

## **The Methodist Church**

The Methodist Church is the fourth largest Christian Church in Britain, after the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches and the Church of Scotland. It has more than six thousand churches and a total membership of approximately 330,000 people. There are Methodist Churches in nearly every country in the world and global membership numbers some 70 million people.

The Methodist Church is traditionally known as non-conformist because it does not conform to (or follow) the rules and authority of the established Church of England.

## **History**

Methodism has its roots in eighteenth century Anglicanism. Its founder was a Church of England minister, John Wesley (1703-1791). During a period of time in 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 in which they carried out their Christian faith. John Wesley later used the term Methodist himself to mean the methodical pursuit of biblical holiness.

In 1738 John Wesley had a profound spiritual experience. "I felt," he wrote, "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." The experience transformed Wesley, and inspired him to become one of the greatest preachers of all time.

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 and threatened with death.

John Wesley always wanted his movement to stay remain within the Anglican Church but the Church of England did not want to be associated with him and his followers. In 1784 he set up the Yearly Conference of the People called Methodists, to ensure that the Methodist movement continued after his death.

## **Beliefs and worship**

Methodists stand within the Protestant tradition of the worldwide Christian Church. Methodist teaching is sometimes summed up in four particular ideas known as the four alls.

1. All need to be saved - the doctrine of original sin
2. All can be saved - Universal Salvation
3. All can know they are saved - Assurance
4. All can be saved completely - Christian perfection

Methodist churches vary in their style of worship during services. The emphasis is often on Bible reading and preaching, although the sacraments are an important feature, especially the Eucharist Baptism.

Hymn singing is a lively feature of Methodist services. The founder's brother, Charles Wesley, wrote many hymns and many of them are still sung today both in Methodist and

other churches.

### **Distinguishing features**

For the Wesleys, works as well as faith were important in Christian life. In the early days Methodists were involved in welfare projects such as caring for the poor and prisoners. This emphasis is still apparent today.

### **Summary**

#### **The Church's purpose ('Our Calling')**

The Church exists to:

1. Increase awareness of God's presence and celebrate God's love - Worship
2. Help people to learn and grow as Christians, through mutual support and care - Learning and Caring
3. Be a good neighbour to people in need and to challenge injustice - Service
4. Make more followers of Jesus Christ - Evangelism