

Claiming the Story

A Journey in Christian History for United Methodists

by James E. Miller

The history of Christianity is rich, complex, and long, often with many storylines continuing simultaneously. Some groups see aspects of these events in one way, some in another. What's true to a large extent in the entire Christian story is also true, though to a lesser extent, in the United Methodist story. Consequently, it's virtually impossible for such a history to be condensed into forty minutes of words and visuals without leaving out many significant details and significant nuances. I do not profess, therefore, that the history that's presented here is anywhere near complete. It's more like a series of glimpses or snapshots, each one true. But for the sake of brevity, many glimpses have been left out.

This history is also incomplete in another way. There were several places in the Christian journey where the road forked. Some folks felt strongly about the direction that should be chosen and went one way, and others felt just as strongly and chose another. As I created this resource, I intentionally followed only those forks that would lead eventually to the creation and development of the United Methodist Church. That means that whole movements and many important leaders are given no mention at all. I do not apologize for that, given the purpose of this audiovisual, but I do wish to acknowledge this fact.

THE DESIGN OF THIS DVD

Much of *Claiming the Story* appears as vignettes. A person's voice and a single thought is introduced, a word is added about this person's place in history, and some general facts and impressions are given to help round out the picture of what was happening at that point in time. By this means I've attempted to maintain the "story" aspect of the Christian saga through the years.

USING THIS PRESENTATION

Claiming the Story can be used in many different contexts and with a wide range of age groups. So rather than prepare a series of questions for you ask, I'll simply offer an overview of this audiovisual in outline form. From this outline and out of viewing the presentation yourself, you'll be able to lead the discussion in the way that best suits you and your group.

A GENERAL OUTLINE

Jesus's ministry on earth.
Death and resurrection of Jesus.
Followers gather after his death; Pentecost.
Apostles preaching.
Greek-speaking deacons called to assist, including Stephen.
Saul, who became Paul, opens gospel to the non-Jews.
Early Christians in small communities.
Persecutions begin under Nero, lasting 250 years, with many martyrdoms, including Ignatius.
Apologists, including Tertullian, defend Christianity as church begins to embrace organization.

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By end of 3rd century, four centers of Christianity: Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Rome, with a bishop or patriarch over each.

Patriarch of Rome, the capital city, assumes more authority, on the way to becoming pope of the world.

Church buildings grow, forms of worship solidified, New Testament formed.

Roman emperor Constantine becomes a Christian, ending persecutions.

Christianity becomes a favored religion.

Church councils convene, beginning with Council of Nicea, to settle religious disputes; seven major gatherings over 400 years.

Jerome takes up the movement of self-denial and desert living, which had started years before, leading to the development of monasticism, reaching full potential in 6th century.

Augustine becomes bishop of Hippo; in 427 completes *The City of God*, explaining Christianity's relationship to other major religions.

Roman Empire overrun; end of that empire in the West in 476.

During Dark and Middle Ages church gives structure to much of life; churches in villages with attending priests.

Roman, Latin-language church grows in the West as Orthodox, Greek-language church grows in East. (This will lead to their excommunicating one another in 1054.)

Growth of Islam; onslaughts against Christian territory; religious map re-drawn.

Charlemagne becomes emperor; revival of art and religion.

Succession of corrupt popes, decline of monastery life.

Pope Gregory VII and Gregorian Reform in 11th century, dealing with moral integrity and independence of clergy.

First cathedrals begun.

Pilgrimages instituted for religious observance.

Bernard of Clairvaux helps start Crusades, with few lasting results.

Francis of Assisi and growth of Franciscans.

Dominic and growth of Dominicans.

Friars as lifeblood of church in 14th and 15th centuries.

Hundred Years War, plague, fall of Constantinople to Moslems in 1453.

Martin Luther posts 95 Theses in 1517 against Pope Leo X's indulgences, advocates "sola scriptura."

Protestant movement grows: John Wycliffe in England, John Huss in Prague, Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland, John Calvin in France.

By end of 16th century Catholicism with allegiance to the pope and church tradition goes one way, Protestantism with emphasis on final authority of scripture and priesthood of all believers goes another.

Henry VIII begins reform of Church of England; English Reformation drops away from Catholicism.

Wanting more reformation, Puritans (and others) try to "purify" the church; move to Massachusetts.

Other Christian sects set up posts in other parts of America.

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One such outpost: John Wesley in Savannah; he was less than successful.
Wesley returns to London; Aldersgate experience.
Methodism grows as a movement in England.
Missionary preachers sent to colonies; lay preachers ordained; Thomas Coke made superintendent.
Methodist Episcopal Church begins in colonies, with Francis Asbury ordained as superintendent.
Phillip Otterbein and others form United Brethren in Christ.
Jacob Albright and others form the Evangelical Association, later the Evangelical Church.
Circuit riders take the gospel to the frontier, helping Methodism grow.
Methodism expands with churches, colleges, seminaries, hospitals, orphanages.
Division of Methodism during the Civil War into two churches, then reunited in 1939.
Evangelical Church merges with United Brethren in Christ in 1946 to become EUB Church.
EUBs and Methodists unite in 1968 to become United Methodists.
And the story goes on.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES BY WILLOWGREEN

John Wesley: The Proud Methodist, a DVD by James E. Miller. 27 minutes.

Sharing the Heritage: The History of United Methodism in America, a DVD by James E. Miller.
21 minutes.

Both are available at Willowgreen, Inc., 10351 Dawson's Creek Boulevard, Suite B, Fort Wayne, IN, 46825, by calling 260.490.2222 or by visiting www.willowgreen.com.