

OUR BELIEFS

United Methodist preaching and teaching is grounded in Scripture, informed by Christian tradition, enlivened in personal experience, and tested by reason. United Methodists are part of the larger Christian faith and affirm all of the historic beliefs of the faith as articulated in the historic creeds of the church. We affirm the God of Israel who has been decisively revealed in Jesus of Nazareth and continues to be present and at work in our lives in the form of the Holy Spirit. This understanding of God is known as the Trinity. We believe that God has been revealed through the Bible, and especially through the witness of the New Testament.

Scripture – The holy Bible is our primary source for Christian doctrine. Biblical authors testify to God’s self-disclosure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as in God’s work of creation, in the pilgrimage of Israel, and in the Holy Spirit’s ongoing activity in human history.

Tradition – Our attempt to understand God does not start anew with each generation or each person. Our faith also does not leap from New Testament times to the present as though nothing could be learned from all Christian thinkers and preachers in between. We learn from traditions found in many cultures, but Scripture remains the norm by which all traditions are judged.

Experience – In our theological task, we examine experience, both personal and church-wide, to confirm the realities of God’s grace attested in Scripture. Experience is the personal appropriation of God’s forgiving and empowering grace. Experience authenticates in our own lives the truths revealed in Scripture and preserved in tradition.

Reason – Although we recognize that God’s revelation and our experiences of God’s grace continually surpass the scope of reason, we also believe that disciplined theological work calls for the careful use of reason. By reason we read and interpret Scripture. By reason we determine whether our Christian witness is clear. By reason we ask questions of faith and seek to understand God’s action and will.

A Triune God

With Christians of other communions, we believe in a triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe in God’s self-revelation as three distinct but inseparable parts.

The Father – We believe in one true, holy, and living God who is creator, sovereign and preserver of all things visible and invisible. God is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and love, and rules with gracious regard for the well-being and salvation of all people.

The Son – We believe that God is best known in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. He is the source and measure of all valid Christian teaching. We believe in the mystery of salvation in and through the redeeming love of God found in the teachings of Jesus, in his resurrection, and in his promised return. The Son is the Word of the Father and one substance with the Father, Through him we are forgiven and reconciled to God.

The Holy Spirit – We believe that God's love is realized in human life by the activity of the Holy Spirit, both in our personal lives and in the church. The Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is a constant presence in our lives, whereby we find strength and help in time of need. The Spirit comforts, sustains, and empowers us.

God's Grace

By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as "prevenient grace," continues in "justifying grace," and is brought to fruition in "sanctifying grace in the life of the believer."

In spite of suffering, violence, and evil, we assert that God's grace is present everywhere. Despite our brokenness, we remain creatures brought into being by a just and merciful God. The reign of God is both a present and a future reality.

God summons us to repentance, pardons us, receives us by grace given to us in Jesus Christ and gives us hope of life eternal.

Justification and New Birth

In justification we are, through faith, forgiven our sins and restored to God's favor. This process of justification and new birth is often referred to as conversion. Such a change may be sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. In either case it marks a new beginning, yet it is also part of an ongoing process.

We believe God reaches out to the repentant believer in justifying grace with accepting and pardoning love.

Sanctification and Perfection

We hold that the wonder of God's acceptance and pardon does not end God's saving work, which continues to nurture our growth in grace. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to increase in the knowledge and love of God and in love for our neighbor.

Faith and Good Works

We see God's grace and human activity working together in the relationship of faith and good works. God's grace calls for human response and discipline. Faith is the only response essential for salvation. However, salvation evidences itself in good works. Both faith and good works belong within an all-encompassing theology of grace, since they stem from God's gracious love.

Personal salvation always involves service to the world. Personal faith, witness to that faith, and social action are mutually reinforcing.

The Sacraments

We believe there are two sacraments, ordained by Christ as symbols and pledges of God's love for us—Baptism and Communion.

Baptism – Entrance into the church is acknowledged in Baptism and may include persons of all ages. Baptism is followed by nurture and awareness of the baptized of Christ's claim upon their lives. For persons baptized as children, this claim is ratified by the baptized in confirmation, where the pledge of Baptism is accepted.

Communion – While we believe the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the suffering and death of Christ and a symbol of the union Christians have with Christ and with one another, we also believe that Christ is spiritually present in the elements of Communion. All persons, regardless of age and regardless of church affiliation, are invited to the table of our Lord.