

## John Wesley Information Sheet

1703 – 17<sup>th</sup> June, born at Epworth in Lincolnshire, the 7<sup>th</sup> of 10 surviving children to Rev. Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel was a Church of England minister, and Susanna a well-educated woman whose father was a dissenter. Dissenters did not subscribe to the Church of England.

1714 – Started at Charterhouse School in London

1720 – Started at Oxford University, Christ Church College, studying classics and logic.

1728 – Ordained an Anglican minister (Church of England)

1735 – Leaves England to travel to Savanna in colonial America. He is tasked with helping to set up churches in the area. He goes with his brother Charles.

1737 – Leaves America, the time there was not successful and he returns feeling lost

1738 – 24<sup>th</sup> May, John Wesley's 'conversion'. This day is celebrated by Methodists as Wesley Day, the day when John's faith became about his heart and soul, not just his mind.

1739 – New Room opened in Bristol, it is the oldest surviving Methodist building in the world.

1739 – Foundry Chapel in London opened in a former Cannon Foundry. Both the New Room and Foundry Chapel acted as much more than chapels, including provision of food, medicine, clothing and education to those most in need.

1744 – First Conference of Methodists held

1751 – John Wesley marries Mary 'Molly' Vazeille. The marriage is not a happy one and ends in separation in 1771.

1778 – Wesley's Chapel opens in London and a year later in 1779, John Wesley moves into the House on site.

1784 – John Wesley ordains two ministers, Thomas Coke and Frances Asbury, and sends them to work in the newly independent states of America. This is seen as a final split with the Church of England as Wesley has no authority to do this. It causes a deep rift between him and his brother Charles; Charles was keen to keep the movement within the Church of England.

1791 – John Wesley dies at his home in London, aged 87.

## What's the difference between Methodism and the Church of England?

### Structure

The structure of the Methodist Church is different, the Methodist Church is connexional. The connexional structure means the whole church acts and decides together. Individual Methodist churches are organised into circuits (which are supervised by a Superintendent Minister) and circuits then form a district, like the London District. All districts come together at Conference level (national). Each year people gather at Conference to discuss policy for the Methodist Church and it is Conference that agrees policy for the Methodist Church. Each year at Conference a new President and Vice President are elected, who oversee the whole church.

### Less Hierarchy

There are no Bishops in the Methodist Church in the UK. There are Bishops, however, in the Methodist Church in America. There are many lay preachers in the Methodist Church. John Wesley also approved of female preachers (although not ordaining women).

### Worship

One thing that made John Wesley and some of his contemporaries, like George Whitfield, stand out was their use of outdoor preaching. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this was seen as very controversial. It was this type of practice that many disagreed with, on the other hand, outdoor preaching appealed to poorer people in society as it removed the need to go into a church, which could be intimidating.

A lot of the sacraments are the same as the Church of England, such as Baptism and Holy Communion. Theologically, Methodism and the Church of England are similar.

Hymns are also a very important part of Methodist worship; Charles Wesley was a prolific hymn writer, writing over 6,000 in his lifetime.

## What did John believe?

Theologically, John was an Arminian (belief in the possibility of salvation for all, free will and not pre-destination), rather than a Calvinist (belief in predestination, only some can be saved). Methodists have always been clear that no-one is beyond the reach of God's love. Salvation is there for everyone who turns to God, and not just for a chosen few.

John Wesley maintained he was an Anglican (CofE) right up until he died, but by this time he had largely departed from the Church of England.

## Do Methodists drink alcohol?

All Methodist Churches are dry, which means alcohol is not allowed on site. Non-alcoholic wine is used for Holy Communion. John Wesley did drink alcohol, but warned against excessive consumption, especially of spirits. The main movement to teetotalism was in the Victorian period, when many Methodists were concerned about the effects of alcohol on families. Today, total abstinence is seen as a matter of personal choice and not a pre-requisite of membership.

For more information see our website:

<http://www.wesleysheritage.org.uk/>

And our sister site for Wesley's Chapel and Leysian Mission:

<https://www.wesleyschapel.org.uk/>

For more information about the Methodist Church, please see the website below:

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/>

John Wesley spent a lot of time in Bristol, and his brother Charles lived there for many years with his family. The New Room in Bristol is the oldest Methodist building in the world, and the scene of John Wesley's anti-slavery sermon, which caused a riot. Please see their website for more information about the site:

<https://www.newroombristol.org.uk/>