

The Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice

During the later years of apartheid rule in South Africa, Central Methodist Church in downtown Johannesburg created a candle wrapped in barbed wire, modeled after the logo for the global



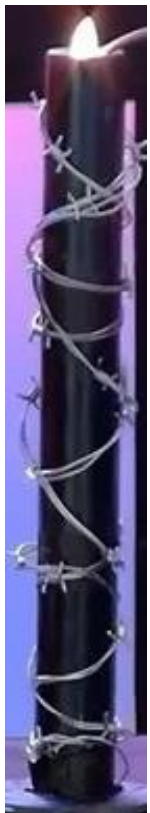
Amnesty
International

human rights organization, AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. Each week, during worship, the candle was lit along with a reading of a list of people who had

been harassed, wounded, imprisoned, tortured, or killed the previous week for protesting their nation's sanctioned racial separation. As they lit the candle, they read John 1:5:

***“For the Light has come into the world
and the darkness has never overcome it.”***

Each week, the church members rededicated themselves to the cause of justice and to our God, who was already undoing apartheid. Because



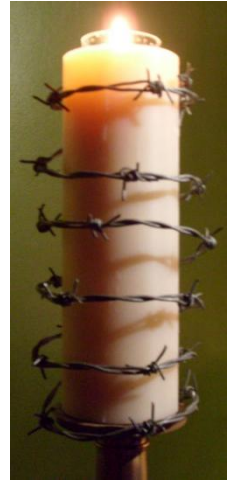
government policies banned the use of symbolic resistance, the government tried to stop the church from lighting this candle. When they refused to do so, the church was banned from radio and TV broadcasts.

Though apartheid is gone, candles like these can be found in many United Methodist Churches around the world as emblems of the continuing struggle for reconciliation and justice in the new South Africa and around the globe. This candle invites us to be a ***“light in the world”*** (Matth. 5:14).

Hundreds of justice-seeking United Methodist congregations around the connection today are standing in solidarity with those targeted by oppressive policies. Each week, the candle is lit for a specific occurrence of “evil, injustice, or oppression” somewhere in the world.

United Methodist Churches in Wisconsin, like St. Paul's in Stevens Point and Baraboo First have such a candle on their altar already.

PEUMC's new Candle of Peace, Hope, and Justice sits in a bowl of red gems, perhaps symbolizing the spilling of blood or the pieces of broken hearts.



Portions of Today's Sermon, cut for time

WESLEY AND WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP:

Taking his cue from his mother, Susanna, who's religious meetings hosted in her own kitchen had drawn bigger crowds than the local parish priest, John learned to place women in greater leadership roles. By the 1750s, Wesley was convinced that the Spirit of God fell on men and women equally. Thus, Methodism *"was [one of the few] areas where women could find meaning outside the domestic sphere."* Women speaking to audiences of men, women speaking in public, women claiming a voice independent of their husbands or fathers *"led to the accusation that Methodism was disruptive to the traditional family structure."*

For instance, Sarah Ryan was a social outcast, having been married three times, all to husbands who left her without legally divorcing her, tainting her reputation and leaving her in legal limbo. Sarah had no legal way to divorce her husbands, who abandoned her. Without a legal identity or any rights, she had no choice but to marry again . . . and again. John Wesley hired her as the housekeeper of the New Room, a position that not only included the cooking and cleaning, but of hospitality – even being the spiritual director of the facilities. John saw Sarah as a gifted leader, organized manager, and responsible housekeeper.

One of the first women to receive a formal preaching license from John Wesley was Mary Bosanquet. She preached often and to large crowds. She and Mary Ryan established Cross Hall, a Christian community that housed and educated children and destitute adults. Along with preaching and Bible study, they offered many services, including some medical care. She herself once said, *"I wish to be more vile, if my Lord requires it."*

ANGLICAN FAITH-LIFE IN WESLEY'S DAY:

Most English citizens, if they went to church at all or were welcomed at all into a parish, sat down, listened to Scripture, heard a sermon on doctrine, and left. There was no action required of them except to fill a seat on Sundays. Even then, to go to church was a sort of privilege reserved for only a select few: those who wore the proper clothing, those who lived close enough to attend or had the means to travel to a chapel, and those who had the luxury of taking Sundays off from work.

Out of this lifeless church culture, John Wesley *"submitted to becoming more vile."*

RESPONSE TO WESLEY:

There was something about his call from God that pulled him toward abnormal practices, people, and principles.

Wesley's message, and actions, were received both poorly and favorably. But he ignored all praise and criticism and just kept going. He saw a need and acted. He saw despair and offered love. He saw people withdraw and he brought purpose and worth to them. *This is what it means to be Methodist.*

John Wesley started out wanting to be a respectable pulpit preacher, who conformed to the standards of the Church of England. Yet that's not what God called him to do. He ended up stirring up trouble, pushing boundaries, and loving people not because they brought him money or fame in return but simply because they were also created by God and therefore worthy of love.

A METHODIST AND A BEACON OF JUSTICE:

Being Methodist means standing as a beacon of justice in this world.

NO MATTER WHAT:

The People Called Methodists were those who preached wherever people in need of the message of God's love were – no matter where, no matter what.