From the Editor

What is the role of the church in today’s society? How have we gotten to the position we are currently in? How do we as a people called Methodists respond to the changing dynamics and needs of our modern world? The articles in this issue all revolve around those key questions as Methodism continues to wrestle with its identity and role in today’s world. We start everything with a rousing paper by Philip R. Meadows about the importance of zeal in the history of Methodism, and even more as a key to reviving the church spiritually for a potential future in evangelism, discipleship, and mission. This paper challenges all of us to think about our spiritual values and how they fuel the growth of the church. George Hendricks and Kelli Taylor offer an insightful look into how the Fresh Expressions Movement and storefront churches may offer Methodism a way forward, along with the challenges of pastors who maintain a secondary career in order to lead churches with fewer resources. Rebekah Clapp brings a Wesleyan theological approach to bear on the pressing question of immigration and the Dreamers in modern U.S. politics. How should Methodists respond to such a current issue, but root it in our unique theological heritage? Jonathan A. Powers goes back to early church history and the foundation of Methodism to explore how Christian catechesis has worked to help develop social holiness within the Christian community.

Other articles are not specifically Methodist in orientation, but still offer insight into how the church can understand and apply scripture to our lives. Edward T. Wright sets out in his article to understand how we can balance faithfulness to the historicity of Jesus and our commitments to the theological Christ in our academic work and preaching. He uses the narrative of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness to examine what maintaining this balance of academics and faithfulness might look like. Sochanngam Shirk, explores the theology of African theologian, Byang H. Kato, and his commitment to biblical truth in the process of contextualization. Throughout these papers the theme of zeal seems to constantly emerge in different, yet significant ways.
Several special essays conclude this issue. Mark R. Elliott reflects back on his life growing up in Georgia during segregation. He questions his own activity or non-activity in a speech written for an audience in Russia, in order to bring those practical lessons he has learned to a global stage, also full of prejudice and hatred for the “other.” Logan Patriguin delves into a new theological approach for understanding the Fall and examines how this might help better inform preachers in today’s churches. Finally, in the essay *From the Archives*, we explore one of the strangest collections in the Archives and Special Collections at Asbury Theological Seminary, which reveals a fascinating story of the scientific study of children’s teeth and a woman’s heart for improving the lives of impoverished sugar plantation workers in Hawaii. Zeal continues to drive the conversation.

On a personal note, in March I lost my father, John Danielson (Dec. 28, 1937-Mar. 9, 2019). He was a humble man, a part-time local Methodist pastor who then became full-time. God called him out of the golfing world where he worked as a golf club professional. He served Methodist churches in Florida and Maine and he exhibited the type of zeal Dr. Meadows refers to in his article. He had a passion for preaching and a love for people that was contagious. He would not have understood the academic language of these articles, but he would have applauded their message. Our task is to reach the people of this world with the love of God expressed through the sacrifice of Jesus. We are empowered to do this through the Holy Spirit to care for the stranger and the marginalized and to preach the Gospel at every chance. My father resonated with this message. I will miss him dearly, but I also know he is up in heaven joining the heavenly throng in casting his crown before the lamb and praising God. As we wonder what our role is in today’s world, so full of problems and issues, and as we even wonder about the future of Methodism, let us remember our task is to fight the good fight, to finish the race, and to keep the faith so we might win the crown of righteousness reserved for all who long for his return (2 Timothy 4:6-8). That level of zeal is our goal, and anything that brings us closer to the Kingdom of God is worth the effort.

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