

**LESSON:**  
**THE METHODIST CHURCH**  
**AROUND THE WORLD**

**PROBLEM STATEMENT**

I didn't know there were other Methodists around the world.

**TAKEAWAY**

We are part of a global church with a common mission.

**BIBLE PASSAGES**

Philippians 1:3-14  
Jonah 4:6-11

**KEY VERSE****Philippians 1:6**

"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

**SUPPLIES NEEDED**

- Bibles
- Handbooks
- DVD
- Pens
- Pencils
- Paper
- Butcher paper
- Markers
- Scissors
- Tape

**Background Information**

American Methodism started as a foreign mission, undertaken by missionary preachers from Ireland and England. For at least the first three decades of its existence, American Methodists were "the other Methodists," the unusual, smaller grouping of Methodists on the other side of the world from the established and wealthier British Methodists under the direct leadership of John Wesley. This missional sensibility is a big part of who we are as Methodists.

A central piece of Methodist identity is that we share our beliefs with others and invite them to consider those beliefs too. The nature of Methodism is to share the call of God to live a holy life with as many people as possible so they might know the salvation offered by God through Jesus Christ. This includes reaching out not only to people who live nearby but to all people, wherever they live.

Shortly after the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, American Methodists began to establish numerous missions in other countries. By 1881, the World Methodist Council was formed as a central organization in which Methodists from around the world could meet and work on common interests and beliefs. Today the World Methodist Council has eighty member Methodist denominations representing 75 million people in approximately 133 different countries. The UMC is one of these members.

Confirmation students might not be interested in the particulars of denominational polity, so this lesson helps them see The UMC as something much bigger than their local church. Students are growing up in an increasingly interconnected world. Some of them might have spent time in other countries or have friends or family who have. They know that for their faith to be meaningful, it has to equip them to live well with people of other cultures and faiths. And that's something Methodists have been striving to do since the eighteenth century

**What Students Need to Know . . .**

- The local United Methodist congregation is part of a collection of congregations that are all part of The United Methodist Church. These congregations work together through a structure that groups local churches into districts, districts into conferences—together, these make up the General Conference, a body that meets every four years to pray, worship, and revise the *Book of Discipline*.
- The UMC is connected with other branches of Methodism through the World Methodist Council and also builds relationships with non-Methodist denominations. For example, The United Methodist Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recently agreed to be in "full communion" with one another, which means that these church bodies officially acknowledge each other as partners in the Christian faith and work together in specific ministries.
- Nearly one-third of the members of The UMC live outside the United States. Methodists from other countries are coming to the United States to serve as missionaries here because they believe that more Americans need to hear the gospel and become Methodists!

## Where They Might Struggle . . .

- Students are prone to thinking about The UMC in the United States as the main branch of the denomination, the one that reaches out to all the other countries. But nothing could be further from the truth. Our Methodist mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This is our common mission regardless of whether we live in the United States, Ghana, Myanmar, or Germany. It is not a matter of one group of Methodists doing mission to help a group with fewer resources. It is a matter of all Methodists working at a common mission. Encourage students to avoid “us versus them” language when speaking about our global church family or the people The UMC seeks to reach through its missional work.
- The interconnectedness of Methodist churches means change happens slowly. Your local church can’t just do whatever it wants. It’s part of a larger family of churches that make decisions together. This is one of the challenges of functioning as a global church, where there are all kinds of cultural expectations to consider. But like any big family, The UMC has chosen to make unity a hallmark of our denomination. We believe that our global identity and polity strengthen our witness in the world. Help students consider the benefits—and the challenges—that come from this belief.
- In that same vein, students might struggle to understand how we can be united when we disagree on social or theological issues. Thankfully, The UMC doesn’t ask people to leave their brains or their individuality at the door. We are allowed—and even encouraged—to bring our ideas to the broader church, knowing that we are committed to working together even when we disagree. We are at our best when we focus on the many things that unite us and not on the few things that divide us.

## About the Video . . .

Manuel is eager to share the Good News of Jesus Christ around the world. Like many well-intentioned people of faith, Manuel doesn’t realize there are Christians (even Methodist Christians!) in other parts of the world. This video will pique students’ interest for discovering the structure and function of the Methodist church round the world. Who started these churches? How do they relate to my church? And, if there are Methodists everywhere, do we still need missionaries?

