THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE METHODIST CHURCH IN NORTH CAROLINA

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The United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations have a long and complicated history on the issues of race and civil rights. The denomination has overcome many sectional and social divisions to become a more racially open denomination. One of the biggest periods of change for the denomination was during the Civil Rights Movement. The United Methodist Church, and its direct predecessor the Methodist Church, was swept along by the great social change during the period from 1954 to 1968 to become a desegregated church. In some ways, elements within the church helped to foster that social change. Despite having been deeply divided on the issues of civil rights and race, particular in the South, the denomination offered protection and support for clergy attempting to push for a fairer society, even in southern states such as North Carolina.

The roots of the United Methodist Church can be traced to eighteenth century Great Britain, and a young student at Oxford named John Wesley. In 1729 John Wesley, his brother Charles, and William Morgan began meeting to study the Bible. This trio of Oxford scholars were unconsciously laying the foundation of the Methodist Movement.[1] This trio would grow and expand to a group that did more than simply study the Bible, but a group that lived a methodical Christian life; a life that was in fact so methodical and organized that members of the group became known as Methodists.[2]

John and Charles Wesley would leave Oxford and set sail for the colonies where Wesley desired to spread the Gospel to the Native Americans. It was on the voyage to Georgia where John Wesley would first encounter Christians from the Moravian

[1] Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Second Edition* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2013), 42-43
[2] Ibid., 50.

tradition, a group that would have a profound impact on Wesley and his theology.[3] While in Georgia the Wesley's both faced troubles and hardships. Despite a relatively successful ministry in Savannah John Wesley left Georgia in 1737, his brother Charles already having returned to Great Britain.[4]

Upon John Wesley's return to Great Britain the Methodist Movement began to take off. At the request of the great evangelist George Whitfield, John Wesley began giving open air sermons, a practice that was at best frowned upon by the Church of England.[5] Open air preaching allowed John Wesley to reach many thousands of the unchurched that had been ignored by the Church of England. The Methodist Movement was built on reaching the outcasts of society, the so called have-nots of eighteen century Great Britain. For John Wesley though, his ministry was about more than just preaching the Gospel, it was about teaching it. Societies, small groups of Christians who met to learn more about the Bible and the practice of Christianity, were John Wesley's way of having the Bible taught. These societies were generally all affiliated with the Methodist Movement, but groups known as bands were uniquely Wesleyan in their practice of Christianity.[6] It would be out of these societies that the Methodist Movement would truly take root in the British context.

John Wesley first sent missionaries to take Methodism to the Americas in 1769. In the early days of American Methodism it was made clear that the Methodist Societies being established were not substitutes for the Church of England, they were meant to supplement the spiritual growth of Christians and those who wished to become

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[3] Ibid., 63-65.
[4] Ibid., 78.
[5] Ibid., 108-110.
[6] Ibid., 113-114.

Christian.[7] Many of the meetings and worship services held by the societies during this early period of American Methodism were integrated, particularly in the North.[8] Additionally, early Methodists were strongly opposed to slavery and advocated for its abolition.[9] Throughout the next decade the American Methodist Movement grew and expanded across the colonies. After the American Revolution had secured independence for the newly created United States of America, Methodists in this new nation created their own Church. The Christmas Conference of 1784 was held in Baltimore, Maryland and it was there that the Methodist Episcopal Church was born. Led by Bishops Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, the Methodist Episcopal Church would become one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States.[10] Both Asbury and Coke, the first Methodist Bishops, took open stands against the institution of slavery. Their opposition to slavery was in fact so strong that they made a joint petition to George Washington calling for slavery to be abolished in Virginia.[11] This provides strong evidence that the early Methodist Episcopal Church was a much more open denomination than it would later become.

The Methodist Episcopal Church would undergo a series of changes during the period from its founding to the American Civil War. These changes included the formation of four new and separate denominations: The African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Of these four major divisions of the

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[7] Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1974), 70-71.
[8] Ibid., 166.
[9] Ibid., 186.
[10] Ibid., 98-101.
[11] Ibid., 186-187.

