

Guidelines: The United Methodist Church and the Charismatic Movement

Approved by the General Conference, 2008

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

In 1976 General Conference approved "*Guidelines: The United Methodist Church and the Charismatic Renewal*." These *Guidelines* served the church well. At the 2004 General Conference the GBOD was assigned the responsibility to review and revise the *Guidelines*, while retaining their general focus and purpose.

GLOSSARY

Terminology associated with the charismatic movement is confusing because of varying usage.

Pentecostal *refers to the movement whose roots began late in the nineteenth century, resulting in the formation of a number of pentecostal denominations in the early years of the twentieth century. Classic pentecostalism affirms what is sometimes spoken of as initial evidence, which includes the concept of requisite "baptism in the Holy Spirit" that every Christian must experience the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" that is accompanied by glossolalia or speaking in tongues as an "initial evidence." Pentecostals also emphasize strongly the full recovery of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.*

Charismatic *The word charismatic comes from the Greek word charismata, meaning "gifts." The root words in Greek mean grace and joy. By definition, a charismatic should be a joyful, grace-gifted Christian. Charismatic Christians emphasize the need to recover the empowerment and the gifts of the Spirit for ministry today. They affirm the importance of all the "gifts of the Spirit."*

Charismatic Movement *Throughout this report the term charismatic movement is used to identify the movement that began about 1960 in mainline Christian bodies, both Protestant and Roman Catholic. This movement emphasizes the central importance of the "baptism of the Holy Spirit," but without the elevation of "speaking in tongues" as the initial evidence. A focus is placed on the need to recover the Holy Spirit's empowering and gifts for ministry today. These gifts include prophecy, healing, tongues, and interpretation of tongues, because these gifts are perceived to have been neglected by the Church.*

In a biblical sense there is no such person as a "non-charismatic Christian," since the term *charismata* refers to the gracious gifts of God bestowed upon all Christians to equip them for ministry: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).

Pentecostals and Charismatics emerged out of Christianity in the West, where for long periods Christianity neglected the importance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. However, the activity of the Holy Spirit is not merely restricted to Western Christianity. Indeed, when the gospel reached different parts of the non-Western world, many Christians learned of the Holy Spirit's work in the Bible. In simple faith they believed, and many began exercising the gifts of the Spirit. Although the ministries of such individuals and churches are similar to those of the Pentecostals and the Charismatics in many ways, they do not owe their origins to these Western sources. Rather, they sprang up entirely on their own under the direct leading of the Spirit.

Neo-Charismatics, or Third Wave (the Pentecostals being the first wave and the Charismatics being the second wave). *These are Christians who, unrelated or no longer related to the Pentecostal or Charismatic renewals, have become filled with the Spirit, energized by the Spirit and exercise gifts of the Spirit without recognizing a baptism in the Spirit separate from conversion. Speaking in tongues is considered as optional or unnecessary. Signs and wonders, supernatural miracles and power encounters are emphasized. Third-wavers form independent churches and do not identify themselves as either Pentecostals or Charismatics.* (Synan, p. 396)

GUIDELINES

We believe the church needs to pray for a sensitivity to be aware of and to respond to manifestations of the Holy Spirit in our world today. We are not unmindful that the problems of discerning between the true and fraudulent are considerable, but we must not allow the problems to paralyze our awareness of the Spirit's presence; nor should we permit our fear of the unknown and the unfamiliar to close our minds against being surprised by grace. We know the misuse of mystical experience is an ever-present possibility, but that is no reason to deny spiritual experiences.

In facing the issues raised by charismatic experiences, we plead for a spirit of openness and love. We commend to the attention of the church the affirmations of Paul on the importance of love in First Corinthians 13 and of Wesley —“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and, in all things, charity” (love that cares and understands). Without an active, calm, objective, and loving understanding of the religious experience of others, however different from one's own, harmony is impossible.

The criteria by which we understand another's religious experience must include its compatibility with the mind and the spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, as revealed in the New Testament. If the consequence and quality of a reported encounter with the Holy Spirit leads to self-righteousness, hostility, and exaggerated claims of knowledge and power, then the experience is subject to serious question. However, when the experience clearly results in new dimensions of love, faith, joy, and blessings to others, we must conclude that this is "what the Lord hath done" and offer God our praise. “You shall know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:20).

