you the link.

**Monthly on the 3rd Tuesday
at 7:00 PM (CST)**

prayer@uppermidwestgmc.org



GLOBAL METHODIST CHURCH UPPER MIDWEST CONFERENCE

Lovingly walk alongside laity and clergy as they make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly and witness boldly.

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