**We are a mission-oriented family on a journey of following Jesus in the Wesleyan tradition.**

In the past several months, we have established that the reason for our existence at St. Paul’s encompasses making “disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” In order to carry out this mission, we have launched the vision that we will be a **mission-oriented family on a journey of following Jesus in the Wesleyan tradition.**

We saw that being a “mission-oriented” church implies that we will be outward focused, reaching out to those beyond the walls of our church. But in looking outward, we do not neglect each other. Instead, we realize that we are a “family,” brothers and sisters who encourage and support one another. As a family, we commit to growing together as disciples of Jesus Christ. Being disciples entails a life-long process of following Jesus and being made more like him. But the last phrase of our vision statement indicates that our mission to the world, love for one another, and growth in discipleship takes place in the context of “the Wesleyan tradition.”

What does it mean to be “Wesleyan”? Of course, there’s no simple answer. The term “Wesleyan” denotes a rich tradition of beliefs, practices, and spirituality. This tradition arose from the impact of John and Charles Wesley. These eighteenth-century brothers were ordained clergymen in the Church of England, and they stoked a revival in England that eventually reached around the world.

John Wesley’s view of the Bible and general insight into the Christian faith and its practices are considered helpful by many today. The Wesleyan theological vision and the tradition’s practices inspire almost one-hundred million Christians. More than eighty denominations claim Wesley as their primary theological ancestor including the United Methodist Church (of course!), the Salvation Army, the Free Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Church (obviously!), and the Church of the Nazarene. Even amid diversity, Wesley scholar Henry H. Knight, III, contends that three quotations by John Wesley can help in defining what it means to be Wesleyan.

The first Wesley quote centers on core beliefs. Wesley wrote, ““Our main doctrines … are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account … the porch of religion; the next the door, the third, religion itself” (“The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained”). At times, Wesley used other terms such as original sin, justification, and sanctification, but the meaning if the same. This quote makes clear that “being saved,” or justification is the not the final of salvation, but the door to the goal. The goal entails growing in holiness to become like Jesus in our thoughts and actions. Salvation, then, is not just about going to heaven when we die. Salvation refers not only to our eternal destiny, but to our present transformation - here and now - by God. Grace pervades every step of the journey. God’s grace calls us to repentance, forgives us of our sin, and enables us to grow in Christlikeness. In a second quotation, Wesley described salvation’s goal when he wrote, “Entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, is neither more nor less than pure love - love expelling sin and governing both the heart and life of a child of God” (“Letter to Walter Churchey”). Wesley contended the salvation entails a process with the goal of restoring us to the image of God in which we were created. What does it mean to be in the image of God? It means to love as God loves. This love of God and neighbor takes root in our hearts with the new birth, grows and flourishes through sanctification, and governs our hearts with Christian perfection.

Again, it is God’s grace that enables us to grow in loving God and neighbor with all our hearts. To say that salvation is by grace alone means that it only come because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and because of what God does in us through the Holy Spirit. We must be receptive and responsive and cooperative with God’s grace if we are to grow in Christlikeness.

Early Methodists found encouragement and empowerment to respond to God’s grace through the Methodist discipline, or way of living. Wesley wrote that “nothing can be more simple … than the Methodist discipline. … Any person determined to save his own soul may be united … with them. But this desire must be evidenced by three marks: avoiding all known sin, doing good after his power, and attending all ordinances of God” (“On God’s Vineyard”). In avoiding sin, doing good, and being obedient to God’s ordinances, Methodists focused on the means of grace. These means entail both works of piety directed toward God and works of mercy directed toward neighbor. As they engaged in these means of grace - such as reading Scripture, prayer, fasting, worship, visiting the sick, feeding the hungry, and giving generously - the Holy Spirit worked through the Methodists to enable their growth in love.

God’s promise of a new life of love provided both motivation and direction for the Wesleyan movement. Wesley claimed that “God’s design” for the Methodists was “to spread scriptural holiness over the land” (“Minutes of Several Conversations”). Methodism thus had a twofold purpose. It was a renewal movement that sought to refocus the church on God and neighbor so that the church might manifest in its own life the love that God so richly manifested in Jesus Christ. It was also a missional movement that aimed to bring the good news of Jesus Christ and the new life Jesus offers to a world in need.

More could be said about being Wesleyan, but it must include at least these things. It is centered on a God of love who through Christ enables us to image that love in our hearts and lives. It provides spiritual discipline to enable us to remain open and responsive to God’s transforming grace. Finally, it motivates individuals to share this good news as we renew the church and reach out to people everywhere. It this way “in the Wesleyan tradition” defines the other phrases of our vision - we are “mission-oriented” sharing the good news with all, a “family” sharing God’s love with each other, and “on a journey of following Jesus” sharing in practices that help us to grow in God’s amazing grace.

Grace and peace.