Guidelines for All

1. Be open and accepting of those whose Christian experiences differ from your own.
2. Continually undergird and envelop all discussions, conferences, meetings, and persons in prayer.
3. Be open to new ways in which God by the Spirit may be speaking to the church.
4. Seek the gifts of the Spirit that enrich your life and your ministry, as well as the life of the church.
5. Recognize that although spiritual gifts may be abused in the same way that knowledge or wealth or power may be abused, this does not mean that they should be prohibited.
6. Remember that, like other movements in church history, the charismatic renewal has a valid contribution to make to the ecumenical church.
7. Remember the lessons of church history that when God's people rediscovered old truths the process was often disquieting and that it usually involved upheaval, change, and a degree of suffering and misunderstanding.
8. Always be mindful of the spiritual needs of the whole congregation.
9. In witnessing, teaching or preaching, the wholeness of all aspects of the gospel must be presented.

For Pastors Who Have Had Charismatic Experiences

1. Continually examine your understanding of the doctrine and experience of the Holy Spirit, so you can communicate this with clarity.
2. Remember the lessons of church history when God's people rediscover old truths—the process is often disquieting, that it usually involves upheaval, change, and a degree of suffering and misunderstanding.
3. Seek firsthand knowledge of what the charismatic renewal means to those who have experienced it. Keep your mind open until this firsthand knowledge is obtained. Then observe and respond as a loving Christian, as a United Methodist minister, and as a sympathetic, conscientious pastor. Keep to scriptural teaching regarding all the gifts of the Holy Spirit.
4. When speaking in tongues occurs, seek to understand what it means to the speaker in his/her private devotional life and what it means when used for intercessory prayer, especially in group worship.
5. Seek to understand the meaning of the other "gifts of the Spirit" in the charismatic experience, such as the utterance of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, and prophecy.
6. United Methodist pastors should be intentional about the benefits to be derived by a mutual sharing of a variety of experiences that have biblical foundation. Accordingly, the pastor should seek to keep all meetings called for prayer and fellowship open to all interested members of the congregation.

For Pastors Who Have Not Had Charismatic Experiences

1. Continually examine your understanding of the doctrine and experience of the Holy Spirit so you can communicate this with clarity.
2. Remember the lessons of church history when God's people rediscover old truths: that the process is often disquieting, that it usually involves upheaval, change, and a degree of suffering and misunderstanding.
3. Seek firsthand knowledge of what the charismatic renewal means to those who have experienced it. Keep your judgments open until this firsthand knowledge is obtained (i.e., by attending and understanding their prayer meetings, etc.). Then observe and respond as a Christian, a United Methodist minister, and as a sympathetic, conscientious pastor. Keep an openness to scriptural teaching regarding the charismatic gifts.
4. When speaking in tongues occurs, seek to know what it means to the speaker in his or her private devotional life and what it means when used for intercessory prayer, especially in group worship. We should be aware that speaking in tongues is considered a minor "gift of the Spirit" by many who have charismatic experiences.
5. Seek to know the meaning of the other "gifts of the Spirit" in the charismatic experience, such as the utterance of wisdom, knowledge, the gift of faith, healing, miracles, or prophesying.
6. United Methodist pastors should be intentional about the benefits to be derived by a mutual sharing of a variety of experiences which have biblical support. Accordingly, the pastor should seek to keep all meetings called for prayer and fellowship open to all interested members of the congregation.

For Laity Who Have Had Charismatic Experiences

1. Remember to combine with your enthusiasm a thorough knowledge of and adherence to the United Methodist form of church government. The charismatic movement is closely related to the holiness movement and to the Wesleyan tradition. Consult with your pastor(s) and if they have not also had your experience, help him/her to understand what it means to you. Invite your pastor(s) to attend your worship services and prayer meetings.
2. Pray that the Spirit will help you to maintain fellowship with all United Methodists.
3. Strive for a scholarly knowledge of scriptural content in combination with your spiritual experiences. "Seek to unite knowledge and vital piety" (Wesley). Strive to integrate your experiences with the theological traditions of our church.
4. Avoid undisciplined, undiplomatic enthusiasm in your eagerness to share your experiences with others. Resist the temptation to pose as an authority on spiritual experiences. Failure in this area may cause your fellow Christians to interpret your behavior as spiritual pride.
5. Be intentional about keeping your prayer meetings and other gatherings open to all members of your congregation. When those who do not share your experiences do attend,

discuss with them the purpose of the meeting with an interpretation of the significance of the content.