Methodist Episcopal Church, two dealt directly with the issue of race, while one dealt with the issue of slavery. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, or A.M.E. Church, was formed by Richard Allen, an African American Methodist preacher. While the denomination was not officially formed until 1816, the disputes that led to the racial split in the Methodist Episcopal Church began as early as early as 1787, when Allen attempted to create a separate church for African Americans.[12] The reason for Allen's support of an independent church for African Americans was his experience with racism and discrimination in St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. When the A.M.E. Church was formed in 1816, Allen was elected as the first bishop and the new church remained thoroughly Methodist in its polity and doctrine.[13]

The second major split in the Methodist Episcopal Church was also a divide along racial lines. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, or A.M.E.Z. Church, was formed in New York City. As with the A.M.E. Church, separation from the Methodist Episcopal Church was no short process. It began in 1796, when African Americans began meeting separately from the congregation of John Street Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1800 a separate church, Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, had been constructed for African Americans. This church remained a part of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was overseen by white elders, elder being the highest level of ordination in the Methodist Episcopal Church, but was also served by black preachers who were ordained as deacons.[14] Zion Methodist

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[12] Will B. Gravely, "African Methodisms and the Rise of Black Denominationalism," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt,108-126, (Nashville, Tenn.: Kingswood Books, 1993), 111.
[13] Norwood, 169-171.
[14] Gravely, 122-125.

Episcopal Church split and a second African American congregation was formed and named Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church. The two churches remained a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church until 1821, when after seeking to form their own Annual Conference and being rejected, the A.M.E.Z. Church was formed.[15]

The creation of the Methodist Protestant Church had nothing to do with issues of race or slavery, and everything to do with issues of church governance. The era of Andrew Jackson and the expansion of the franchise to more common people mobilized some Methodist to support more democracy in their church. Throughout the period from 1820 to 1828 the Methodist Episcopal Church successful fought off attempts to implement democratic reform on issues of church governance and church decision making. At the General Conference of 1828 the Methodist Episcopal Church closed the door on reform, and in the process of doing so alienated the proponents of reform.[16] Over the next two years the groundwork for a schism would be laid throughout American Methodism. The Methodist Protestant Church was officially formed in 1830 and brought with it many democratic reforms, but not nearly as many as some would have liked. The Methodist Protestant Church would have no bishops, laity gained equal representation to clergy at annual conferences, and there were some controls placed on ministerial appointments.[17] This schism was perhaps the worst in American Methodism, because it did not have to do with issues of race or regional difference which offer a clear line demarcation. This schism, though small relative to the size of the Methodist Episcopal

[15] Norwood, 173.
[16] Ibid., 178-182.
[17] Ibid., 182.

Church, was the culmination of a volatile and damaging decade for the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The fourth denomination to separate from the Methodist Episcopal Church was the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (M.E.C.S.). The General Conference of 1844 was the flashpoint for this separation. At this General Conference a resolution was passed that asked Bishop James Andrew of Georgia to essentially take a leave of absence until he could determine a way to terminate his ownership of two slaves that he had inherited from his wife upon her death. This decision by the General Conference led to the adoption of an outline for how a separation due to the issue of slavery should be carried out.[18] The separation was not implemented until the southern Methodists met in Louisville, Kentucky in 1845 where the formation of the M.E.C.S. was approved. The following year the new Methodist denomination met for their first General Conference in Petersburg, Virginia, a city where less than twenty years later some of the bloodiest fighting of the Civil War would take place.[19]

Following the Civil War the two Methodist Episcopal Churches encountered great changes on the issues of race. The Methodist Episcopal Church expanded southward, serving 135,000 new members, of those 88,000 were African American.[20] In part because of the growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, but also due to the expansions of A.M.E. and A.M.E.Z. Churches into the South, the M.E.C.S. was losing African American members at a high rate. Additionally, the M.E.C.S. began to abandon its evangelistic programs to African Americans following the Civil War in part due to the

[18] Ibid., 198-199.
[19] Ibid., 205-207.
[20] Ibid., 246.

prolific evangelism by the African American and northern Methodists. However, the abandonment of African American evangelistic programs was also rooted in the desire to maintain the southern social order, despite the fact that slavery had been abolished.[21] By 1870 and the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (C.M.E.), the M.E.C.S. had lost nearly all of its African American members. The C.M.E. Church was formed in 1870 by the remaining African American members of the M.E.C.S. with the cooperation, encouragement, and support of the M.E.C.S.[22] While the M.E.C.S. was becoming a nearly all white denomination, the Methodist Episcopal Church was becoming a church segregated along racial lines. The Methodist Episcopal Church created annual conferences composed of solely African American congregations. These annual conferences overlaid the geographical annual conferences that white congregations would belong to.[23] This created a situation where you could have two Methodist Episcopal Churches in the same community, the only difference being race, belonging to different annual conferences and having different bishops.