## Lesson Notes . . .

### Icebreaker

#### HUMAN KNOT

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1. Divide your group into teams of eight to twelve students. If you have a smaller group, include mentors and other adult volunteers in the team.
2. Now have students hold out their right hands and grasp another person's right hand. Be sure they aren't holding hands with the person next to them.
3. Have students hold out their left hands and grasp a different person's left hand, making sure they're still not holding the hand of the person next to them. Students should be fairly tangled up now.
4. Next, have the group undo the knot they've created without letting go of hands. If you have multiple teams, have them start unknotting at the same time. See which group can get untangled first.
5. Talk about the ways people get tangled up, confused, and frustrated when trying to work out problems. How do these relationship knots hurt us? How can they ultimately make us stronger as people and communities?

### Into the Story

Look up Philippians 1:3-14 in your Bibles. Ask a volunteer to read it aloud. Then ask:

- Paul says that his arrest and imprisonment have helped spread the gospel. How could that be?
- What do you think people your age most need to know about Jesus?
- This letter says that God “began a good work among you” and will complete it “by the day of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). How does this connect with John Wesley’s ideas about holiness and perfection? How is the church part of that journey for you?

Have a volunteer read Jonah 4:6-11. Ask:

- Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh because he thought the people there were too wicked to be loved by God. God, of course, thought differently. How would you feel if some of the people who hurt you the most started working to live holy lives? How would you want God to treat them?
- This is a weird ending to a strange story. But what do you think God is asking here?

### Questions to Get the Conversation Going . . .

- Do you know anyone who came to faith because of a conversation or relationship with another Christian? What do you know about that story?
- What’s one place you would never want God to send you? Why?
- How do you like to make decisions—by yourself or with the help of other people? What are the pros and cons of each option?

At the end of confirmation class, you're going to make a set of promises about participating in the life of your church. Well, not just your church. The United Methodist Church exists all over the world in some form or another. That's right—you belong to a global church that is part of the body of Christ and stretches from your hometown to the other side of the world and includes people from almost every continent on earth.

There's so much to learn about being a Methodist. And now you're being asked to be part of a global church. That seems like a lot to ask of a teenager.

### The Methodist Church Around The World

*The great big church*

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**Philippians 1:6**  
"I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

ONCE YOU'RE CONFIRMED, YOU'LL BE A LITTLE LITTLE COMMUNITY YOU'VE GOT TO KNOW DURING THIS CLASS. WON'T THAT BE GREAT? DRAW A PICTURE OF YOUR CHURCH ON THE HILLSIDE.

**My Mission**  
Many churches have a mission statement that helps them define who they are and what they want to be about. See if you can find your church's mission statement. Look on a church bulletin or brochure, or ask your pastor or parents. Once you find it, use the banner above as a space to write down a few ways you see your church living out this mission. If your church doesn't have a mission statement, see if you can come up with one based on what you know about your church.

**My Church**  
Draw a picture of why you or your family chose to attend your church. Write about it inside the outline of the church above.

**My Logo**  
Create a logo for your church and draw it on the church pictured on the postcard. On the back of the postcard, write about what the logo means to you.

**I know all about my Methodist church. What else do I know?**

*My Church*  
314 Wesley St.

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This is obviously an exaggeration meant to push against the idea that we only belong to one church. This is the notion that the rest of the lesson will unravel, so it's okay if students are already a little uncomfortable with the idea that they are committing to a single church.

Have a student read the pivot statement located at the bottom of the page, and gauge the group's thoughts on where the lesson might go. Remember: You want tension! Allow your students to live with the questions posed on the first page until after the video has played and you begin exploring the infographic.

If you've ever been to another church, how was it like this church? How was it different?

