

# United Methodist Heritage

"Unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety." These words from Charles Wesley provide the basis for (United) Methodism's involvement in higher education. John Wesley, Charles' older brother and the founder of Methodism, was the catalyst for uniting religious studies with the traditional liberal arts since John and Charles had grown up in an environment that stressed both religious and traditional educational formation. Thus the Wesleyan heritage has from the beginning incorporated both the religious and the liberal arts aspects of education.

When Jesus was questioned by a young lawyer as to what was the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus answered, "Love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind...and You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37,39).

To love God with one's mind

implies an intellectual love of God. It has always been the nature of the church to express itself through this form of love and worship of God. It is from this understanding that the Methodist Church launched its involvement in higher education on December 24, 1784, at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. The newly formed Methodist Church passed a resolution authorizing the establishment of Cokesbury College in Abingdon, Maryland. This event marked the beginning of a commitment to higher education by the church that has continued for over 200 years. Since that time more than 1,500 academies, colleges, and universities have been established by the (United) Methodist Church. In those years some have closed, some have merged with other colleges, and some have become state-supported institutions. Today in America there are 123 colleges, universities, and schools related to the United Methodist Church.

On April 13, 1853, Central Methodist University was founded by Nathan Scarritt and David Rice McAnally. The University was chartered on March 15, 1855, and the first classes were held September 18, 1857, with one building on one acre of ground, 144 students, and 3 faculty members. In what was to become a prophetic statement, Nathan Scarritt said, "Let our motto be, One Methodist College in Missouri, and Only One." Over the years eight other Methodist colleges and over 100 other schools were established in Missouri. Today the words of Scarritt have come to fruition. There is only one United Methodist-related university in the State of Missouri, Central Methodist University.

Throughout two centuries of church-related higher education, our "Wesleyan tradition has endeavored to avoid narrow sectarianism" (A College-Related Church by the National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education). That is, United Methodist institutions are committed to values-centered inquiry, critical thinking, and a liberal arts curriculum. The (United) Methodist Church has stressed five major concepts that have been the basis for the church to continue its support and involvement in higher education. Our Wesleyan heritage and traditions are defined by these five concepts

1. Education should be available to all people regardless of social standing, ethnic identity, or gender.
2. Education should appropriately relate faith and reason.
3. Education should help individuals make full use of their capabilities and experience for service.
4. Liberal and classical learning is critical, as well as professional and vocational training. Neither is subservient to the other.
5. Education should aim at high standards of student achievement based on deep concern for what is best for the person (from To Give the Key of Knowledge by the National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education).

Today there are new issues and challenges facing all levels of education. The over 200-year tradition of the United Methodist Church and what it believes vital in education continue to inform the current policy of church-related higher education. The United Methodist Church is involved in higher education because it is the nature of the church to express itself in the intellectual love of God. The Wesleyan heritage has supported the ideal of uniting knowledge and vital piety within a diverse community from the beginning. This nature and this ideal are clearly reflected in the statements of values, mission, and educational goals of Central Methodist University.