

Our hope is that Annual Conference will be more than a meeting. We envision it as a time of retreat where we—both as individuals and as a conference—can realign our lives and ministries with the Holy Spirit.

When I think about “keeping in step,” I picture different running partners I have had over the years. In my first appointment, I had a workout partner who was 6'3" with long legs. When we ran together, it felt like I took two steps for every one of his long strides. Years later I ran with my son when he was in junior high cross country. I assumed his younger legs would outpace me—but instead I found myself slowing down to match his rhythm.

Running together requires paying attention to someone else’s stride.

The same is true for our life with the Spirit. We must learn to pay attention to the Spirit’s pace and movement.

Annual Conference can sometimes feel like a sprint—we only have a few days to worship, pray, learn, and connect together. Yet seasons like Lent invite us into a different rhythm. During these forty days I am trying to slow down: letting go of distractions, creating quiet space in my schedule, and listening more carefully for the Spirit’s leading.

My prayer is that we will all learn to move in step with the Spirit.

I invite you to join us for a blessed, Spirit-filled time at Annual Conference. Registration is now open, and I encourage you to begin making plans to attend.

I also ask you to join in prayer as we prepare. Please pray for our global denomination as we move toward General Conference this fall in Johannesburg, South Africa. The Spirit will be doing important work there as our Global Methodist Church connection continues to grow, now with more than 7,000 churches around the world.

And please pray for our shared ministry here in the Upper Midwest Conference. God is calling us forward together.

May we learn to keep in step with the Spirit as we walk the path before us.

To register, go to: <https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3465716>



Mission Challenge Resource... Mission Trip Opportunity... and more!

Our first church has reported in for the Conference Blessman Wells Project. They set a goal of \$3000 and raised it through special offerings in just 2 weeks! Thank you for starting us off so well!

Is your church looking for a fun idea to raise money for our Blessman Wells Project? Remember EVERY church is invited to make lives better by drilling 3 wells at 3 day-care centers in South Africa. Our goal is \$37,500 by Annual Conference! Feel free to adapt the following.

Water from the Upper Midwest to South Africa with LOVE

Here's a fun way for your Sunday School, Youth Group, or entire congregation to participate in the Conference-Wide Mission Challenge to raise money during Lent 2026 to dig 3 wells in South Africa in partnership with Blessman International. By providing access to safe water, we'll change lives for children, families, and whole communities.

HOW MANY WATER SOURCES DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR HOME?

Take inventory of all the sources of fresh water you have access to, both inside and outside of your home. Decide how much to "assess" for each source (5 cents each, \$1 each -- you decide!) Find a special way to collect your assessments: large jug similar to what African women carry water in, wading pool, etc. Be creative!

INDOOR WATER SOURCES

- Bathroom and Kitchen: faucets, showerheads, toilets, dishwasher, icemaker/water dispenser in fridge
- Laundry Room: washing machine, sink faucet

OUTDOOR SOURCES

- Exterior faucets, automatic sprinkler systems, swimming pools, hot tubs, decorative fountains

As you can see, we in the Upper Midwest Global Methodist Church have many ways to access clean water. In South Africa, the wells we help purchase and install could replace women walking long distances to rivers where the water isn't clean or fresh. We can make a real difference. How will you help?

Mission Trip Opportunity

Blessman International is offering a mission trip experience for the Upper Midwest Conference to serve in their ministries in Limpopo Province in South Africa! We will stay in a safe, beautiful facility on their campus at the Lodge of Dreams and participate in ministries like an optical outreach, shoe and hygiene kit distributions, and feeding programs with the children. This trip is especially good as a first international mission trip.

Who: People from the Upper Midwest Conference

When: November 12-24, 2026

Cost: \$2550 plus airfare and optional excursions

More details next month or go to www.blessmaninternational.org for more information.

Missions Resources

- Link for a short video about the need for wells to share with your congregation or groups: <https://youtu.be/EgeEq8C-5b0>
- Link for online giving for the Blessman Wells Project. Designate it for the South Africa Partnership Fund and add memo that says "Well": <https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/give>
- For mailed donations note "South Africa Partnership Fund - Well" on your giving form or check. Checks can be mailed to Upper Midwest Conference, PO Box 113, Enon, OH 45323.
- Contact us at missions@uppermidwestgmc.org for questions.



Trust and Obey and ... Count Your Blessings!

Rev. Sandra Marquardt, Upper Midwest GMC Prayer Team

*Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day.
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.
[1 Chron. 16:23-24]*

Many of you will recognize the title of this article. Along with being great admonishments and reminders of how to live as followers of Jesus Christ, they are the titles of trusted, old, familiar hymns. They may be “old,” but they remain very relevant. Throughout this Lenten Season (and any time of the year), we can glean much wisdom, comfort, encouragement, and motivation (!) from singing traditional hymns as well as contemporary Christian music.