6. Remember that there are many types of Christian experiences that lead to spiritual growth; charismatic experience is one of these.
7. Accept opportunities to become personally involved in the work and mission of your own congregation. Let the results of your experience be seen in the outstanding quality of your church membership and service to others. Be an obvious, enthusiastic supporter of your congregation, its pastor and its lay leadership and of your district, your annual conference, the General Conference, and mission of each. This may well be the most effective witness you can offer to the validity and vitality of your charismatic experience.
8. Remember Paul's injunction that when the gift of tongues is spoken to the body in a group context, there must be interpretation to ensure proper order (1 Cor. 14:27, 40). If the gift is exercised in a worship setting or group prayer, be careful that it does not hinder worship or cause distraction for others.
9. Keep your charismatic experience in perspective. No doubt it has caused you to feel that you are a better Christian. Remember that this does not mean you are better than other Christians but that you are, perhaps, a better Christian than you were before. Jesus commanded us to love one another (John 13:34).

For Laity Who Have Not Had Charismatic Experiences

1. We believe God is constantly seeking to renew the Church, including The United Methodist Church. Pray that God may make known to you your own place in the process of renewal. The advent of the charismatic movement into our denomination is only one aspect of renewal.
2. If there are members of your congregation who have had charismatic experiences, accept them as brothers and sisters. Jesus commanded us to love one another (John 13:34).
3. Be aware of the tendency to separate ourselves from those who have experiences that differ from our own. Observe personally the charismatics in their prayer meetings, in your congregation, and in the mission of your church. Examine scriptural teaching about this. Pray about it. Discuss your concern with your pastor. The United Methodist Church is theologically diverse.
4. Do not be disturbed if your experience is not the same as others. The work and mission of a healthy congregation calls for many gifts (1 Corinthians 12–14). Each Christian is a unique member of the body of Christ and should seek to discover his/her gifts and role.
5. Should your pastor emphasize charismatic experiences, help her or him to be mindful of the spiritual needs of the entire congregation, to be a pastor and teacher to all. Encourage her or him in preaching to present the wholeness of all aspects of the gospel. Be open to what God would say to you through your pastor about the Holy Spirit.

For Connectional Administration

1. Refer prayerfully and thoughtfully to the other sections of these Guidelines.
2. Remember your pastoral responsibilities toward ordained persons and congregations within the connection, particularly toward those whose spiritual experience differ from your own.
3. Each administrator should consider whether any teaching or practice regarding the charismatic movement involving an ordained minister of a congregation is for the edification of the church.
4. If there is division involved in a particular situation, make as careful an evaluation as possible, remembering that there are other kinds of issues that may divide our fellowship—a lack of openness to something new or an unwillingness to change, for example. Sometimes tensions and conflicts may result in the edification and growth and maturity of the church and therefore need to be handled wisely and prayerfully by all concerned.
5. Administrators and connectional bodies will be required to deal with expressions of the charismatic movement. We urge all involved to seek firsthand information and experience about the movement, its meaning for those involved in it, and its value to the particular congregation.
6. Care should be taken that persons whose theology and experiences align with those of the Charismatic Renewal are not discriminated against in appointments or as candidates for ordination.
7. Where an ordained person seems to overemphasize or de-emphasize some charismatic doctrines/practices, she or he should be counseled to preach the wholeness of the gospel, to minister to the needs of all of the congregation, and as a pastor to grow in understanding of our polity in the mission of the particular annual conference.
8. Annual conferences may also be faced with a situation where there is a charismatic group within a congregation whose pastor or whose lay leadership or both may be hostile to or ignorant of the charismatic movement. The Annual Conference Board of Ordained Ministry, the bishop and the district superintendent have a pastoral responsibility to mediate and to guide in reconciliation, using these guidelines.
9. Pray continuously for sensitivity to the will and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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Historical Perspective: The Ministry of the Holy Spirit in Church History

The Holy Spirit in the New Testament Period

The Holy Spirit came upon Mary (Luke 1:35), descended upon Jesus at his baptism (Luke 3:22) and filled Jesus before the temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4:2ff). Jesus claimed that the Spirit was upon him when he stood up to preach (Luke 4:18ff) and that the Spirit empowered him to cast out demons (Matthew 12:28). John the Baptist and Jesus both indicated the importance of the power of the Spirit (Luke 3:15-19; John 7:37-39; Acts 1:5, 8).

