

(INTERIOR OF FETTER-LANE CHAPEL.)





Foundry Moorfields, Original Wesleyan Chapel.

## The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

This was the rise of the United Society, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than "a company of men having the *form* and seeking the *power* of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the leader. It is his duty:

1. To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order: (1) to inquire how their souls prosper; (2) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require; (3) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.
2. To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order: (1) to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reprov'd; (2) to pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*First:* By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

The taking of the name of God in vain.

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.

Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.

Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking things on usury—i.e., unlawful interest.

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:

The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.

Softness and needless self-indulgence.

Laying up treasure upon earth. Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them. It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,



*Secondly:* By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men: To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison. To their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that "we are not to do good unless *our hearts be free to it.*"

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them *falsely*, for the Lord's sake.

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

*Thirdly:* By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

The public worship of God.

The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.

The Supper of the Lord.

Family and private prayer.

Searching the Scriptures.

Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

## See Handout –John Wesley Part 6 #2

**Thursday, May 7.—I reminded the United Society that many of our brethren and sisters had not needful food; many were destitute of convenient clothing; many were out of business, and that without their own fault; and many sick and ready to perish: that I had done what in me lay to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to employ the poor, and to visit the sick; but was not, alone, sufficient for these things; and therefore desired all whose hearts were as my heart:**

- 1. To bring what clothes each could spare to be distributed among those that wanted most.**
- 2. To give weekly a penny, or what they could afford, for the relief of the poor and sick.**

**My design, I told them, is to employ for the present all the women who are out of business, and desire it, in knitting.**

**To these we will first give the common price for what work they do; and then add, according as they need. Twelve persons are appointed to inspect these and to visit and provide things needful for the sick. Each of these is to visit all the sick within her district every other day and to meet on Tuesday evening, to give an account of what she has done and consult what can be done further.**

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**See Handout –  
John Wesley Part 6 #2**



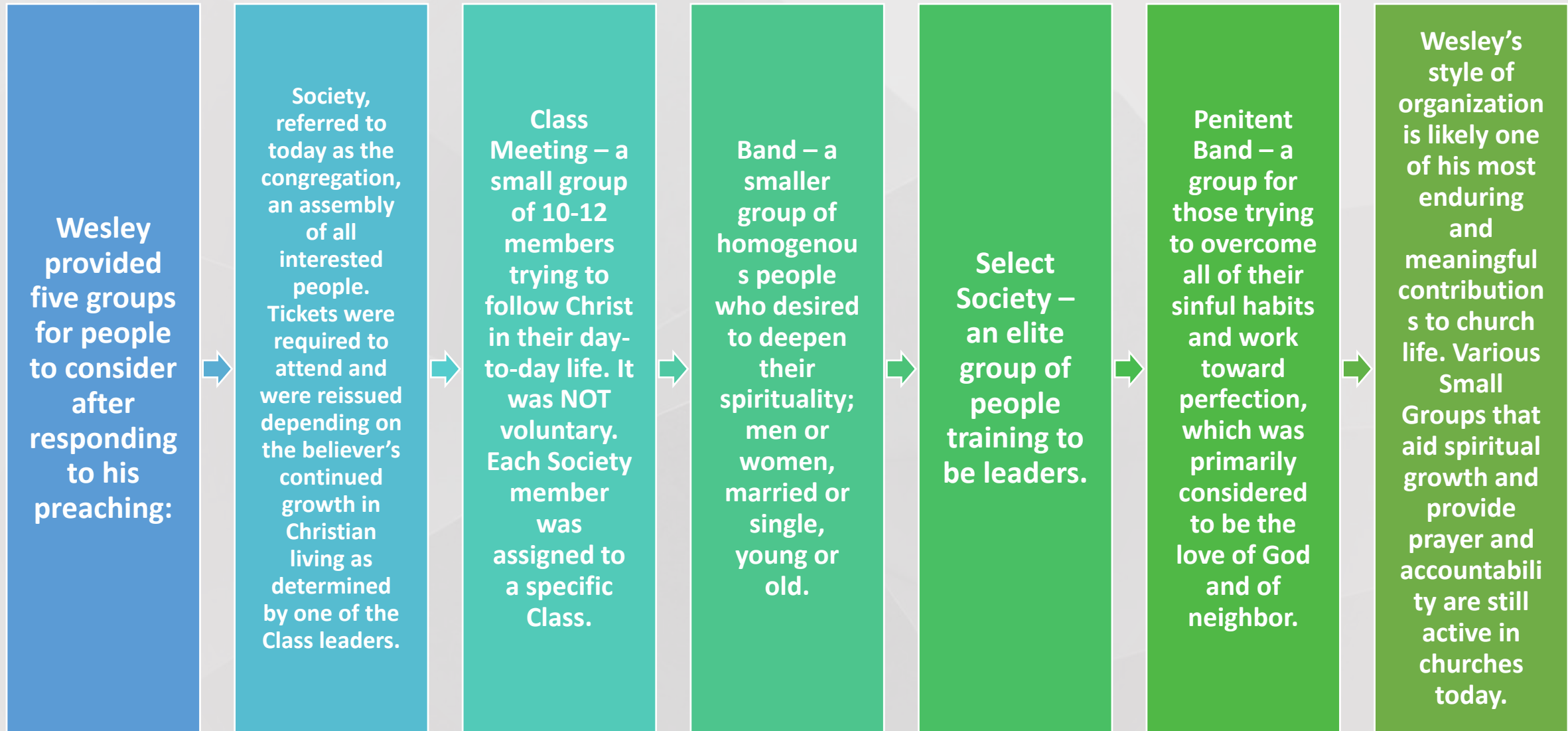
**Sunday, 13.—My ordinary employment in public was now as follows: Every morning I read prayers and preached at Newgate. Every evening I expounded a portion of Scripture at one or more of the societies. On Monday, in the afternoon, I preached abroad, near Bristol; on Tuesday, at Bath and Two Mile Hill alternately; on Wednesday, at Baptist Mills; every other Thursday, near Pensford; every other Friday, in another part of Kingswood; on Saturday in the afternoon, and Sunday morning, in the Bowling Green (which lies near the middle of the city); on Sunday, at eleven, near Hannam Mount; at two, at Clifton; and at five, on Rose Green. and hitherto, as my days so my strength hath been.**



