Report of the Working Group to Review the Membership Commitment on Speaking in Tongues

The 2016 General Conference authorized a study for the purposes of reviewing the current membership commitment on speaking in tongues (Wesleyan Discipline paragraph 268:10) and bringing recommendations to the 14th General Conference. The following is the report and the resulting recommendations for the 14th General Conference to consider.

THE PARTICIPANTS:
While the final recommendations are ultimately the product of the Working Group, we are deeply grateful for the valuable input of the resource people called upon to comment throughout the process.
Please note that the input provided by each resource person was their professional and/or personal view and does not automatically constitute their full endorsement of the final report or any recommendations made by the Working Group.

The participants in this study included:
- Fourteen Wesleyan Theological Scholars from all five of our Wesleyan higher education institutions and Asbury Seminary
- Six Wesleyan local church pastors
- Seven global Wesleyan current and former leaders.

1. Resource People: Wesleyan Scholars
   Oklahoma Wesleyan University:
   Dr. Jerome VanKuiken, professor, Dean of the School of Ministry and Christian Thought
   Dr. Josh McNall, professor, School of Ministry and Christian Thought
   Southern Wesleyan University:
   Dr. Michael Tapper, professor, Chair of the Religion Division
   Rev. Mark O. Wilson, Assistant Professor for Discipleship, Multiplication and Renewal
   Dr. Robert Black, professor emeritus of Religion
   Indiana Wesleyan University:
   Dr. Bud Bence, professor
   Dr. Ken Schenck, professor, Dean of the School of Theology (currently at Houghton College)
   Kingswood University:
   Rev. Brittany Trafton, adjunct professor, Vice President for Enrollment
   Dr. Kenneth Gavel, Chair, Division of Biblical and Theological Studies
   Houghton College:
   Dr. Sarah Derck, professor, chair of the department of Biblical Studies, Theology, Philosophy
   Dr. Jonathan Case, professor of theology

2. Resource People: Scholars from Other Academic Institutions
   Dr. Ruth Anne Reese, professor of Biblical Studies, Asbury Seminary
   Dr. Joseph Dongell, professor of Biblical Studies, Director of Greek Studies, Asbury Seminary
3. Resource People: Global Wesleyan Leaders
   Rev. Jose McKella, Pastor and Director, Wesleyan Church of Panama
   Dr. Alfred Kalembo, Bishop, Pilgrim Wesleyan Church of Zambia
   Rev. Thabisili Thwala, Superintendent, The Wesleyan Church of Swaziland
   Rev. Jarvis Ferguson, former Global Partners Area Director, Ibero-America
   Rev. Thomas Hines, Consultant for Hispanic Ministries, Global Partners

4. Resource People: Wesleyan Pastors
   Rev. Moe Diggs, Lead Pastor, Healing Place, Waldorf MD
   Rev. Jarod Osborne, Lead Pastor, Pathway Church, Warsaw IN

5. Resource People: Wesleyan Headquarters Personnel
   Rev. Zach Coffin, Director of Next Gen Ministries, The Wesleyan Church

CHANGES SINCE THE 1968 MERGER:
The 1968 Discipline of The Wesleyan Church included the first denominational statements concerning the “Gifts of the Holy Spirit” and a paragraph addressing the usage of “tongues” in public worship. The 1972 Discipline and the 1974 revision amended the denomination’s stance on tongues. The 1976 version contained an Appendix which sought to clarify the denomination’s position. The 1980 version again amended and expanded the denomination’s position. Additionally, the 1996 and 2004 versions of the Discipline contained further amendments to the denomination’s position on speaking in tongues. Since 1968, there have been five variations of the denomination’s understanding of tongues in the Discipline. The denomination’s current position is located in the Discipline (paragraph 268:10) as a Membership Commitment.

