

Confessional Small Groups in the Style of the Wesleyan Band Meeting



Prayer of Confession

Almighty and all-loving God
through your Son Jesus Christ
you have reconciled the world to yourself.
Help us now to be reconciled with one another,
that again we might dwell in the warmth
of your love.
Inspire us with your Holy Spirit
to put aside the cloak of pride and put on Christ,
that we might forgive and be forgiven;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**
(Michael J. O' Donnell, U.S.A., 20th cent.)

On the Formation of Bands

“...wanted some means of closer union;
they wanted to pour out their hearts
without reserve, particularly with
regard to the sin which did still ‘easily
beset’ them, and the temptations which
were most apt to prevail over them... In
compliance with their desire I divided
them into smaller companies; putting
the married or single men, and married
or single women together.” *(John
Wesley, Works, 9:266-67)*

Introduction

The Band Meeting was a very small group of approximately five people who would confess their sins and struggles together. Members would talk specifically about their temptations, successes and failures. Creating a safe space for confession and accountability was a part of growing in personal holiness. Not every Methodist was part of a band. This was always a smaller subset of Christian community. It is not intended to be for everyone.

Wesley's System of Transformational Discipleship

The basic organizational structure during Wesley's time:

- ▶ **Societies.** The place where primary preaching and teaching takes place for the largest gathering of believers. Tends to meet weekly or even bi-weekly (e.g., Sunday and Wednesday evening) and has the lowest bar for accountability.
- ▶ **Classes.** Basic organizational unit, required participation, 12 people meeting weekly, focused on accountability, often geographically determined
- ▶ **Bands.** Optional participation, function was different than classes. It was deeply confessional and confidential. The bands were same-gender cells of 3-5 people gathered for pastoral care.

We might see these same organizing units today as:

- ▶ **Church.** The primary place where community preaching and teaching takes place.
- ▶ **Transformational Small Groups.** 7-12 people, focused on care of one another and accountability
- ▶ **Confessional Covenant Groups.** 3-4 people, focused on confession and covenant

THE MODERN BAND MEETING

Wesley's band meeting can serve as a model for a contemporary confessional small group.

- 3-5 members of same gender
- 1-2 hours per week



BASIC AGENDA

- Begin with song or prayer
- 4 Questions asked at every meeting:
 1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
 2. What temptations have you met with?
 3. How were you delivered?
 4. What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
- End with prayer incorporating each person's situation.



Guidance from Scripture

Group Discussion

Have you experienced a breach of confidentiality? What was it like for you? Did it make an impact on whether or not you would be willing to participate in a confessional small group?

In keeping with the scripture from Matthew, does a shared sense of holiness matter to a confessional covenant group? What might be the biggest concerns for having a shared vision for where this group is headed?

CONCLUDING PRAYER

This concluding prayer is in the style of call and response. Have one reader start and have the group respond with the bold.

Mother of All

Your children yearn to be obedient.

Call us and we will listen.

Your children desire to follow your will.

Call us and we will come.

Your children long to be yours alone.

Call us and we will be saved. Amen.

RESOURCES:

Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Zondervan, 2003).

Steve Manskar, *Disciples Making Disciples: A Guide for Covenant Discipleship Groups & Class Leaders* (Discipleship Resources, 2016).

Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relationship Discipleship in Transformational Community* (Seedbed, 2017).

“Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed” *Jas. 5:16*.

“Again, truly, I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” *Matt. 18:19-20*.

If Someone Shares Something Shocking

Some people are resistant to growing deeper in their faith through a confessional covenant group not only because they have to be vulnerable but because others will be vulnerable with them. What happens if someone shares something shocking in a confessional small group? What if you share something from your past that has haunted you for a long time?

Kevin Watson and Scott T. Kisker offer some suggestions:

“The fear that people typically have when they share a secret is that if anyone really knew them, they could not love them. You can do two things when someone shares a source of deep pain and shame from their past. First, tell them explicitly that Jesus has heard their confession and that in the name of Jesus Christ they are forgiven. Second, tell them that you are sorry for the pain and shame this has caused you and that you love them” (*The Band Meeting*, 131-132).

Guidance from Tradition

While United Methodists do not consider confession a sacrament, they do acknowledge our need of it. John Wesley said when we confess our sin we become “more and more dead to sin, [and] more and more alive to God.”

Many United Methodists gather in small groups to confess their sin to one another for support and spiritual growth. People in our lives who pray for us, cheer us on, and ask how things are going are a source of strength as we confront temptation. Prayers of confession should be followed by declaration of pardon, which may be as simple as, “In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!” Confession and pardon together remind us that we are sinners saved by grace.