



To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

# COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP QUARTERLY

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## No Accidental Disciples

By Steven W. Manskar



**In Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices<sup>1</sup>** Douglas Yeo, a trombone player in the Boston Symphony Orchestra talks about how discipline and practice set him free to make music. To illustrate his point he tells us what his teacher told him years ago: “World class trombone players do not just happen. Their talents are forged in the dual furnaces of determination and diligence.”

From this Mr. Yeo learned that “nothing good comes about simply by accident. That there is work involved.”

Jazz is the music that has taught me the most about discipleship. Jazz is always played with at least two players and as many as 50 or 100. Jazz helps us understand discipleship because it is an expression of freedom and new possibilities drawing us closer to God. A typical performance begins with the band playing a melody. The leader then begins to improvise. As he or she plays with the theme, the band plays supporting chords. As each player takes a turn at improvisation, he or she is supported by the band. Improvisation requires skilled and close listening to one another.

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*However, because we are all created in the image of God, we are all given the same gift: the capacity to give and receive love.*

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This process of listening and mutual support sets each player free to play with the music and see where it can lead them. The goal is to allow the music to take them to new places and new possibilities. All the practice, discipline, listening, and mutual respect for the

music and one another allows the musicians to get out of the way and allow the music to play them.

In the waters of baptism God calls us into discipleship. Becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ is very much like becoming a musician. Certainly, God does not give everyone the gift of making music. However, because we are all created in the image of God, we are all given the same gift: the capacity to give and receive love. The goal of discipleship is to develop this gift to its fullest capacity. Along the way our character, which has been damaged by sin, will be restored to wholeness into the image of Christ. As we grow and mature in loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving our neighbor as ourselves, love becomes a natural response and way of life in the world. This process is what John Wesley called “holiness of heart and life,” “sanctification,” and “Christian perfection.”

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*The Baptismal covenant provides the compass headings for how to make disciples.*

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Making disciples, like making musicians, does not happen by accident. It is done with intention born of love for God and love for those whom God calls into God’s household in baptism. The Baptismal covenant provides the compass headings for how to make disciples. In it United Methodist congregations will find guidance for developing an intentional process, or system, for making disciples of Jesus Christ. Such a system will be immersed in the grace of God from which all of the respective pieces emerge. The goal of the system is a community whose form and witness in the world are defined by holiness of heart and life.

<sup>1</sup> A video (DVD) presentation of grace and the means of grace in the Wesleyan tradition. It is available from Discipleship Resources (800-972-0433) and Cokesbury.



# Blogging as a Means of Grace

By Michelle M. Hargrave



*I have been journaling for thirty years now. I have a trunk full of varied notebooks that I keep well packed away. They are part record-keeping, part therapy, part prayer. In some ways they are all prayer: as I have poured my life onto the page, the disappointing and awkward parts, the joys and hopes, grace somehow works*

*its way into the words. Somewhere between my mind and my pen God's spirit works to bring occasional beauty and order out of my thoughts. It is like wringing grace from the details of my day.*

For the last many months, however, I have been journaling online in my blog, <http://33namesofgrace.blogspot.com>. "Blog" is short for "web log" and is a form of online communication that has evolved in recent years. I write commentary on public events, describe what is happening at church, list details of my day, post pictures of the weather, include prayers and poetry. I add links to other blogs and websites I like. I belong to groups of bloggers that create internet communities across the world.

The important thing to remember with a blog is that it is very public. Anyone with a web browser can read anyone's blog at any time, and can usually leave comments. Blogs are the thoughts of one person but

with commentary from anyone who passes through. I am very aware as a pastor that, as I write on my blog, people from my congregation may read it, as well as fellow United Methodists, friends from outside the church, my family, and many strangers as well.

So blogging is immensely public. But blogging is also much like journaling; it is still prayer. It may even be a spiritual discipline for me. It is the place where I try to take the complications of ministry and parenting and life in general and organize a narrative out of it. It is the place where I list the odd and lovely details of my days and try to wring grace from them.

For example, when I preach a funeral sermon, I preach to the family's grief. But in my blog I discuss my own grief of losing this parishioner. In writing I experience grace, because God is working somehow in the writing. But then the blog adds a new twist – other people come and tell me their stories, other clergy tell me about losing their people. People offer compassion and insight, or just say, "lovely post." Or I write a list of random things I am grateful for that particular day, and seventeen people add their own list to mine.

