

# Module 4

## The Wesleyan Church Today

### Introduction

In our current form, The Wesleyan Church really isn't that old. We are only in our fifties. Regardless of our previous denominations, we are our own church. We have inherited traditions, but we determine our current and future identity. As we will see in the two final modules of the course, our *Discipline* provides mechanisms for change. This is both a strength and a potential threat. We can improve, and we can devolve too.

Knowing who we have been helps us weigh any changes – intended or accidental – with awareness. If we aim to make significant changes, we should do so with our eyes wide open. Further, why would we reinvent the wheel if the wheels we already have serve us well? In this module, we want to take stock of where we have been and are going as a denomination.

### Background

The conversation between Dr. Bence and the two most recent General Superintendents – Dr. JoAnne Lyon and Dr. Wayne Schmidt – discussed some of the trends that have taken place over the last fifty plus years. We might organize our brief history into five phases:

1. Organization – The first few years of our pilgrimage. We were figuring out how to blend the three parent denominations, including matters like the organizational structure and which colleges would continue or merge.
2. Personal Evangelism and Youth Ministry Phase – In the 1970s, especially under the innovative leadership of David Keith and Keith Drury, the church saw many young people called into ministry with innovative youth conventions and initiatives like Ezekiel's Wheels and the Isaiah 6 Project. As the influence of John Maxwell was growing, the church engaged more and more in personal evangelism, including thriving bus ministries.
3. Church Growth Phase – As the influence of John Maxwell continued, the church shifted its focus in the last few decades of the twentieth century to church growth. Previously, a church of 200 was considered very sizable. Soon, churches would grow into the 1000s.
4. Biblical Justice Phase – As millennials came of age, the church began to pay more attention to concerns like racial reconciliation and fulfilling the biblical mandates to help those on the margins of society. The General Superintendency of Dr. JoAnne Lyon coincided with this period.
5. Equipping the Church Phase – The current emphasis of the church is on equipping all Christians to minister, not least in the secular marketplace. It is especially marked by decentralization and distributing authority to networks of churches. These emphases coincide with the General Superintendency of Dr. Wayne Schmidt.

For further details especially on the first three “phases” of the church, see *The Story of the Wesleyan Church* by Bob Black and Keith Drury. In many respects, our sense of what are called the fourth and especially the fifth phase above is too close to us in time for us to conceptualize them entirely. The history is being written as you take this course!

What do you think the future of the church will or should look like? Who we elect as our next General Superintendent will have a huge impact on the answer to this question. The future is being written as you read.