

## Becoming The U. M. C.

### Yes, actually, The UMC is only 50 years old!

We think of the Methodist church as being around a few centuries. This is true! Yet also untrue, since the “United” part of our church is having its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday this year.

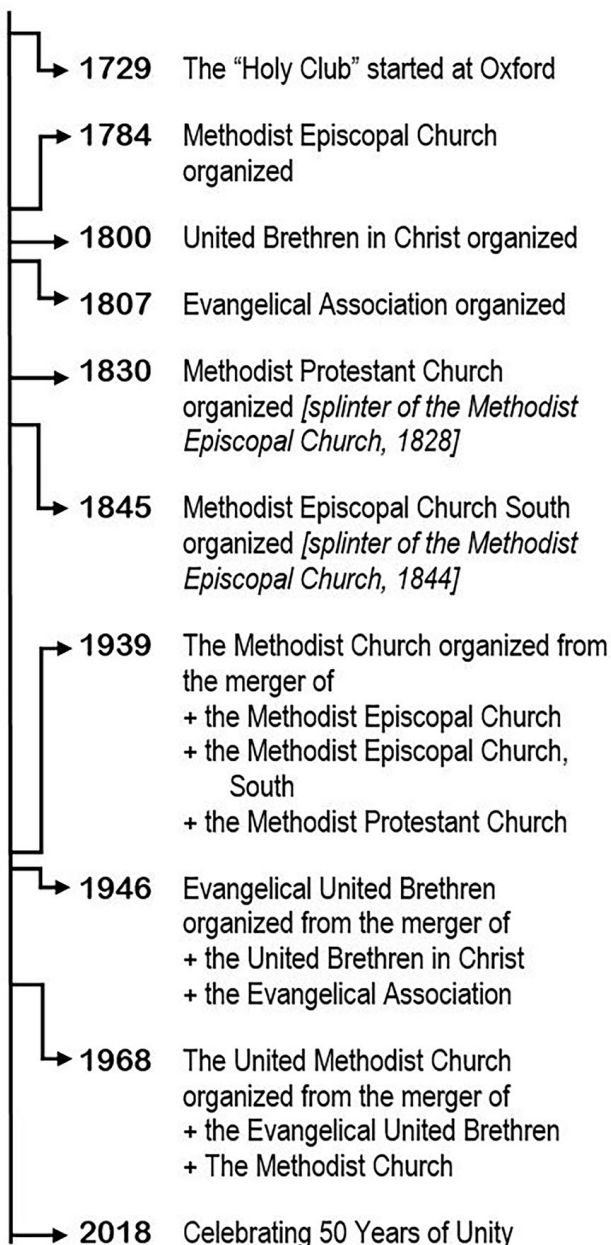
On April 23, 1968, The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren merged to create a new Christian denomination, The United Methodist Church. The union was facilitated by theological traditions steeped in the Protestant Reformation and Wesleyanism, similar ecclesiastical structures, and relationships that dated back almost two hundred years.

- In the Evangelical United Brethren heritage, for example, Philip William Otterbein, the principal founder of the United Brethren in Christ, assisted in the ordination of Francis Asbury to the superintendency of American Methodist work.
- Jacob Albright, through whose religious experience and leadership the Evangelical Association was begun, was nurtured in a Methodist class meeting following his conversion.



*“Know from whence you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go.”*

~ James Arthur Baldwin



### Otterbein, Asbury, and Albright – what about the Wesleys?

The Methodist movement dates back to John and Charles Wesley and the “Holy Club” at Oxford in the late 1720s. The name itself stems from the cell group being teased for their methods. Many members of this club helped lead the Evangelical Revival (also known as the Great Awakening) of the mid-1700s.

### So how did Methodism come to the U.S.?

The formal organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) in America took place in 1784 at the Christmas Conference at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, MD, with Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury serving as joint superintendents of the new denomination.

### Why did we have so many Methodist denominations?

That single entity, the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1784, unfortunately divided a few decades later when disagreements arose regarding lay representation at General and Annual Conferences, and the power and authority of bishops and presiding elders at General Conference in 1828. Some churches and clergy withdrew, with the Methodist Protestant Church (MPC) being formally organized in 1830.

Then, the 1844 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was divided over slavery. Many more clergy and churches withdrew and organized the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) in 1845.

### Who are the Evangelical United Brethren?

The United Brethren in Christ were organized September 25, 1800, with Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm elected their first Bishops. Jacob Albright and his Methodist-style preaching among German settlers led to the first conference of the Evangelical Association, held November 13-15, 1807.