## EXPLORING THE INFOGRAPHIC

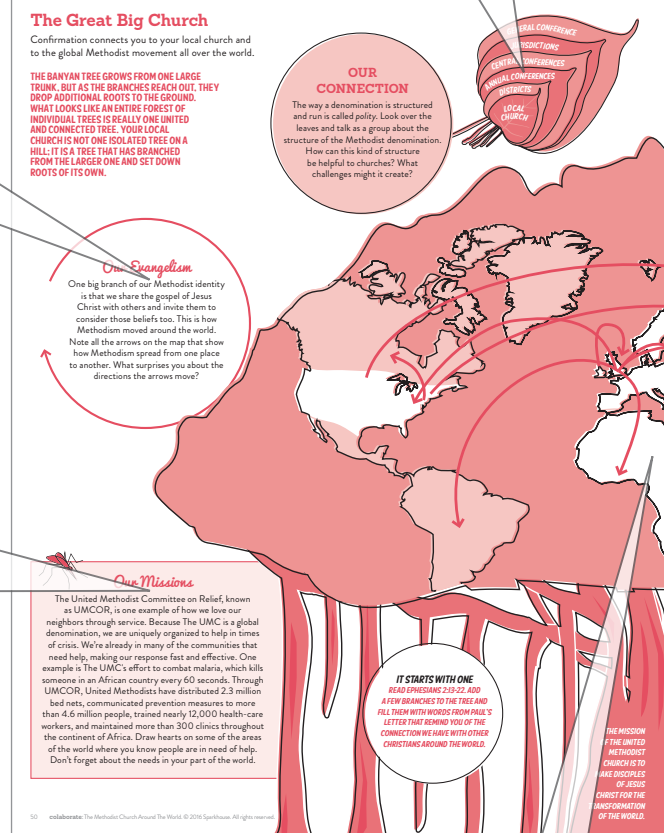


The global reach of The UMC is kind of amazing. Most students will have no idea they are part of something so expansive. The banyan tree infographic will give them some visual clues to how the church can be both one entity and a collection of individual congregations. Start with the mission statement on the trunk of the tree, then explore the map and the interactions around the tree to get an overview of how The UMC is structured and how that structure helps us fulfill our mission all over the world.

Talk about the ways Methodism has spread, encouraging students to recognize that the United States isn't the center of this movement. Why is that a good thing? What does that tell us about who God is and who God loves?

When have you seen churches of multiple denominations come together to share God's love in your own community?

This structure is one of the many ideas that gets debated at the General Conference. Talk with students about changes that the General Conference has made over the last ten years or so and how those changes affect a local church like yours.

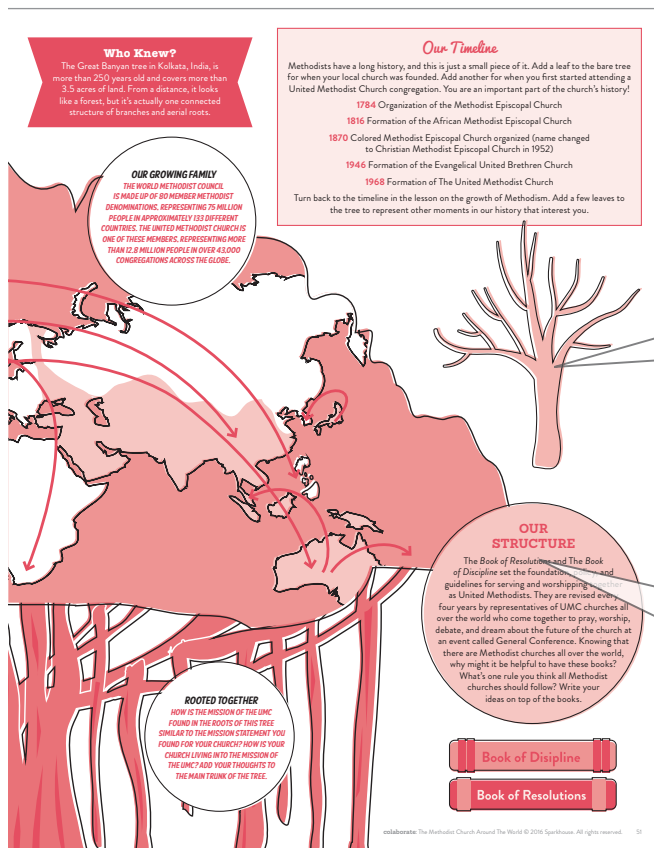


What might United Methodists in other parts of the world teach us about following Jesus Christ and sharing the gospel?



