

**June 3, 2018**

## **The Merger**

The United Methodist Church turns 50 years old this year! It was on April 23, 1968 that the 10, 289,000 million-member Methodist Church and the 738,00-member Evangelical Brethren Church merged to form The United Methodist Church at General Conference in Dallas, Texas.

In large part due to the repeated contacts of Francis Asbury with William Otterbein, Martin Boehm and others, there had been casual discussions of a merger as early as 1810. Negotiations continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Formal discussions between the two denominations began in 1956. At that time, The Methodist Church dropped discussions of merging with the Episcopalians. This decision was one of the most significant because it meant that, for the time being at least, Methodism at a fork in the road chose the way more congenial to its Evangelical than to its Anglican heritage.

Several big challenges were evident.

**The Name** – what was something that everyone could live with?

**Size** – 738,000 EUB's could easily get lost in 10 million Methodists.

**Nature of Episcopacy** – EUB bishops had one 4-year term,  
Methodist bishops had life tenure.

**District Superintendent:** EUB's voted by annual conference;  
M: DS was appointee of the Bishop.

A huge appropriation of \$25 million dollars was made for the World Service Fund, the fund that today is foundational to the UMC.

To send a statement to combat prejudice, the new church withdrew investment funds from a New York bank in protest against their involvement in racial prejudice in South Africa.

As we know, the 1960's and 1970's were a time of great social upheaval in America. The new church found itself having to give its attention to social problems, violence, war, and other emerging tensions. One can say that priority was given to finding a path of practical responses to social and racial issues. Resolving differences in theological understanding would have to wait, as well as the creation of a new structure where voices of all minority groups, caucuses, and special-interest groups could be represented fairly.

One of the highly debated but ultimately approved aspects of the Uniting Conference dealt with race relations. Up until 1968, The Methodist Church had operated worldwide with a system of jurisdictions, annual conferences, districts, and local churches, and a racially separate jurisdiction called the Central Jurisdiction for African American congregations. The Uniting Conference officially dismantled and ended the Central Jurisdiction. Today, all churches regardless of race are part of the geographic jurisdiction where that church resides. Our United States had five jurisdictions African American congregations were segregated into a separate Central jurisdiction

It's interesting to recall that this union came during a time of great social upheaval and division in our country. Yet it was the coming together of people from different regions, races, languages, cultures, and customs because of their common grounding in the Bible, teachings, spiritual life, practice and influence of John and Charles Wesley.