- John Wesley rode as many as 20,000 miles each year on his circuit, preaching a spirit-filled message to all who would listen and winning over many souls at camp meetings. Methodists have always emphasized mission work stemming from a personal relationship with God.



## See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #3



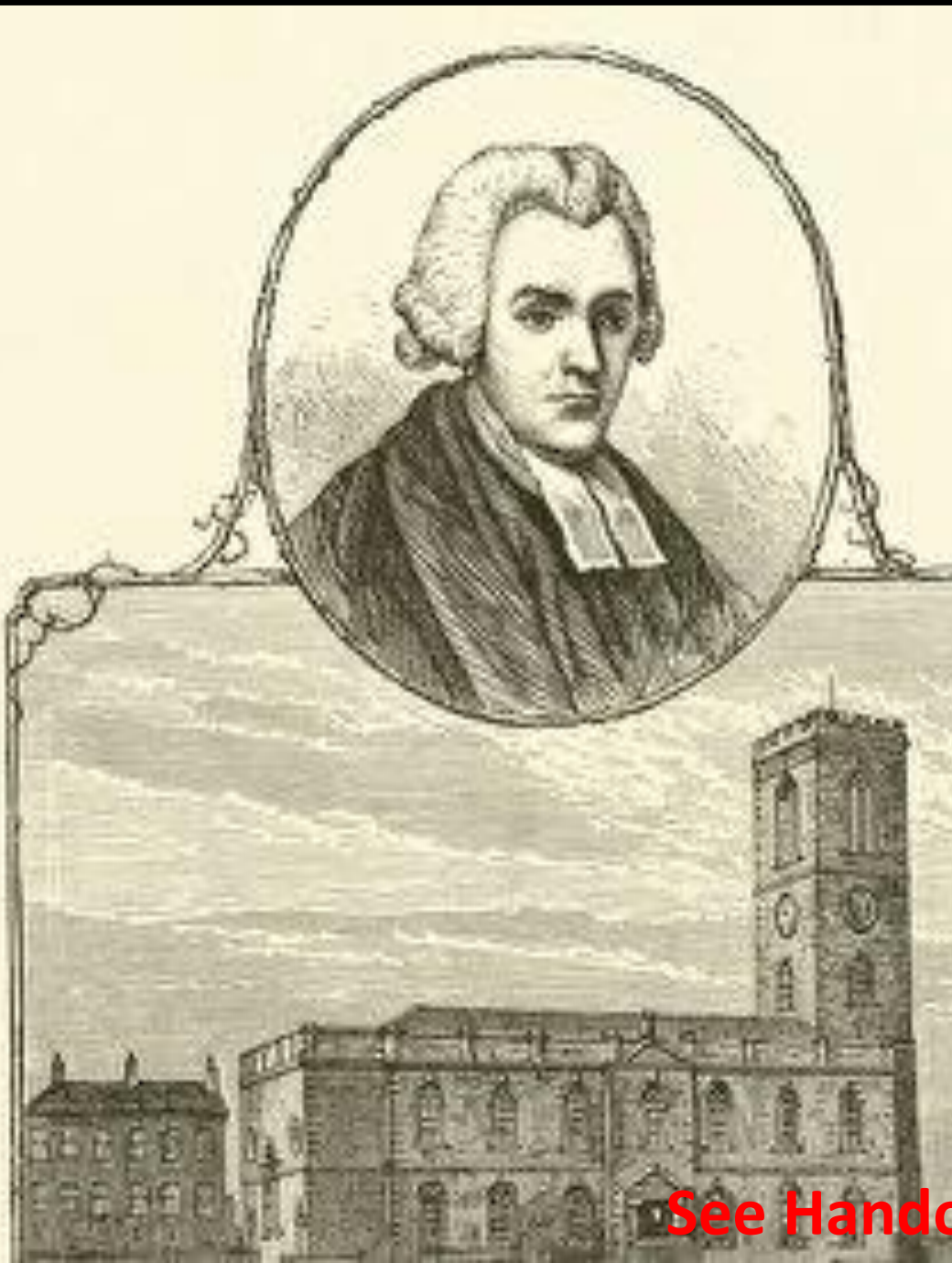




My mother was the source from which I derived the guiding principles of my life.