The coming of the Holy Spirit ushered in the beginning of the Church (Acts 2) and empowered the disciples to be witnesses (Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4ff). Paul writes about the gifts of the Spirit in his letters (Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31; Eph 4:11) and describes his missionary outreach to the Gentiles as “by

word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom 15:18ff, 1 Cor. 2:4-5; 1 Thess. 1:5).

The Holy Spirit in John Wesley's Life and Ministry

John Wesley and his followers were bearers of Scriptural Christianity. Their ministry testifies to the dynamic work of the Spirit in early Methodism.

To begin with, Wesley's Aldersgate experience of the assurance of his salvation on 24th May 1738 was certainly a work of the Spirit. He relates in his journal how as he heard of "the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed ...and an assurance was given that he had taken away my sins." Some months later, he was at prayer with seventy others, including his brother Charles and also George Whitefield, on the night of 1 January 1739. In the early hours of the next morning, the Holy Spirit was poured on them in a most powerful manner. He writes: "About three in the morning ...the power of God came mightily upon us insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of His majesty, we broke out with one voice, 'We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord.'"

"On the basis of Scripture, Wesley taught that the Holy Spirit is present and active in *every major stage of Christian experience*." (Stokes, 46) Careful study of Wesley's writings shows clearly that spiritual gifts, including healing and deliverance of the demonized, were clearly manifested in his ministry and that of his coworkers. There were also reported cases of people falling to the ground under the power of the Holy Spirit due to a variety of reasons, including deliverance from demonization, deep conviction of sin and subsequent release, or simply being overcome by the Spirit. (Davies, *Methodism*, pp.60f; Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, pp.100f, 319.) One study has shown that, 'a careful study of Wesley's *Works* and particularly of the lives of the early Methodist preachers reveals evidence that all the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Cor. 12:8-10 were exercised, with the one exception of the interpretation of tongues. (Davies and Peart, *The Charismatic Movement and Methodism*, 2)

Finally, Wesley himself has noted that the spiritual gifts were not generally exercised after the first two or three centuries after Christ. But the reason for this was not that these gifts were not available. Rather, as he noted, "The real cause was 'the love of many,' almost all Christians, was 'waxed cold,' because the Christians were turned Heathens again, and had only a dead form left." (Sermon LXXXIX, "The More Excellent Way," *Works*, Vol. 7, 26-27) And Wesley wrote, "I do not recollect any scripture wherein we are taught that miracles were to be confined within the limits either of the apostolic or the Cyprianic age, or of any period of time, longer or shorter, even till the restitution of all things." ("Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained," *Works*, Vol. 8, 465)

The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements and the Wesleyan Framework

It is impossible to speak of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Renewal apart from their roots in Methodism. It was, after all, the Wesleyans who first applied the title "pentecostal" to their movement and to a variety of their publications. The Methodists were also first to coin the phrase *baptism of the Holy Spirit* as applied to a second and sanctifying grace (experience) of God. (Cf. John Fletcher of Madeley, Methodism's earliest formal theologian.) The Methodists meant by their "baptism" something different from the Pentecostals, but the view that this is an experience of grace separate from and after salvation was the same. However, the roots of Pentecostalism in Methodist soil go much deeper than titles and phrases. While the phenomenon of speaking in tongues, commonly associated with Pentecostalism, was not an experience sought or promoted by early Methodists, other equally startling manifestations of the Spirit did abound. This was particularly so as Methodism spread across the American frontier. When asked once why the gifts of the Spirit, manifest in the early church, had disappeared, as if the church had no more need for them, Mr. Wesley responded: "It should not be reasoned that the absence of such in the

church (eighteenth-century Church of England) reflects the reluctance of God to give, rather the reticence of the church to receive.” (Tuttle, 106) Methodism then, at its inception, invited God’s people to expect and receive whatever blessing God would give “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7). It is not surprising that many of the first Pentecostal leaders were originally Methodists. Pentecostalism has continued to be what Francis Asbury wanted Methodism to remain, a pliable movement more than a static institution. Whether Methodism claims it or not, Pentecostalism is an offspring and will perhaps be its greatest legacy. Conservative estimates of the number of classical denominational Pentecostals run 200 million. Combined with the millions of charismatics and neo-pentecostals or third wavers and those in house churches, that number now stands at 500 million (Synan, 2) to 700 million (Rutz, 44-46), making this the second largest group of Christians in the world, second only to the Roman Catholic church as a whole. This group is estimated to be growing worldwide by 8 percent a year (Rutz, 15).