THE PROCESS:
We met seven times via video conferencing. There were a few overarching questions that informed each discussion as we attempted to carry out the charge given to us by the 2016 General Conference:
1. Is this a “posture” (reactive) issue?
2. Is this a “theological” (biblical alignment) issue?
3. Is this an “application” (discipleship) issue?
Over the course of our time together, we arrived at the conclusion that all three questions were appropriate to be explored. We also:
1. examined the church culture at the time when each (initial and revised) membership commitment was adopted;
2. gave careful, weighted attention to the Scriptures as they relate to the issue of speaking in tongues, especially Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 12 – 14;
3. examined the statements, rulings and pastoral letters on this subject from the General Superintendents since 1968;
4. surveyed the approach and statements made by our sister denominations, the Free Methodist Church and the Church of the Nazarene;
5. incorporated the input from our Wesleyan scholars, pastors and global leaders.
6. received and incorporated, valuable input from the General Board as well as from several Wesleyan district superintendents.
THE PROPOSED MEMORIAL:

Whereas, During its 2016 General Conference, The Wesleyan Church adopted Memorial 66, which directed the General Board to appoint a working group consisting of pastors and scholars to review the membership commitment on speaking in tongues, as stated in paragraph 265:9 of The 2012 Discipline of The Wesleyan Church (paragraph 265:10 in The 2016 Discipline of The Wesleyan Church), and bring a recommendation to the 14th General Conference in 2020;

Whereas, Twenty-seven pastors and scholars representing local Wesleyan churches, all five Wesleyan universities, Asbury Seminary, and five global Wesleyan leaders comprised the working group and resource people which reviewed the current membership commitment on speaking in tongues;

Whereas, Every effort has been made to carefully avoid two theological “ditches”:
(1) unintentionally hindering a genuine work of the Holy Spirit among us, and (2) the potential for disruption and abuse to occur in our church settings; and

Whereas, Any action taken by the 14th General Conference of The Wesleyan Church, postponed until 2022, has direct impact on the global Wesleyan Church;

Resolved, The 2016 Discipline of The Wesleyan Church be edited by replacing paragraph 265:10 with the following:

(10) To promote love, the common good, and orderliness in Christ’s church with reference to the use of the spiritual gift of tongues. The Wesleyan Church believes in the gifts of the miraculous use of tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Speaking, praying or singing in tongues, whether done privately or publicly, is the divinely enabled ability some believers experience to communicate to God words of thanksgiving, praise and adoration in a language not previously learned. While The Wesleyan Church recognizes that gift of tongues is given to some believers, there is no single gift that is given to all as evidence of the Spirit’s infilling. The greatest expression of this work is a heart purified by the Holy Spirit and an empowered life of love and service to God and people. If speaking in tongues occurs publicly in a church gathering, Scripture requires one person to speak at a time and an interpretation to be provided so all in attendance, especially unbelievers, may understand and be edified. Pastors and leaders are to exercise discretion in light of these instructions to ensure our gatherings bear the fruit of unity and order in a manner helpful and intelligible to those hearing the Gospel.


TASK FORCE ON SPEAKING IN TONGUES
Karl Eastlack, Chair

The Working Group consisted of:

- Dr. Karl Eastlack (Chair), DS, Northeast District of the Wesleyan Church, member of the General Board of The Wesleyan Church.
- Dr. Steve Elliott, National Superintendent, The Wesleyan Church of Canada, professor at Kingswood University.
- Rev. Dina Horne, Global Partners NEXT Site Developer, Vienna, Austria.
- Rev. Josh Ratliff, Lead Pastor at Crosspoint Church, Lynchburg, VA, adjunct professor at Southern Wesleyan University.
- Pastor Arlynn Ellis, Pastor at Crossroads Church and President of Acts of Hope Center, San Antonio, TX.
- Dr. Abson Joseph, Academic Dean, Wesley Seminary, Marion, Indiana.