Methodism continued to grow throughout the nineteenth century in all parts of the United States. This period of growth also saw increased cooperation between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the M.E.C.S. The two churches cooperated in missionary activity, as well as publishing.[24] It was this increase in general cooperation between the two major branches of American Methodism that led to discussions of reunification of the two denominations. However, it was not until 1916 that formal

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[21] Ibid., 252.
[22] Othal Hawthorne Lakey, "The History of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church," Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, December 10, 2015, http://www.thecmechurch.org/history.htm (accessed April 17, 2016).
[23] Morris L. Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 4.
[24] Ibid., 27.

discussions on unification began between the denominations with the creation of the Joint Commission on Unification.[25] One of the main issues of disagreement during the negotiations between the two denominations would be the status of African Americans within the new church. During the negotiations the M.E.C.S. delegation argued for the exclusion of African Americans from this new church, just as the M.E.C.S. had done after the Civil War with nearly all of its African American members. The Methodist Episcopal Church was willing to compromise to some extent on the race issue, but opposed the M.E.C.S. on removing African Americans from their denomination. The compromise agreement that was reached called for the General Conference to be an all-white body, with "Associate General Conferences" to be created to represent various racial and foreign groups of Methodists.[26] This agreement by the Joint Commission proposed to build segregation into the very fabric of a new, united Methodist Church.

Despite the work of the Joint Commission on Unification during the period from 1916 to 1920 the three predominantly white branches of American Methodism, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the M.E.C.S., and the Methodist Protestant Church, would not merge until 1939. During the renewed negotiations on union, the M.E.C.S. argued that African Americans Methodists would be better served joining with a unified church composed of the C.M.E., A.M.E., and A.M.E.Z. Churches. The M.E.C.S. proposal for unification would have left two major American Methodists denominations: one white, and one black.[27] Despite opposition from the M.E.C.S., the Methodist Episcopal Church was unwilling to desert their African American members and pushed for a plan that

[25] Ibid., 48.
[26] Ibid., 79.
[27] Norwood, 408.

included both races in the new denomination. The compromise plan that was created was only marginally better than the Associate General Conference plan proposed twenty years earlier. The new plan called for the creation of six Jurisdictions, five based on geography and one based on race. This plan was reluctantly accepted by the Methodist Episcopal Church because it helped to accomplish the goal of unification. African Americans within the Methodist Episcopal Church were divided on the issue because while the jurisdictional structure did weave segregation into the fabric of the new denomination, the structure allowed some autonomy and self-governance for African Americans within the new denomination.[28] One example of some good that could come out of the jurisdictional system was that each jurisdiction would have their own quadrennial conference that would be responsible for the election of bishops. This meant that the Central Jurisdiction, the name given to the African American jurisdiction, would be allowed to elect African American bishops. These bishops would have full rights on the Council of Bishops of the newly formed church, just as any white bishop would.[29]

So it was in Kansas City, Missouri that the Methodist Church was officially formed when the Uniting Conference met there in 1939. It was at this conference where the Central Jurisdiction was created, causing many African American delegates to silently protest the merger while most of their white colleagues celebrated with the hymn "Marching to Zion."[30] It was under this segregated system that the Methodist Church would enter the Civil Rights Movement in 1954.

[28] Ibid., 407-408.
[29] Ibid., 408-409.
[30] Davis, 1-2.

The Methodist Church moved towards the Civil Rights Movement as a denomination deeply divided on issues of race. Despite this division, it was clear that a majority of Methodist were at least willing to support desegregation and an end to discrimination within the church. This support was initially shown through nonbinding statements, such as this excerpt from the *Discipline* that said that the church should "…resolutely set about achieving a Christian brotherhood in the church that will be free from racial discrimination and segregation."[31] It was this cautious tone that would come to be the official stance of the Methodist Church in the years to come. The church would support integration and civil rights through words, if not always through deeds.