Charismatics should interpret their gifts and experiences in light of their own traditions. When this does not occur, division and/or exploitation sets in. When United Methodist charismatics adopt a classical pentecostal line, they are no longer United Methodist—at least in the Wesleyan sense. United Methodist Charismatics need to recognize that, properly understood within the context of our own tradition, their charismatic gifts and experiences can be considered as fresh wind of the Spirit.

Wesley’s theology of grace is in fact a theology of the Holy Spirit. He believed that Reformation theology was built upon the cardinal doctrine of original sin and that it is God’s sovereign will to reverse our “sinful, devilish nature” by the work of the Holy Spirit. He called this activity of God *prevenient*, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Bound by sin and death, one experiences almost from the moment of conception the gentle wooing of the Holy Spirit—*prevenient grace*. This grace “prevents” one from wandering so far from God that when a person finally understands what it means to be a child of God the Holy Spirit enables us to say Yes to this relationship. For Wesley, this Yes was a heartfelt faith in the merit of Christ alone for salvation. It allows the Holy Spirit to take the righteousness that was in Christ and attribute or impute it to the believer—*justifying grace*. For Wesley this begins a *lifelong movement* from imputed to imparted righteousness in which the Holy Spirit moves the believer from the righteousness of Christ attributed through faith to the righteousness of Christ realized within the individual—*sanctifying grace*.

To understand Wesley’s experience of “entire sanctification” is to know how far the pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit falls short if there are not continuing works of grace. Grace is continual, though we may not always perceive it. It is essential that we do not confuse being “filled with the Holy Spirit” with Wesley’s mature doctrine of sanctification. The Spirit-filled life is, rather, a sustained journey of gifts, experiences, and divine support, beginning with conversion, constantly moving us toward the goal of sanctification.

Many charismatics have come to believe that being filled with the Holy Spirit is an experience that begins with justification and continues as a lifelong process of growth in grace. For the charismatic, Spirit-baptism bestows not one but many gifts and not one but many experiences intended to sustain one day after day. Being baptized in the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5) and being continually filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) and walking with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25) are important parts of the *journey* toward Christ-likeness, but they are only *parts* of the journey. Thus, United Methodist charismatics, within the context of our own rich tradition, can never interpret gifts and experiences as signs of superior spirituality, making them better than others. Rather, the power of God being sustained within them makes them better than they were and able “to press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

The Charismatic Renewal has been instrumental in providing many gifts to the Church of Christ Jesus and has made a profound impact upon present-day United Methodism.

Methodists throughout history have always worshipped God in a variety of styles—never more so than today. In addition worship itself—from openly free to highly liturgical—is now more broadly and correctly understood as a personal offering from the body rather than simply the service of worship that one attends. “*God is spirit, and those who worship him, must worship in spirit and truth*” (John 4:24).

Contemporary Christian music—a hallmark of the charismatic renewal—fills many of our churches each

Sunday, enriches the spiritual life of individuals and enhances small group meetings.

There are a variety of healing services offered in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. In addition, the church offers a number of helpful resources for beginning and sustaining healing ministries within the local church.

Spiritual formation is now considered an integral part of planning for annual conferences and important in the continuing education for clergy.

The renewing work of the Holy Spirit within The United Methodist Church has supported the *Lay Witness Movement*, the *Walk to Emmaus*, and the *Academy for Spiritual Formation*. In 1978, *Aldersgate Renewal Ministries* (whose purpose is to “encourage United Methodists to be filled, gifted, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit in ministry to the world) became an affiliate of the General Board of Discipleship. These ministries have been used by God to bring thousands of people around the world into a new or deeper relationship with the Lord.

United Methodist charismatics and non-charismatics alike should be encouraged. In fact, the term *non-charismatic* Christian is a misnomer. All Christians have gifts. *Charismatic*, as earlier defined, refers to those who more explicitly acknowledge and emphasize teaching concerning the power of the Holy Spirit at work within them and the church through such gifts.

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2004 Calendar #136 requested that Resolution 324 be considered for expansive biblical language and a subsequent recommendation concerning deletions, revisions, or replacement. An international committee of eight persons—four men and four women, including persons from Singapore, Peru, and the Philippine Islands—and four GBOD staff members did this work