*BIBLICAL SUPPORT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Biblical Support</th>
<th>Clarification</th>
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<tr>
<td>To promote love, the common good, and orderliness in Christ’s church with reference to the use of the spiritual gift of tongues.</td>
<td>1Cor. 12:7, 25; 1Cor. 13:1, 14:1, 23, 33 &amp; 40 1Pet. 4:10</td>
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<td>The Wesleyan Church believes in the gifts of the miraculous use of tongues and the interpretation of tongues</td>
<td>Acts 2:4, 6; 10:46; 19:6 1Cor. 12:10, 28, 30; 14:5, 26</td>
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<td>Speaking, praying or singing in tongues, whether done privately or publicly, is the divinely enabled ability some believers experience to communicate to God</td>
<td>1Cor. 14, 2, 13, 14 1Cor. 14:15 1Cor. 14:18,28: privately 1Cor. 14:6, 26: publicly</td>
<td>1 Cor. 14 uses the words pray and speak interchangeably. Singing is mentioned once (1Cor. 14:15).</td>
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<td>words of thanksgiving, praise and adoration</td>
<td>Acts 2:11  Acts 10:46  1Cor. 14:16-17</td>
<td>The key concept: tongues speaking is God-ward, not a believer speaking to people on behalf of God. A person who proports to deliver a message from God in another language is in conflict with 1Cor. 14:2.</td>
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1Cor. 14:2 is key to the understanding that speaking/praying in tongues is solely to God. Speaking in tongues is the divinely enabled ability to speak to God words of thanksgiving, adoration and praise. The person is speaking to God words which declare His goodness and glory. This fits with Acts 2:10 where the people heard the disciples talking about the works, deeds, wonders of God (i.e.: God you are glorious, holy, pure, powerful,
majestic, God you are my provider and protector, thank you for your kindness and mercy...). Speaking in tongues is a 'sign' to non-believers (1Cor. 14:22), because they hear Christians highlighting the attributes and acknowledging the works of God in their own language. Speaking to God, also fits well with Acts 10:44-47 and 19:6 where those who heard the new believers speaking in tongues were already believers, thus no need for tongues as an evangelism tool.

| in a language not previously learned. | Mark 16:17  
| | Acts 2:8-11, 16, 33  
| | Acts 10:44-47; 19:6; 1Cor. 12:10, 28; 13:1; 14:10 | There are examples of people supernaturally enabled to evangelize, preach, speak to non-Christians and understand a language they had not previously learned, but this is an example of a miracle, not of speaking in tongues (Gen. 11:7; Num. 22:28). The only Biblical example of God speaking to people in an unknown language is Dan. 5:8 (2:18-19, 30) |

While The Wesleyan Church recognizes that the gift of tongues is given to some believers, **there is no single gift that is given to all as evidence of the Spirit’s infilling.**

| | 1Cor. 14:2, 5, 6, 13  
| | Mk. 16:17  
| | 1Cor. 12:10-11, 30  
| | Heb. 2:4 | God determines which gifts and abilities He gives to individual believers...not everyone speaks in tongues. Not every Biblical instance of people being filled with the Holy Spirit contains a reference to speaking in tongues. |

The greatest expression of this work is a heart **purified** by the Holy Spirit and an **empowered life of love and service** to God and people.

| 1 Cor. 13:1  
| | Acts 1:8; 4:7, 31; Lk.24:49; 1 Cor.2:4, 12:7 Rom.15:18-19; Rom. 5:5  
| | 1Thess.5:23; 1Pet. 4:10 | Wesleyans believe the Scriptures teach all believers may experience the purifying and empowering influence of the Holy Spirit. All spiritual gifts are given for the common good of believers and the mission of Christ’s church. |
| **If speaking in tongues is exercised in public worship, Scripture requires one person to speak at a time** | 1Cor. 14:6, 19  
1Cor. 14:23, 27, 39-40 | Paul makes clear that the exercise of spiritual gifts is under the control of the individual believer (1Cor. 14:32). The Bible does not assume speaking in tongues will take place during all worship services, but when it is present, is to be done in an orderly, not chaotic or confusing, manner. God’s word makes it clear, speaking in tongues is not to be forbidden. |
| | | |
| **and an interpretation** to be provided so all in attendance, especially unbelievers, may understand and be edified. | 1 Cor. 14:5, 13, 16-17, 26-28 | A congregation does not benefit from hearing individual believers speaking to God in tongues unless there is also an interpretation of what was just said to God, in the language of the congregation. |
| **Pastors and leaders are to exercise discretion in light of these instructions to ensure our gatherings bear the fruit of unity and order in a manner helpful and intelligible to those hearing the Gospel.** | 1Cor. 14:26, 33, 40  
Rom. 13:1-5  
1Pet. 5:2; 1Thess. 5:12 | |