“Trust and Obey” was written by John H. Sammis and set to music by Daniel B. Towner, both in 1887. Ten years later, in 1897, “Count Your Blessings” was written by Johnson Oatman Jr., and set to music by Edwin O. Excell. [Both hymns in the Public Domain]

Even though these two hymns have been around for over 120 years, I remain grateful to the composers for the words and music, which not only remind me of childhood Sunday morning hymn singing but also, more presently, speak to me of God’s comfort, His trustworthiness, and His blessings. Music and lyrics can speak to you - as you journey through the Lenten season.

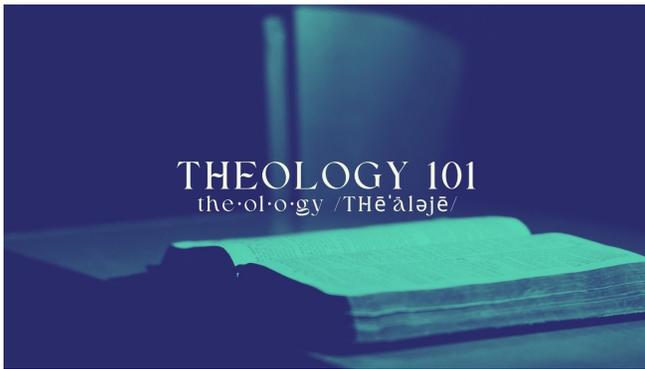
The message is still strong and clear – *Trust and Obey*: “Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet, or we’ll walk by His side in the way; what He says we will do, where He sends we will go; never fear, only trust and obey.” (v. 4)

And *Count Your Blessings*: “Are you ever burdened with a load of care? Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear? Count your many blessings; ev’ry doubt will fly, and you will be singing as the days go by.” (v. 2) “Count your many blessings; see what God hath done.”

This Lenten Season, may you prayerfully and boldly sing out the words and music so graciously shared with us by talented musicians who are gifted and inspired by God. Traditional and contemporary music can enhance both personal and corporate worship as we journey to the cross with Christ.

And now let us pray ... *O God, as we pick up our cross to follow Christ, may we be strengthened by your Holy Spirit, encouraged and inspired by your Word as we learn to trust and obey. May we be bold in singing our praise and thanksgiving to you, O Lord, as we count [our] many blessings. Amen.*

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. [Psalm 19:14]



The Wesleyan Understanding of Salvation Part 3: Justifying Grace

By Rev. Dr. Travis Stevick, Grace Methodist Church, Marcus, IA
[YouTube.com/tstevick1](https://www.youtube.com/tstevick1) | travisstevick.substack.com

So far, in this series, we have looked at a Wesleyan understanding of both Prevenient Grace and Convicting Grace. This brings us to the aspect of Wesley's perspective that has the most overlap with other Protestant Traditions: Justifying Grace.

In most traditions, talking about someone being “justified” is one and the same with someone “getting saved.” Justification is the word that often gets used to translate the idea in the New Testament that we are “made right” with God. It is the crucial word in passages like Romans 3:23-24 when Paul writes “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” There are several overlapping ways in which this word gets applied, but it is clear that it is referring to the way in which, because of what Jesus has done, we are made right with God by grace and through faith.

On this topic, the Wesleyan tradition is in lock-step with other Protestants who emphasize that we are not brought into a right relationship with God because of anything that we have done, but only because we have faith in Jesus. This is not merely a thing that happens in our minds, it happens when we put our *trust* in who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. On that basis, we are accepted by God and have our sins forgiven.

It is important to make sure we are clear that this is different than what happens during convicting grace. A person under convicting grace may *feel* sorrow for their sins, they may be earnestly repenting as well as they can, but that is not the same thing as putting their trust in Jesus. This is because the *point* of the good news of Jesus Christ is not that we all feel bad for our sins, but that we be freed from our sins and find our new life in Christ.

This is how Wesley puts it:

And yet I allow you this, that although both repentance and the fruits thereof are in some sense necessary before justification, yet neither the one nor the other is necessary in the same sense, or in the same degree, with faith. Not in the same degree; for in whatever moment a man believes (in the Christian sense of the word) he is justified, his sins are blotted out, ‘his faith is counted to him for righteousness.’ But it is not so at whatever moment he repents, or brings forth any or all the fruits of repentance. Faith alone, therefore, justifies; which repentance alone does not, much less any outward work. And, consequently, none of these are necessary to justification, in the same degree with faith.” (A Farther Appeal To Men of Reason and Religion, Part 1, II.11)

This much is all fairly typical for Protestants. There is, however, a nuance in the Wesleyan perspective that becomes clearer if we understand some of Wesley's early theological struggles. In his young adulthood, Wesley was shaped by what is called the “holy living tradition.” Under the influence of this tradition, Wesley operated as if justification was something that came at the *end* of a long journey of growing in holiness. It was only *after* his famous encounters with Moravian Lutherans that he became convinced by scripture, by the doctrines of the Church of England, and by personal testimony, that people were saved by grace through faith *before* they grew in genuine holiness.