I'm not quite sure where blogging falls in the order of the practices of Covenant Discipleship. It is sometimes justice, sometimes compassion, always devotion, and it is always public. In any case it is becoming, for me, a spiritual discipline, and it is, like everything else we discuss in Covenant Discipleship, an avenue for God's grace.

To sample other United Methodist blogs visit the methoblog at [methoblog.onlywonder.com/content/](http://methoblog.onlywonder.com/content/).



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## GUEST WRITER

## "What is a Methodist?"

By Andrew C. Thompson



*In Methodism's early days, John Wesley had a hard time explaining to suspicious outsiders who the Methodists were. He was suspected of leading a radical, even dangerous, group of sectarians. Opponents called him an "enthusiast," which was not a compliment in 18th century England.*

So Mr. Wesley wrote a pamphlet called, "The Character of a Methodist," in 1742 to explain the new movement.

Confronted by the question, "What is a Methodist?", Wesley responds, "I answer: a Methodist is one who has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him'; one who 'loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength'."

"Big deal!" you might say. "That could describe any Christian, not just a Methodist!"

And that's exactly Wesley's point. Later on in the pamphlet, he says, "Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? I ask no farther question. 'If it be, give me thy hand.'"

This statement is often used to show the "catholic spirit" that Wesley embodied in his life and ministry. And it is true that he wanted Christians of whatever background to find a unity in the actual practice of their faith.

But Wesley was absolutely insistent on that one key idea: the actual practice of faith. And for him, the distinguishing mark of Methodists was that they actually practiced the faith they claimed to hold.

He wrote, "By these marks, by these fruits of a living faith, do we labour to distinguish ourselves from the unbelieving world, from all those whose minds or lives are not according to the gospel of Christ. But from real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all."

Claiming to love God and love neighbor is one thing; putting those tenets of faith into daily practice is another. And this is the very reason why Covenant Discipleship is such an important tool for our faith today. If our whole faith is just made up of attending worship on Sundays, we can go through our entire Christian lives on autopilot. But in Covenant Discipleship, we are confronted with the necessity of making that faith a daily practice through acts of

worship, devotion, compassion, and justice.

Making the greater commitment that Covenant Discipleship entails is not always easy. In my own experience with CD Groups, I have had experiences of embarrassment when I have had to go to my group meeting and report a less-than-stellar week of discipleship. But those are also occasions when the Holy Spirit has been present to me through my fellow brothers and sisters in the covenant. They have gently, but firmly, encouraged me in the areas where I have needed to work harder.

Wesley wanted his Methodists to be "inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God." That's a wonderful phrase, and it speaks to the goal of the practice of our discipleship. But it doesn't happen automatically! We experience it only as we are willing to engage in concrete practice, day by day, together.

Read more from Andrew at his blog, GenX Rising, [www.genxrising.com/index.html](http://www.genxrising.com/index.html).

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# A WESLEYAN INSTITUTE • OCTOBER 8-11, 2007

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*“Help us to build each other up,  
Our little stock improve;  
Increase our faith, confirm our hope,  
And perfect us in love.”  
(Charles Wesley)*

**How do we love one another as Christ loves?  
How does a congregation “increase faith, confirm  
hope, and perfect us in love?”**

This Wesleyan Institute will be an in depth exploration of riches to be found in the General Rule of Discipleship: To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

**IN EIGHT WORKSHOPS YOU WILL HAVE  
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- Covenant Writing
- Supporting and Sustaining Covenant Discipleship Groups
- How to Get Through the Doldrums
- Charles Wesley as Spiritual Guide
- Sprouts: Covenant Discipleship with Children
- Covenant Discipleship with Youth & Young Adults
- Covenant Discipleship for Pastors
- How to Introduce Covenant Discipleship to Your Congregation

**PLENARY SPEAKERS & PREACHERS:**

- Bishop Janice Riggle Huie – Texas Conference Resident Bishop
- Dr. David Lowes Watson – Wesley Scholar & Seminary Professor
- Dr. Daniel Flores – Pastor of La Trinidad United Methodist Church, Ft. Worth, TX & President of The Hispanic Wesleyan Society
- Mrs. Sandra King-Shaw – Member of Asbury United Methodist Church, Washington, DC
- Rev. Tom Albin – Dean of the Upper Room Chapel, GBOD
- Dr. Steven W. Manskar – Director of Accountable Discipleship, GBOD
- Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell – Senior Pastor, Windsor Village United Methodist Church, Houston, TX

**SPECIAL GUEST:** Suzannah Moorman, soprano. She will perform selections from her CD, “Great Wesley Hymns”, as part of the evening worship on October 10: “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing: A Celebration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the Hymns of Charles Wesley”

Congregations are encouraged to send a pastor and at least two lay persons to this event.