One example of the cautious, progressive stance the church frequently took is found in the 1954 North Carolina Annual Conference Journal which states:

> The decision of the Supreme Court with regard to segregation in the public schools has presented all of us with a new situation. We recognize that the practical application of this decision in North Carolina involves real difficulties and dangers. But we believe that this decision is a true interpretation of our Christian faith and of our American democracy; and we confess both as a church and as individual Christians that by our failure to face seriously the teachings of the Gospel on the question, we have contributed to the difficulties and dangers.[32]

This statement by the Board of Social and Economic Relations of the North Carolina Annual Conference was a progressive view considering the time it was written. Not only is it impressive that this could be written by group of white southerners, but that the statement was adopted by a vote of the North Carolina Annual Conference as a part of the report of the Board of Social and Economic Relations. Some would see that statement as a fairly radical call for Methodists, and all Christians, to accept integration as conforming

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[31] *Journal of the North Carolina Annual Conference: Southeastern Jurisdiction of The Methodist Church 1954*, ed. W. Carleton Wilson (Raleigh, N.C.: 1954), 172.
[32] Ibid., 172.

to Christian beliefs and standards.[33] But the statement was pragmatic in is construction, just as the statement from the *Discipline* was.

During these early phases of the Civil Rights Movement the Methodist Youth Fellowship and the Methodist Student Movement frequently took more openly progressive stands on issues. For example, the Annual Conference Session (ACS) of the Methodist Youth Fellowship passed a resolution supporting the integration of public schools. When the President of the Methodist Youth Fellowship, Belton Joyner, presented this resolution to the Annual Conference later that year it received a mixed response from the delegates. According to Joyner, some delegates thanked him for what the youth had done, while others told him "someday you'll understand why we feel differently."[34] Later, when Joyner was attending Duke University the Methodist Student Movement (MSM) made attempts to build relationships with African Americans in Durham. Joyner noted that students from Duke would work with Asbury Temple, an African American Methodist congregation, as an "intentional effort to try to get us in touch with persons of other racial experiences, though the university itself was not integrated at that time."[35] It would be these youth and college students from the early 1950s, who would go on to help push the Methodist Church in a more racially inclusive direction.

Despite many progressive voices within the Methodist Church on racial issues, there were still many within the church who opposed integration. For example, on December 12, 1954 two North Carolina Methodist Churches approved resolutions that

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[33] Ibid., 62.
[34] F. Belton Joyner Jr., interview by author, Bethany United Methodist Church, March 2, 2016.
[35] Ibid.

opposed integration. In addition to opposing integration the resolution attacked the Council of Bishops and other Methodists when it said:

> We, who make up the majority in The Methodist Church, have been inclined during these latter years, to follow a course of passive resistance, and to allow our bishops, along with the impractical idealists within our church to speak for the whole church. For years, our Sunday school and other literature, has been contaminated with the racial integration.[36]

This resolution is a prime example of the deep division that the Methodist Church faced on issues of race and integration. The more conservative forces within the church, particularly those form the Southeastern Jurisdiction, would soon begin to fight back more vigorously against the denomination's official positions and actions on racial issues.

The Methodist Church began to descend into open conflict over racial issues during the late 1950s. The main theatre of battle was a familiar one: the Central Jurisdiction. By August of 1955 over twenty annual conferences within the Methodist Church had passed resolutions calling for the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction.[37] The Civil Rights Movement was illuminating the deep sectional divisions within the Methodist Church that were never fully addressed during unification in 1939. In response to the calls for the abolition of the Central Jurisdiction, the College of Bishops of the Southeastern Jurisdiction released a statement defending the jurisdictional system. Specifically the bishops claimed that the Central Jurisdiction had been good for African Americans within the Methodist Church and that abolishing it would "not be progress."[38] Just over a century had passed since the Methodist Episcopal Church had divided over

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[36] "Two Quarterly Conferences Adopt Segregation Resolution," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, January 13, 1955, 7.
[37] "Resolutions Show Danger, Threatens Methodist Union," *North Carolina Christian Advocate,* August 18, 1955, 3.
[38] Arthur J. Moore, et al., "Statement by College of Bishops," editorial, *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, February 17, 1955, 5.

the sectional issue of slavery and the possibility that the church could face another racially charged schism was rising. In response to the College of Bishops of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, the Methodist Student Movement adopted a resolution opposing the bishops' statement. Sadly, it was not event that simple because a small group of southern members of the Methodist Student Movement released a resolution supporting the bishops' statement.[39] The Methodist Church was beginning to have a very public war of words that would inflame sectional divisions for the better part of the next decade.

