

CLEMSON WESLEY FOUNDATION

While in seminary I was introduced to Howard Snyder's book *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal*. Part theological and part historical, Snyder's book left an impression on me that continues to shape my approach toward campus ministry in Clemson. Snyder, more than another Wesley historian that I have read, focuses his text on the ways in which the otherwise "prim and proper" John Wesley was willing to think or work "outside the box" of his day - a stuffy, lifeless, overly Reformed-leaning Church of England.

As someone who seeks to bridge the gap between the 50+ somethings and the Gen X, Y and even Z generations, I have found Snyder's short yet pithy text helpful. I have come to believe that a reclaiming of the "radical" Wesley is one of the keys to our older Methodists appreciating our younger ones, and vice versa.

But who is this "radical" Wesley that Snyder reveals? In summary, this "radical" Wesley is one who was willing to innovate and try new approaches to accomplish the primary goal of sharing the Gospel and "Scriptural holiness" with all God's children, everywhere. Wesley's willingness to be flexible on the "opinions" while staying true to the "essentials" manifested itself in many startling and controversial ways for his day, including:

- leaving the "sacred" space of the church to share the Gospel with the poor and disenfranchised in the fields, mines, factories, and street corners;
- making use of the popular secular tunes of the day (often the ones sung in saloons) through new hymns designed to teach the tenets of the faith;
- commissioning uneducated yet gifted laity to preach the Gospel to the masses;
- empowering women to play significant leadership roles in the life of the movement;
- organizing believers into classes, bands and societies to ensure that everyone who joined the movement was both encouraged and held accountable in the living out of their faith;
- emphasizing that there was no personal holiness without social holiness, and that works of piety had to be intertwined with works of mercy directed to the poor, the hungry and the imprisoned;
- advocating against slavery, greed, and the other destructive social ills of his day; and
- establishing plain, unadorned preaching houses to ensure that the Gospel might be conveyed clearly and plainly to all people, no matter their social status.

Wesley's radical approach led him to being banned from many Church of England pulpits, even though he remained an ordained Anglican priest until the day he died. And the fruits of his controversial work? Well, you and I along with the 75 million other Methodists/Wesleyans around the world owe him a debt of gratitude.

At Clemson Wesley and Clemson UMC, we strive to keep our eyes firmly on the "essentials" of the faith while always being open to new possibilities, approaches and even innovations to reach today's younger generations. For example, we believe that there is no one right way or style to worship God, so long as our worship is centered on loving God with our heart, soul, mind and strength and calling us to love our neighbor as ourselves. We believe that each and every person's voice and gifts are essential to the whole, no matter their gender, race or social status. We believe that our time together within the four walls of sanctuary should empower us to lives lived for God outside the sanctuary. In summary, we believe that our methodology is consistent with the "radical" Wesley that we all claim as our forefather in the faith, and we are grateful to God for the fruit that these efforts have yielded in Clemson over the years.

In closing, I believe that it is essential for us all to remember that the Methodist movement started on a college campus. As in the era of John and Charles Wesley, college students today are equally as "ripe" for the Gospel as they were then. On the primary campus which I serve, there are a variety of campus ministers and ministries seeking to serve the faculty, staff and students. Some of these organizations are doing good work, while others are seeking to proclaim a Gospel that strongly differs from what we as Methodists hold dear. Sadly, the financial resources being expended by some of these groups are five to ten times what Clemson Wesley and Clemson UMC are able to fund. On other campuses the primary "competition" is not a distorted and potentially dangerous Gospel but no Gospel at all, where atheism, secular humanism and hedonism lead in the number of conversions.

To address these developments, I would challenge all Annual Conference delegates to inquire about how their local churches might be involved in hands-on ministry with and to the college students and campuses in their community. Here in Clemson, we are blessed to receive financial and other forms of tangible support from many of our sister UM churches in the greater Clemson area. It is a partnership model that works well and bears much fruit, and one that can easily be duplicated in other communities. I believe it is a model that would make the "radical" Wesley very pleased.

This is a glimpse of the approach that we seek to use with the nearly 800 students that call CW and/or CUMC home each year. We give God thanks for the thousands 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.

The harvest continues to be ripe, but more laborers and more folks willing to step "outside the box" are desperately needed.

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