



The Methodist Church

a short history

The Methodist Church is known as non-conformist because it does not conform to the rules and authority of the Church of England. Its founder was a Church of England minister, John Wesley (1703-1791), who challenged the religious assumptions of the day. He and others met regularly for Bible study and prayer and became known as 'The Methodists' because of the methodical way in which they practised their Christian faith. In 1739 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 him preach.

The Methodist Church is the fourth largest Christian Church in Britain, after the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches and the Church of Scotland.. There are Methodist Churches in nearly every country in the world and global membership numbers some 70 million people.

Preaching radical ideas took great courage in those days. Wesley and his followers were denounced in print and from pulpits, his meetings were disrupted and he was even physically attacked. John Wesley always declared that his movement should remain within the Anglican Church, but the Church of England was keen to distance itself from him and his followers. In the end, the strength and impact of Methodism made a separate Methodist Church inevitable. In 1795, four years after Wesley's death, Methodists in Britain became legally able to conduct marriages and perform the sacraments.

In 1808 the Methodist lay-preacher, Hugh Bourne, was expelled from the movement. He and his 200 followers became known as Primitive Methodists. They differed from Wesleyan Methodists in several regards, including the encouragement of woman evangelists. Both Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist communities grew rapidly during the 19th century. It was from among the Primitives that many Trade Union leaders emerged towards the end of the century.

The United Methodist Church, which was formed from earlier mergers of smaller Methodist groupings joined with the Primitive and Wesleyan Methodists in 1932 to form the present Methodist Church in Britain.

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