### Want More?

- Connect with a UMC leader in another part of the world and plan an online video conversation with your class. Invite your guest to describe congregational life in their part of the world and maybe introduce a few students from the church. Encourage your group to prepare some questions before class.
- Find out if your students can participate in your annual conference. Travel to the conference meeting as a group and observe the experience—attend plenary sessions, workshops, and worship. Allow time for conversation with your group to process what they've seen and heard. If you can't make a trip work, invite your church's representative to visit your class and share his or her experiences of this event.
- Get outside for a nature walk in a wooded area. Think like forestry experts as you look at the way the various trees and plants grow in the woods. What kinds of trees thrive? Which ones grow near each other? How does the plant life change as the shade or water situation changes? As you walk, talk about the interdependencies we see in nature. What can they tell us about the ways large groups of different people can work together to create good in the world?



There's been a lot of splitting off and regrouping in our history. How has that helped us in our mission? What problems might it create?

Think of a time you've been with other UMC students at camp, retreats, or youth gatherings. What did this experience teach you about our connection as United Methodists?

## Mentor Notes

- Have student/mentor pairs head to the UMCOR website and come up with at least one project for your group. Have each pair do a short presentation on what their project would involve. Then talk as a group to determine which project—or projects—they'd like to pursue, and come up with a plan for making it happen.
- Have students and mentors share some travel stories. Even if someone hasn't traveled very far from home, they are bound to have a few stories of road trips gone wrong, getting lost in an unfamiliar city, discovering a great hidden gem in a small town, trying strange food, or just meeting interesting people from other places. Have them talk about the benefits of learning from people and places that are different from what we know.



## LEADER TIP

**Shared Mission.**

This activity will take some imagination. Encourage students to think of what they know about other countries or cultures, but be careful not to let them lean on stereotypes. Instead, get them thinking about the way people move from place to place or get their food or make their homes. What about people who live in rural areas? People who live in huge cities? People who live with extended family? People who have to move far away from their families to find work? What could we learn from their experiences?

## LEADER TIP

**Growing Together.**

If your group isn't likely to pull off The UMC chant, invite them to find a creative way to display the interconnected tree trunk somewhere in the church building. But come on, who doesn't love a good chant?

**Our Global Church**

Being Methodist means we are linked to other congregations around the world, sharing the joys and struggles of people everywhere. Being Methodist also means we care about the unity of the body of Christ. We try to live well with people in other denominations and other faiths.

**Option 1: Shared Mission**

With all these branches reaching out, our church has lots of opportunities to love and serve others. Above the branch, draw or write about one way your church or youth group could help a group of people on the other side of the world. Below the branch, draw or write about one way a group of people from another part of the world could help your youth group.

**Option 2: Growing Together**

Supplies: butcher paper, markers, scissors, tape

Build your own banyan!

**1. Working in small groups, use the butcher paper to create leaves, church buildings, UMC logos, or other shapes that represent The UMC for you. On each one, write something you learned about The United Methodist Church today.**



**2. Get a loopy piece of butcher paper and hang it in the room. You're now weaving a lengthwise to create a branch. On the branch, write down one way you can be part of the work of the global UMC.**



**3. Tape your cutouts from step 1 to the top half of the branch. To make each group feel like a large group and twist the lower parts of your branches into one big trunk.**



**4. Spread out so everyone is holding the tree, and hoist it over your heads while you chant, "UMC, UMC, UMC!"**



1. Think

2. Share

3. Discuss

**Why is it important to be part of a globally connected church?**



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It might seem obvious to you that we have plenty to learn from other cultures, but students can still get stuck on the idea that the United States is the sole birthplace of everything great. This activity helps expand their view.

Yes, this activity will be a little awkward and clunky, but so is life in a global church. As students work together to manage this unwieldy project, they'll hopefully get a sense of how carefully The UMC works to stay connected and cooperative.

Why is it important to be part of a globally connected church?

**Into the World**

Listen this week for events in the world. If you learn of a tragedy, look online to see how The United Methodist Church is already in these communities and how it's responding.