

CLEMSON WESLEY FOUNDATION

What does it mean to say, “I’m United Methodist”? As a Campus Minister nearing the end of my seventh year in Clemson, I find myself having to answer this question more and more. Sometimes the question comes from a student, sometimes it comes from within. To serve in a place like Clemson is to meet UM students who would answer this question in many different ways, usually depending on their ethnicity or geographic origin. When this diversity of perspective is combined with the vast array of other traditions and theologies present on any college campus today, many students find themselves struggling with a spiritual identity crisis. If I say that I am Methodist, Baptist, Catholic, Reformed or even a participant in a house church, what does that mean exactly and how might such a label infringe upon my calling “simply” to be a disciple of Jesus? These are common concerns on college campuses today, with many churches choosing to drop any hint of their theological roots from their official name.

While I cannot speak for other traditions (as much as I might treasure the special place that they hold in the history and ongoing life of the universal Church), it is incumbent upon me as an ordained elder in the UMC to articulate an answer to what it means to say “I’m United Methodist.” I thought that you, members of the Annual Conference and therefore supporters of our ministry, deserved to know more about the approach that we take here in our ministry with and to students in the greater Clemson area.

In large part, through the combined efforts of Clemson Wesley and Clemson UMC, we seek to preach, teach and put into practice an understanding of the Christian faith, rooted and shaped by the Wesleyan-Methodist movement, which could be summarized with the following affirmations that seek to clarify some of our distinctives:

- **We believe that we are part of the Church but not exclusively THE Church.** To be UM is to understand and appreciate that God has been and will continue to do great things through other communities of faith and traditions, and hopefully through ours too! Therefore, UMs have always been highly ecumenical and cooperative, seeking to work closely with other Christians who claim the same “essentials” of the faith that we do.
- **We are apostolically rooted but also Spirit-led.** To be UM is to cherish the historic roots of the Church and to understand that any and all new and reform movements inspired by the Spirit are connected to the “great cloud of witnesses” that have preceded us. While treasuring our heritage and giving thanks for the faithful witness of the saints through the centuries, we also understand that the Spirit is always at work, doing new things in new places (sometimes, we hope and pray, even in and through us). For this reason, we seek to steer clear of “sacred cows” that over time become idols to worship rather than important rites, rituals and practices that point us to the only One worthy of our worship.
- **We believe both that God is sovereign and that humans are free.** To be UM is to hold in paradox two views that are often taught in opposition on today’s campuses: God’s sovereignty and the freedom of the will. While UMs believe that God is “in control” and that God and the forces of good will ultimately defeat the forces of darkness and evil, we also affirm that we as human beings have the freedom to choose daily between a path that leads to life or one that leads to death. Thus, much of the heartache that we experience in this world is a result of sin, not a part of God’s good, pleasing and perfect will. Of course, we see salvation as a great gift from God offered to all who, with God’s leading, say “yes” to God’s invitation in Jesus Christ.
- **We are both evangelistic and socially conscious in our core theology.** UMs have long proclaimed that God in Jesus Christ has the power to not only transform lives and hearts, but to transform the world as well. The “Good News” in Jesus Christ, however, should never lead us to feel spiritually superior or better than others. For UMs, a true response to God’s amazing grace leads us into the streets and into the world – working for and serving those who have no voice, no status, and no value in our culture. And a true response also leads us, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to advocate for peace, to work for justice, and to seek to tear down the walls of hostility that continue to separate us within the Body of Christ and throughout the world. While God’s grace is always free, it is also always costly.
- **We believe that we are saved by faith, but that faith without works is really no faith at all.** Arguably, the “yes” that we say to God in Jesus Christ is to be affirmed each and every day through our actions. UMs believe that simply saying “Lord, Lord” is not enough. In the end, Jesus will claim to know those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the prisoners, and greeted the stranger – indeed, those who cared for the forgotten of our world. UMs, unlike others, extend a helping hand to whomever has need, not just those within the community of faith. The UM student ministry in Clemson is most distinctive in this way.
- **We believe that loving God with our minds is just as important as loving God with our hearts.** In the UMC, we do not ask folks to check in their brains at the door of the sanctuary. Instead, we see our minds and our reason as great gifts from God that, if used faithfully, can help us better understand how to discern God’s will for the world. UMs have always sought to hold together two ideas that have long been “disjoined” – the pursuit of knowledge and vital piety.
- **We believe in the dignity of all persons.** UMs seek to extend God’s love to all people because we believe that Christ died for all and that all people are made in God’s image. We affirm that one of most important marks of the Christian community is how it cares and shows respect for those on the fringes of

our society. UMs believe that a woman's voice and role in the life of the Church is just as important as a man's.

- **We believe that a life lived for God is the only life worth living.** UMs believe that following Jesus will require us to deny ourselves and live in cruciform ways as we seek to love God by loving others. Ideally, this is lived out in community where *agape* love and true *koinonia* is the goal. While we all know that cross-bearing is painful and never easy, UMs also affirm that the way of Jesus is, well, the way. True and everlasting life, therefore, begins when we start living our lives in service to God and God's world, with the support and nurture of our brothers and sisters in the faith.

To summarize, we preach and teach that to be UM is to be a Christian, to be someone who, with God's help, is seeking to follow faithfully in Jesus' footsteps. With hearts full of gratitude for his work as Savior on the cross, we seek to celebrate his Lordship in all things by how we live daily. Renouncing the ways of the world, UMs seek to emulate God's nature by practicing hospitality, forgiveness, mercy and generosity in tangible ways. Generally, it is our tendency to leave fruitless, dogmatic arguments to others, preferring instead to err on the side of gracious living.

This is a glimpse of the Gospel that we seek to share with the nearly 1,000 students that call CW and/or CUMC home each year. We give God thanks for the hundreds of graduates over the years who continue to serve God and the Church through full-time, ordained, and lay ministry.

To all the individuals, pastors, youth ministers, Sunday School classes, women's and men's groups and local churches who support this ministry through your apportionments or other special gifts – may God bless you all in your desire to reach today's generation of young people with the Good News of Jesus Christ.

C. Lane Glaze, Campus Minister