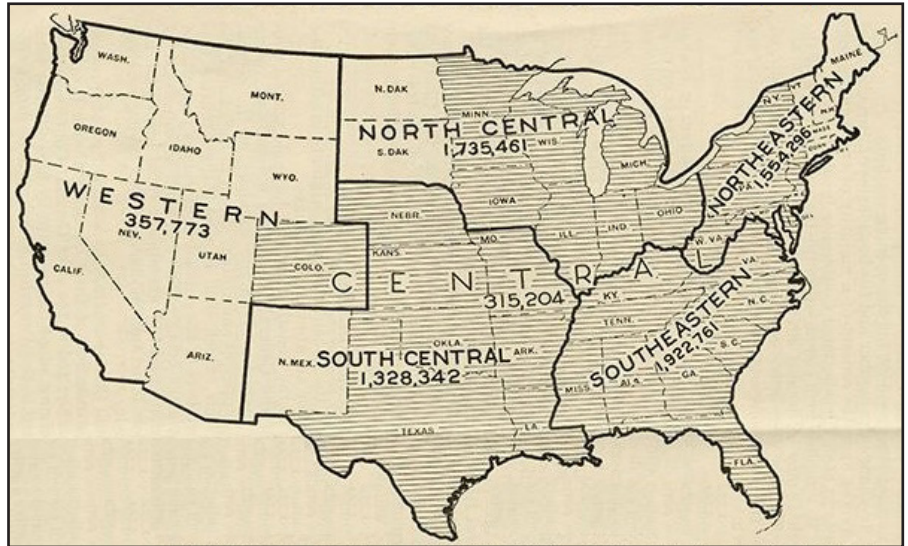
These two groups of “German Methodists” coexisted until merging to form the Evangelical United Brethren (EUB) on November 16, 1946.

## That time we started figuring out “unity”... but missed.

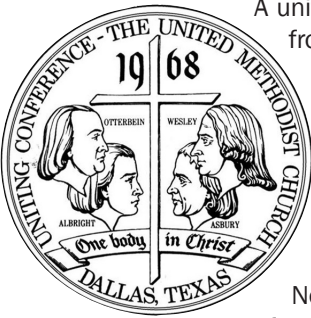
The Evangelical United Brethren was in conversation of merging when the three [not German] Methodist denominations (the MEC, MECS, and the MPC) merged back together to form The Methodist Church on April 26, 1939.

One of the results of the 1939 merger forming The Methodist Church was the division of the denomination in the United States into six different jurisdictions, five of which were regional, and one being racial. (Notice the inset image poignantly demonstrating the division of a large geographical area.)

While the formation of the Central Jurisdiction was segregation on a large scale, it did, however, allow for African-American Bishops and for African-American representation on the general boards and agencies of the denomination, which may not have occurred otherwise.



## The time we got unity right.



A uniting conference took place in Dallas, Texas on April 23, 1968, forming The United Methodist Church from the unification of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren. When discussion began toward the formation of The United Methodist Church, a non-negotiable for the EUB (and for many Methodists) was the elimination of the Central Jurisdiction and the institutional segregation of the church.

On June 5, 1968, the Western North Carolina Conference of the Southeastern Jurisdiction formally joined with the Western and Central Districts of the North Carolina-Virginia Conference of the Central Jurisdiction. This worship service at the opening of the 1968 annual conference formed the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church as we know it today, led by the joint efforts of clergy and lay members of the two conferences.

Bishop Earl G. Hunt Jr., of the Charlotte Area (Southeastern Jurisdiction), and Bishop Edgar A. Love, of the Baltimore Area (Central Jurisdiction), read jointly the statement of union: *“For the glory of God and for the extension of Christ’s Kingdom in our time, we announce officially the merger of the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church with that portion of the North Carolina-Virginia Conference lying within its borders. May our Heavenly Father abundantly bless this union. Amen.”*

**Today, we are able to call ourselves United Methodists because of the foundation laid nearly three hundred years ago and the diligent and prayerful work of those people who, in the midst of the civil rights movement, believed the church itself should be one.**



*1 Corinthians 1:10 (CEB) Now I encourage you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ: Agree with each other and don’t be divided into rival groups. Instead, be restored with the same mind and the same purpose.*

## Interested in learning more and hearing memories of the merger within Western NC?

More, in-depth information is available at [www.umc.org/umc50](http://www.umc.org/umc50) and [www.gcah.org](http://www.gcah.org) as well as resources located in our own conference archives. Interviews from our own clergy and lay members are available on <https://www.youtube.com/user/umcwncc>.



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