This event qualifies for 1.0 CEU.

If you fly to Houston, please go to the George Bush Intercontinental Airport. Transportation will be provided from the airport to Klein UMC.

**[WWW.GBOD.ORG/WESLEYANINSTITUTE](http://WWW.GBOD.ORG/WESLEYANINSTITUTE)**

**LODGING:**

- Holiday Inn Express, 281-351-4114 (\$70 + tax)
- LaQuinta Inn & Suites, 281-516-0400 (\$89 + tax)
- Tomball Inn, 281-351-9700 (\$57 + tax)

Please call the hotel of your choice and tell the clerk you need a room for the “Wesleyan Institute.”

Complimentary transportation will be provided between the hotels and Klein United Methodist Church.

**REGISTRATION FEE:**

- \$150 (before September 14, 2007)
- \$175 (after September 14, 2007)

Registration fee includes six meals (3 lunches & 3 suppers) and a complimentary copy of A Disciple’s Journal (Year A).

**To register go to [www.gbod.org/WesleyanInstitute](http://www.gbod.org/WesleyanInstitute) or call  
Becky Caudill at 877-899-2780, ext. 7059**

# CHILDREN WILL BE CHILDREN

By Edie Harris

*We're dog sitting our daughter's 8-month-old puppy—a golden retriever and husky mix.*

She weighs almost 60 pounds. The problem with a 60-pound puppy is that we tend to forget that regardless of her enormity, she is still a PUPPY. She may look like an adult dog, but her behavior is that of a puppy. We can't expect from her the kind of behavior one can expect from a grown dog. I know that in the next 4 days she will probably chew up something else—probably several more something elses.

And what is my point?

Sprouts are children and they will act like children. Regardless of how smart they are, how computer savvy, how well they can program your new cell phone, or how much they want to be like Jesus, they will still act like children. They will giggle inappropriately, particularly at scatological humor, they'll be cruel even to their friends. What will appear to be minor problems to you will be considered catastrophic to them. They have no sense of time or history. They may not be able to think abstractly or empathize well with others' feelings.

Mary Alice Gran at the GBOD has some excellent resources that can help you. For help and ideas, go to [www.gbod.org/ministries/children/](http://www.gbod.org/ministries/children/).



You must love your Sprouts unconditionally; even when they spoil your lesson plan by being silly or ruin the prayer by lack of attention or just plain run wild with excess energy. You have to count to ten, remember that they are children, regroup, demonstrate that you still love them, and try again.

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*They can be loved unconditionally and at the same time be held accountable as disciples of Jesus Christ.*

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Paul Chilcote writes in *Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit* (a resource I highly recommend) that Jesus “became what we are in order for us to become what he himself is, the embodiment of [God’s] love.”

One of the strengths of the Sprouts ministry is that it gives you, as the adult leader, an excellent opportunity to embody God’s love to children who may or may not be receiving it elsewhere. They can be loved unconditionally and at the same time be held accountable as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Just remember, puppies will be puppies and children will be children.

[WWW.GBOD.ORG/SMALLGROUP/SPROUTS](http://WWW.GBOD.ORG/SMALLGROUP/SPROUTS)

## Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices

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## Acts of Justice

Acts of justice are always the most difficult for Covenant Discipleship groups. This is true for many reasons. The most common reason is that most justice issues, like war, hunger, homelessness, racism, etc., are all so immense we ask,

“How can I, or my little CD group, possibly make a difference?” The answer is that when Christians join their voices and hands together they release the power of grace that is working to prepare planet Earth for the coming reign of God.

The General Board of Church & Society invites you to join with United Methodists from all over the world for four days of transformational learning, preaching, collaboration and community building.

### **Living Faith, Seeking Justice: Resourcing Local Churches for Justice Ministry November 1-4, 2007 Fort Worth, TX**

You will come away with resources, techniques and programs to teach and preach the Social Principles, train and equip others to understand and live out justice in their lives, and mobilize others to engage in advocacy and work that transforms the world in the ways of Christ.

To learn more go to <http://www.umbcs.org> and click on the link to Living Faith, Seeking Justice.