1956 was an important year for the Methodist Church, as it was a General Conference year. At General Conference the delegates attempted to come to an agreement to deal with the Central Jurisdiction. The General Conference took two actions regarding the jurisdictional system. The first was to establish a commission to study the jurisdictional system, a very Methodist thing to do. The second proposal allowed churches from the Central Jurisdiction to be transferred into one of the geographical jurisdictions, only where both jurisdictions involved supported the transfer by a two-thirds vote. This proposal required changes to the church's constitution, so it required the approval of at least two-thirds of the annual conferences in the Methodist Church.[40] Southerners tended to be amenable to this plan because it did not force them to accept churches from the Central Jurisdiction. Bishop Costen Harrell, of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, summarized the southern position when he said "it leaves the question of racial relations to be answered in every instance by the people concerned and

[39] "Student Group Differs on Jurisdiction, Segregation," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, March 3, 1955, 9.
[40] "What the General Conference Did," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, May 17, 1956, 2.

at the place where the question is raised."[41] This statement effectively shows that the Methodist dispute over jurisdictions was not all that different from the dispute over states' rights that was occurring during the same time. It highlights the deep differences in thought and approach to governance, both secular and religious, between the South and the rest of the country. In many ways, the disputes within the Methodist Church regarding racial and sectional issues were a microcosm of the nation as a whole during this period.

The Methodist Church was not only facing sectional divisions, but divisions between clergy and laity. A 1957 survey of Methodists in Indiana bear out this division in no uncertain terms. Not even five percent of Methodist clergy who were polled supported segregation in the Church. Conversely, nearly half of the laity polled supported segregation in the Church.[42] Setting aside the fact that almost half of the laity polled in a northern state supported segregated churches, the divide between clergy and laity is a wide one. An example of the divides within the Methodist Church were evident at Jonesboro Heights Methodist Church in Sanford, North Carolina in 1964. Rev. Vernon Tyson, the pastor of Jonesboro Heights, invited Dr. Samuel Proctor to preach on Race Relations Sunday. Dr. Proctor was African American and was president of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College.[43] This invitation caused great trauma to the members of Jonesboro Heights and the Sanford community. The invitation of Dr. Proctor caused the situation to deteriorate to such a point that Rev. Tyson felt unsafe in his own home. He said "when I had Dr. Proctor I called the police department and said I

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[41] "Our Bishops Make Statements," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, May 17, 1956, 3.
[42] "Segregation Loses Out in Poll of Methodist Ministers," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, June 20, 1957, 7.
[43] Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004), 73.

had been getting threatening calls and I've gotten some threatening mail. I said I would not care if you'd come by my house several times during the night."[44] This event just shows how these differing opinions on issues of race relations could divided a congrigation. Despite the great uproar of some, the church administrative board vote comfortably, twenty-five to fourteen, to support Rev. Tyson and have Dr. Proctor come to preach.[45]

Not only were there disputes between clergy and laity, but there also were disputes among the clergy. Belton Joyner, the former President of the North Carolina Methodist Youth Fellowship, attended seminary at Drew University in New Jersey. Upon his return from seminary he was appointed to start a new church in Wilmington, North Carolina. He recalled a conversation he had with his district superintendent:

> I finished seminary and the district superintendent was riding me around showing me the area and tried to be real casual about it, but wasn't terribly casual, and said 'now you've been up north in school, were glad you came back but you know they have some different ways up there than we do around here. Just sort of keep in mind that the races around here don't always get along… that was in 1961.[46]

This exchange does not necessarily mean that the district superintendent did not believe that segregation was wrong. It does however, give an example of the situation in North Carolina at the time. More than that, it shows that the Methodist Church was reluctant in some cases to put pressure on local churches to deal with issues of race and integration. Sadly, the bishops and district superintendents were not always willing to back up their official statements with substantive action.

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[44] Vernon C. Tyson, interview by author, Raleigh, N.C. January 30, 2016.
[45] Tyson, 77-78.
[46] Joyner.