This is where the Wesleyan understanding of justification is sometimes a *little* different than other forms of evangelical faith. Sometimes, the way people talk about being justified, or “getting saved,” gives the impression that it is something that happened in the past and is over and done with. When some people talk about getting saved at the time they came to faith, it almost sends the message that, since they are saved by grace through faith and not by works, there is no place for *doing* anything.

Not for Wesley. He was so captivated by the good news that justification comes at the beginning of our life of faith that he never forgot that it was the *beginning* of our faith, and never its *end*. That is to say, coming to be justified by faith is not the last thing that happens in our relationship with God and it is not the *goal* of that relationship. It is what makes all growth in our faith possible, but the point of having faith is not just to have faith, but to let that faith and trust grow to the point where we live our lives completely devoted to Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. That will be the topic of the remaining articles in this series.

The practical application, from the Wesleyan perspective of Justifying Grace is that, if we have been justified by grace and through faith, we are in a state of salvation, of being accepted by God *right now*. Because of that, we can describe ourselves as “saved” in the present tense. It is not just that we *will be* saved, but that we *are* saved.

This is crucially important for the Christian trying to comprehend where they stand with God. They do not need to imagine that they have to get to a certain level of holiness before God will accept them, because God accepts them without any works at all. We are not treading water in this life, trying to keep ourselves afloat. We don’t have to be sanctified before God saves us. In fact, we *can’t* be sanctified before justification because genuine sanctification only happens *after* God accepts us. We have been made right with God, not because *we* have done anything, but because of what *God* has done for us.

This also means that we are not left to our own devices, and with nothing but our own strength in our growing in grace. Wesley distinguished between “justification” and “the new birth,” but he saw them as happening at the same time. Because of that, we will unpack more of what it means to be born again in the next article, but justifying grace is the line between being an enemy of God and being God’s friend, the line between being a sinner facing destruction and being a sinner saved and set on a new foundation. Though both preventive and convicting grace are important in this process, it is at justification when a person is properly said to “be saved” or “become a Christian.”

If you have been laboring under convicting grace, feeling the burden of your sin but not yet experiencing the relief of that burden through the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, do not stop seeking it in prayer. If your soul is stirred with longing to experience the freedom of Christ, never rest until God gives it. We cannot force God’s hand, but God longs for us to be made new!



UPPER MIDWEST ANNOUNCEMENTS

2026 Upper Midwest Annual Conference



Friday-Sunday, June 19-21, 2025

at the Convention Center in Sioux City, IA

Registration - NOW OPEN

Registration is now open for the 2026 Annual Conference in Sioux City! The \$120 conference fee includes Saturday lunch and light snacks.

Young Adult/Youth Discount

For this year's conference, a \$60 discount code is available for young adult and youth participants. If you are 40 years old or younger, apply the code YA40 before completing your registration to receive the \$60 discount.

Register here: <https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/3465716>

Tentative Conference Schedule

Friday, June 19

12:30 PM – Check-In Opens
1:30 PM – Early Bird Breakouts
3:00 PM – Clergy/Laity Sessions
4:30 PM – Supper Break
6:30 PM – Opening Worship
8:00 PM – Closing Prayer

Saturday, June 20

7:30 AM – Morning Gatherings
8:30 AM – Check-In Opens
9:00 AM – Morning Worship
10:20 AM – Conference Business
12:30 PM – Lunch Provided
1:30 PM – Breakouts
3:00 PM – Conference Business
4:30 PM – Supper Break
6:30 PM – Evening Worship
8:00 PM – Closing Prayer

Sunday, June 21

9:00 AM – Ordination Worship

*This is a tentative schedule and is subject to change. You can find updates in each newsletter and on our Annual Conference website pages here: <https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/annual-conference-home>

Leadership Encounter

More details coming soon about a new FREE pre-conference event, Leadership Encounter, designed for anyone who is leading a church. This event will be hosted at Wesley GMC (3700 Indian Hills Drive, Sioux City).

Leadership Encounter begins with Evening Worship on June 17, followed by a Day of Connection and Development on June 18, which includes lunch.

Annual Conference Hospitality Volunteer

Help welcome and support attendees at Annual Conference by greeting guests, offering directions, and assisting as needed. A friendly presence and willing heart make all the difference—no experience required.