~ John Wesley

- In November, 1745 John proved his devotion for all followers of Christ, no matter the gender, when he appointed Grace Murray, a young widow in Newcastle, to take charge of the Methodist orphan house in his absence. Likely because of his mother and his college experience, Wesley viewed women as equals in many ways and encouraged them to grow in knowledge and faith.



**Soon after John opened a clinic in London at the foundry, the main Methodist location where poor people could see a doctor and receive medicine; opened a boarding school in Kingwood for the sons of Methodist preachers to educate a new generation of Methodists, and agreed to operate and oversee a day school for the coal miners' sons.**

**See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #4**



(THE FIRST DISPENSARY FOR THE POOR IN LONDON.)

In 1746 John started a fund to give short-term loans to poor Methodists. The loans were for one pound per person with a three-month payback period. In the first eighteen months, two hundred twenty-five people took advantage of the program. John encouraged everyone to reach out and help the poor.

**See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #4**



Though John and his brother, Charles, had sworn off marriage agreeing that a man can serve God better as a single man, Charles met a woman he considered a candidate for wife when he was forty years old. Sally Gwynne was twenty-three at the time and did not impress John when Charles introduced them. John was so unimpressed, in fact, that he drew up a list of candidates he felt were more suitable for Charles before he departed for a trip north.

**See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #4**





**Eventually John agreed that Sally was God's woman for Charles and on April 8, 1749 John officiated the nuptials of Charles and Sally.**



Finally in early 1751 John met Molly Vezeille, a forty-one-year-old widow with four grown children who nursed John back to health after he fell on a patch of ice and sprained his ankle. On February 19, 1751 they married, but barely one month later, John left to resume his life of active ministry.

In his absence he wrote Molly many letters, but she soon grew tired of the loneliness. Attempting to strengthen their marriage the following year, she left on a four-month trip to northern England and the Midlands with John, but after six weeks returned home to nurse her ill son.

**See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #4**



- In November, 1753 John contracted an infection in his lungs from preaching in freezing outdoor temperatures and was convinced he was going to die. Though he had experienced many victories and blessings of God, John seemed incapable of appreciating the thousands of souls who were saved, the poor ministered to, and the orphans loved and cared for as a result of his work.
- God had accomplished so much through him, yet John wrote the following epitaph for his tombstone:
- “Here Lieth the Body  
of JOHN WESLEY  
A brand plucked from the burning  
Who died of consumption in the fifty-first year of his  
age  
Not leaving after his debts are paid  
Ten pounds behind him.  
God be merciful to me, an unprofitable servant”
- Fortunately John did not die from the infection and began to preach again in March, 1754.

**See Handout John Wesley  
Part 6 #4**



J. Wesley Writes to W. Wilberforce





- In April, 1755 Molly made a second effort to accompany her husband on an extensive tour of the Midlands and northern England; but the travel proved to be too difficult for her. Sadly, John's marriage continued to deteriorate as he traveled and preached and Molly was left alone at home.
- When she reached the point of extreme disappointment, Molly took the money she inherited from her first husband and returned to an independent life.

**See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #4**





**See Handout John Wesley Part 6 #4**

- Though John continued to travel and preach, he never intended to be the founder of a new denomination outside of the Church of England. John preferred to be labeled a “reformer” within the existing state church. At the annual Methodist leaders’ conference in 1755 John outlined sixty-two reasons why societies should stay within the Church of England but also expressed four reasons that would serve as grounds to separate from them.
- His four reasons stated that Methodists should always be free to 1) preach outdoors, 2) pray without using the Book of Common Prayer, 3) form and manage their own societies, and 4) allow laymen to preach. John further stated that if the Church of England tried to restrict any or all of the above activities, Methodists might need to leave and form their own denomination.
- Charles disagreed with John’s potential separation and the four reasons John stated as grounds for that separation, so they parted ways.



# John Wesley Study Guide - Pt 6

1. What was the name of the first “methodist” building and what was it before John Wesley bought it? What was the name of the new Society?
2. What were some of the main points in the General Rules?
3. What do the General Rules remind you of??
4. What are the “social Services” that John Wesley started?

5. System of Groups, how does it work?
6. Five Groups, what are they?
7. Women in the church...why?
8. What did he include in the Foundry?
9. Charles and John both met women who were they and what happened?
10. What was John Wesley's intention for the Methodists?
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