According to Rev. Bill Gattis, knowing that a bishop or a district superintendent will support a pastor who is making tough decisions is important for that pastor. The reason, according to Gattis, that this is so important is because it gives a pastor certainty.[47] Certainty is key in the Methodist system because of itineracy, clergy are appointed by a bishop to one year appointments and while it is normal for pastors to stay four to eight years, during the Civil Rights Movement racial controversy could result in a pastor being moved sooner than expected. Gattis explained further, "we have a polity that relies upon the supervisor to support us and advocate for us… and sadly over recent history of the South we haven't had that."[48]

Instead of the bishop leaving a pastor in a church where there has been conflict, what is more likely to happen is that the pastor will be moved. One pastor during this period accepted an African American family into membership of the church he was serving. This resulted in serious conflict in the church and so the pastor was moved. And, according to Rev. Gray Southern who was a youth at the church where the pastor was moved to, the pastor's new appointment was "by any standard of judgement where he wound up would have to be considered, in the eyes of the world, a promotion."[49] In some ways the pastors were supported by the church structure by being offered protection by the itinerate system. In other cases they were not only protected, but rewarded with better appointments. However, this often left churches in an odd situation. The church is not asked to change its position on issues of civil rights and racial reconciliation, instead they are allowed to feel as though it has in some ways defeated the pastor and forced him

[47] William H. Gattis, interview by author, Edenton Street United Methodist Church, Raleigh, N.C. February 29, 2016.
[48] Ibid.
[49] H. Gray Southern, interview by author, Apex United Methodist Church, Apex, N.C. March 2, 2016.

to move. So while the pastor is rewarded for their attempt to do the right thing in the eyes of the bishop and the denomination, the church is allowed to continue to hold positions that go directly against the stated beliefs of the United Methodist Church.

Despite all of the divisions and fissures within the Methodist Church on Civil Rights the church was making progress. The changes in society during the 1960s such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, school integration truly getting underway, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 all allowed the supporters of the Civil Rights Movement within the church to push the denomination in a more progressive direction. In some ways the northern and western parts of the church were pushing the southern parts of the church in a more progressive direction. However, there were many in the South who wished to move the church in a more progressive direction on issues of race. One of these men was Rev. W. Junius Neese, a pastor in North Carolina. In 1964 he served a congregation in Roanoke Rapids, N.C. On February 9, 1964 he delivered a sermon on Race Relations Sunday, a special day that the Methodist Church had set aside to collect a special offering to go towards strengthening race relations.[50] On this Sunday, Rev. Neese delivered a sermon titled "The Brotherhood of Man." In the sermon, Rev. Neese spoke out against racism, prejudice, and stereotyping. He said "do we Southerners really love the Negro….we really are kidding ourselves when we say, 'I love you, but I don't want you in my school, my golf course, my office, my church.'"[51] Rev. Neese was criticizing what he saw as hypocrisy for Christians to simultaneously say that they love their neighbor, and then hold segregationist views. Rev. Neese continued:

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[50] "Race Relations Sunday," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, January 30, 1964, 4.
[51] W. Junius Neese, "The Brotherhood of Man" (sermon, First Methodist Church, Roanoke Rapids, N.C., February 9, 1964).

> From the point of view of the segregationist, he is trying to preserve the status quo – because of prejudices. We fear painful social change. The problems which come when negroes pour out of their ghettoes into formerly white residential neighborhoods are very real. This gives rise to racism – and the greatest danger of all is not really racism which is running rampant – but that racism becomes a part of our faith: if we defend white supremacy in God's name."[52]

Rev. Neese spoke out in a way that today might not be considered politically correct, but he spoke out in a way that was rare in this period in the South. He articulated the concern of many Christians, and many Methodists, of this time: that their faith was being used to defend something that they saw as heinous, racism.

At the General Conference of 1964, the Methodist Church voted to abolish the Central Jurisdiction. The vote called for a commission to present a plan to incorporate the churches of the Central Jurisdiction into the geographical jurisdictions to the 1968 General Conference.[53] However, this plan adopted by the 1964 General Conference would be fast forwarded. In 1968 the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren (E.U.B.). The E.U.B. were the descendants of German speaking Wesleyans who formed their own denominations in the late eighteenth century. The discussions between the two denominations had been ongoing since 1960, but the terms of the merger took quite some time to be negotiated.[54] It was though, at the Uniting Conference in Dallas, Texas that the United Methodist Church was finally formed.[55] A part of the negotiations dealt with the Central Jurisdiction. The E.U.B. would not take part in a merger if the segregated Central Jurisdiction remained. So, the timeline for