Hotel Accommodations

A limited number of rooms are available at select local hotels with exclusive discounted rates for June.

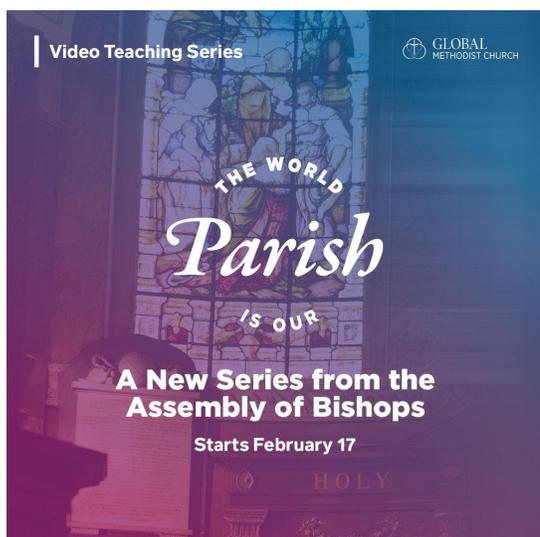
Courtyard by Marriott: 1-712-292-6893 Ask for Upper Midwest Attendees GMC Rate

Hilton Garden Inn Riverfront: 1-712-261-6878 Ask for Upper Midwest Global Methodist Rate

DoubleTree by Hilton: 1-877-402-1980 Ask for Global Methodist Church Rate

Marriott Riverfront: 1-402-284-4476 Ask for Upper Midwest Global Methodist Room Block Rate

GLOBAL METHODIST ANNOUNCEMENTS



The World Is Our Parish

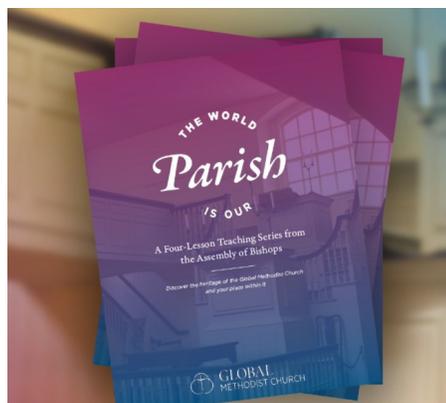
John Wesley famously declared, “**the world is my parish.**” What began as a conviction about preaching became a movement shaped by mission, connection, and love for the whole Church of Jesus Christ.

We invite you to join us for *The World Is Our Parish*, a four-lesson video series from the Global Methodist Church and the Assembly of Bishops that explores how Methodism became a global movement and what that legacy means for us today.

Filmed at historic Wesleyan sites in the United Kingdom, each lesson connects our shared history to our present calling as Spirit-filled, globally-minded disciples.

Check out the first two videos on the Global Methodist Church YouTube page.

<https://www.youtube.com/globalmethodistchurch/videos>



The World Is Our Parish Study Guide:

Download the free study guide that accompanies this video series, making it easy to follow along with your church, small group, Sunday school class or in your personal devotional time. Each week includes Scripture, reflection questions, and prayer to help you engage deeply with the theme.

https://irp.cdn-website.com/1876eae9/files/uploaded/2026-01-20_TheWorldisOurParish_StudyGuide_v2.pdf

General Conference 2026

General Conference Website

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.

Prayer for General Conference

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

PETITIONS that are brought forth will reflect the movement of the Holy Spirit and help shape the Global Methodist Church into the Church God is calling us to become. Pray for the committee that will oversee all petitions.

*“For we are God’s handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus to do good works,
which God prepared in advance for us to do.” - Ephesians 2:10*

CLERGY AND LAY DELEGATES who will be nominated for various committees and commissions.

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways, acknowledge Him,
and He will make straight your paths.” - Proverbs 3:5-6*



MORE INFORMATION

Be The First To Know!



Sign up for our Upper Midwest Newsletter
<https://www.uppermidwestgmc.org/newsletter>

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



Global Methodist Church Across the Globe News-
letter: <https://www.globalmethodist.org/connect>

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

Important Dates



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

<https://uppermidwestgmc.churchcenter.com/calendar?view=list>

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>

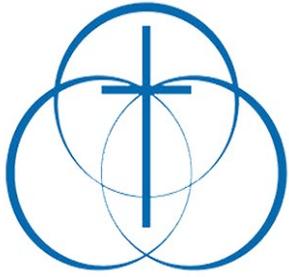


Scheduled Zoom Prayer Meetings

Email us and let us know that you would like
to join and we will send you the link:

prayer@uppermidwestgmc.org

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



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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YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/@UpperMidwestConferenceMedia>