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[52] Ibid.
[53] "Conference Votes to Abolish Central Jurisdiction," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, May 7, 1964, 6.
[54] Norwood, 426-427.
[55] "The Scene Is Here Set for the Final Act of Union," *North Carolina Christian Advocate*, May 9, 1968, 1.

abolishing the Central Jurisdiction was expedited, and when the United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 only geographical jurisdictions remained.[56]

This new church was formed at the end of one of the most tumultuous decades in the history of the United States. The task before United Methodists was a large one: the church needed to move past desegregating society and towards reconciliation between the races. In 1971 Rev. Neese again used Race Relations Sunday to forcefully and openly address race relations. Now, at a different church, Neese said "as Christian people concerned about bettering human relations, we must do all we can for better race relations…. This cannot be handled by the subjugation of one race of the other – but only by reconciliation of people across racial lines…."[57] Rev. Neese directly addressed the need for the races to come together as equals to address the problems that both races faced. He also stated bluntly to his congregation that "in most cases blacks are seeking those things we have long taken for granted."[58] Neese was saying to a congregation that was if not exclusively white, certainly nearly all white, that African Americans were not seeking to get special treatment for themselves, but only to be treated as equals.

In the United Methodist Church, the Central Jurisdiction no longer existed on paper, but sadly in practice it remained. According to Rev. Bill Gattis "if you were a person of color, there was clearly a ceiling as to how far you'd go and it would be only to the largest, or to be quite honest, the highest paying African American church in the conference."[59] This was the new normal for some time in the United Methodist Church

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[56] Joyner.
[57] W. Junius Neese, "The Healing of Broken Relationships" (sermon, Haymount United Methodist Church, Fayetteville, N.C., February 14, 1971).
[58] Ibid.
[59] Gattis.

in the South. Despite the fact that the church was no longer officially segregated the church remained in a state of de facto segregation. Generally, if there was to be a pastor of a church that was primarily a different race than their own, it was a white pastor serving an African American congregation.[60]

Even into the 1980s racial tension existed within United Methodist Churches. Rev. Gray Southern recalled being "accosted by a couple of people and functionally dressed down by a couple of people" when an African American United Methodist pastor was invited to speak at a revival.[61] This was not the only racially charged incident that Rev. Southern recalled during his ministry. He also recounted the concerns of some church members regarding the possibility of interracial dating because the church's United Methodist Youth Fellowship included African Americans.[62] The United Methodist Church had come a long way on issues of race, but it still obviously had a long way to go.

Even into the twenty-first century, the United Methodist Church encountered issues of race relations. Until the mid-2000s churches were solicited for whether or not they would accept a pastor who was a minority. Rev. Bill Gattis recalled:

> I remember the discussion at the Cabinet because we looked at those forms every year before they were released and sent out to everybody. And I remember some of us saying, 'you know [the Central Jurisdiction] has long passed, we are a United Methodist Church. We are in covenant with our brothers and sisters regardless of whether they are Asian, African, or Hispanic. Are we still giving churches a chance to really answer that?'[63]

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[60] Ibid.
[61] Southern.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Gattis.

The North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church gave churches the option to express whether or not they would accept the appointment of a member of the clergy who was of color into the twenty-first century. That is unbelievable, particularly considering in 2016 the episcopal candidate from the North Carolina Conference in an African American pastor.

The United Methodist Church, and its predecessors, have had a long and thoroughly complicated history on issues of race and civil rights. The early Methodist movement firmly opposed slavery and was, to some extent, an integrated movement. Sadly, this was not maintained and the Methodist Episcopal Church lost African American members because of discrimination and alienation by white Methodists. The church divided over slavery, and remained divided along sectional lines until 1939. To this day there remains three separate branches of American Methodism that are predominately black. During the Civil Rights Movement there were many within the church that supported the movement, but it was difficult for a church that was so bitterly divided on the issue take much of a leading role. Not to mention the fact that the church remained officially segregated until 1968. Perhaps the most disheartening thing, is that it took decades for the United Methodist Church in North Carolina to completely rid itself of de facto segregation as it pertained to ministerial appointments. However, the fact remains that the church has overcome many racial issues to become a more united and inclusive church.

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