Methodism and American University
By Guy E. Snavely

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY is located on a historic site, Fort Gaines of Civil War fame, one of the highest spots in the city of Washington. It was founded by Methodist Bishop John Fletcher Hurst. Its only relationship to the Church was the statement in the charter, granted by the Federal Congress in 1893, that three-fifths of the trustees were to be members of The Methodist Church, and that all trustees elected were to be confirmed by the quadrennial General Conference.

The University ambled along for some fifty years with its principal support coming from fees. In 1948 the president and the trustees were confronted with a large operating deficit and no prospect of substantial aid from The Methodist Church. So at the General Conference held in Atlantic City in 1948, President Paul Douglass appeared with a formal petition for support. The delegates seemed open-minded and voted to appoint a "Commission to Study Educational Responsibilities in Washington, D. C."

This action of the Methodist General Conference was taken with the adoption on May 3, 1948, of Report Number 18 of its Committee on Education. In its preamble the report noted that the Methodist Episcopal Church in its General Conference of 1892 had recognized its responsibility for higher education in the nation's capital. Similar recognition was noted in the 1894 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Methodist Protestant Church had also indicated a similar responsibility. Now that the three groups had been reunited for nine years, current conditions at American University emphasized the need for a reappraisal of the responsibility of the United Church.

The official action of the General Conference is outlined on page 582 of the 1948 Discipline:

The Council of Bishops shall appoint a representative commission, composed of bishops, members of the University Senate, and others, to canvass the responsibilities of The Methodist Church in the field of Higher Education in Washington, D.C., and to report its findings to the Council of Bishops and the General Board of Education. The necessary expense of the Commission shall be provided from the General Administration Fund.

1 Dr. Snavely is a distinguished educator and Methodist layman. He has been president of colleges and Executive Director of the Association of American Colleges, of which he is now Emeritus Director. He holds the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Johns Hopkins University and honorary degrees from twenty other institutions. A building at Birmingham-Southern College is named for him.
On page 641 of the 1948 Discipline of The Methodist Church the following were listed as members of this Commission. The officers were chosen at their first meeting, May 1, 1949.

Bishop A. Frank Smith, Houston, Texas, Chairman
Bishop W. Earle Ledden, Syracuse, New York, Vice Chairman
Guy E. Snively, Executive Director, Association of American Colleges, Washington, D. C., Secretary
Bishop W. W. Peele, Richmond, Virginia
Walter C. Coffey, President-emeritus, University of Minnesota
Nolan B. Harmon, Book Editor, Methodist Church
Theodore H. Jack, President, Randolph-Macon Woman's College
Goodrich C. White, President, Emory University
Clyde E. Wildman, President, DePauw University

On assuming the secretaryship of the Commission I was handed a bound booklet of fifteen pages which contained important historical data concerning the University and the Church's interest. This and other pertinent material considered by the Commission I turned over to the Archivist of American University. Therein will be found enthusiastic statements made in the Episcopal addresses to the General Conferences of 1892, 1896, 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1916. Prominent clergymen, industrialists and statesmen, including President Theodore Roosevelt, were confirmed as Trustees. Nowhere was mention made of financial support.

This oversight was emphasized in this report of the 1932 General Conference Committee on Education:

"Your Committee is very sympathetic with the efforts of this Methodist institution, but does not feel that it is wise to single it out for special approval.

This was the feeling I found to be prevalent among the leaders of The Methodist Church when I suddenly found myself made chairman of the sub-committee to prepare a statement for consideration by the Commission of Nine.

At its first meeting held in Atlantic City on May 1, 1949, there was general agreement in the commission that there was no need for just one more university to be established by The Methodist Church, but that there was a need for a Methodist or Protestant University that would have particular concern for the preparation of persons for foreign service in the government of the United States. A letter of similar import was received from Federal Judge E. B. Prettyman of Washington, a member of the Board of Trustees of American University.

President Paul Douglass and Trustee Robert M. Lester were present at this meeting upon invitation. In response to questions from various commissioners, Trustee Lester, then secretary of the
Carnegie Corporation of New York, read a “Resolution of Belief” which had been drafted by him and fellow Trustee Donald R. Richberg, at one time a high official in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration. It had been adopted by the Trustees of American University on April 23, 1949.

This Resolution of Belief states that the purpose is to establish an adequate Protestant university center specializing in the humanities and the social sciences. It should be located in the Nation's capital where the best research and library facilities are readily available. Thus it would be adjacent to government activities. Washington has now become the focal point for scholars and specialists from all over the world. It should be supported by private sources so that it would be subject to no pressure of any kind. By maintaining high moral, intellectual and religious standards, this university would promote better citizenship, more informed leadership, and thus help to raise the level of higher education.

The question of the need of a careful survey was raised by Commissioner Nolan Harmon, now a Methodist Bishop. Dr. Lester indicated that such a survey had been recently made by a committee of five competent educators comprised of John O. Gross, Secretary of the Methodist Board of Education; A. J. Brumbaugh, Vice President of the American Council on Education; Hugh C. Gregg, Business Manager of Syracuse University; David A. Lockmiller, President of the University of Chattanooga; John L. Seaton, President Emeritus of Albion College. He said that there were also available recent reports by the Middle States Association and other statistical data.

The visitors departed after further questioning and discussion among the group. In the following executive session of the commission it was voted that President Douglass be requested to send a copy of the Gross report to each member of the Commission. No report ever came. It was generally understood that it was critical of the recent administrative policies of the university.

The second regular meeting of the Commission was held in Philadelphia on the afternoon of November 29, 1949. On invitation there were present also Bishops James C. Baker, Fred P. Corson, Charles W. Flint, and Dr. John O. Gross. President Paul Douglass joined the group later. In response to a query from the chairman, Bishop A. Frank Smith, President Douglass replied that American University could, by amending its by-laws, be turned over to the Methodist General Conference or to the Federal Government for a Normal School.

The Commission adjourned after voting: that a committee of three composed of Theodore H. Jack, Clyde E. Wildman and Guy E. Snively, Chairman, be appointed to make a careful study of the
whole situation and report to a full commission at a later date. 
This committee was advised to consider the possibility of coopera-
tion with other Protestant groups and to coopt others to assist in the 
study if it were deemed advisable. 
With the approval of my fellow sub-committee members, Presi-
dents Jack and Wildman, I conferred with a number of prominent 
Protestant Church officials who might be concerned about cooperat-
ing with the Methodists in transforming American University into 
a National Protestant University. My friends of long standing, 
Gould Wickey and Fay Campbell, secretaries respectively of the 
Boards of Education of the Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches, 
were very sympathetic with the idea. Unfortunately their groups 
could not be organized rapidly enough to take action before the 
meeting of the General Conference of The Methodist Church to be 
held in San Francisco in the spring of 1952, the deadline for pre-
sentation of the report of our commission. 
Church support on a much more comprehensive plan had been 
previously solicited by President Douglass of American University. 
As early as February 9, 1948, he and Garland E. Hopkins, Associate 
Director of the Division of Foreign Missions of the Board of Mis-
sions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church had sent a 
memorandum to the Executive Board of Foreign Missions of the 
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. concerning 
the need of a Protestant-sponsored School of International Affairs 
to be located in Washington. Naturally the memorandum from Hop-
kins and Douglass indicated that American University was the 
logical place for the proposed school. 
The Executive Board of the Division of Foreign Missions of the 
National Council appointed a committee which held several meet-
ings to consider the proposal. The records of this committee show 
much interest and general support for a Protestant Sponsored School 
of International Affairs. They went so far as to appoint President 
Kenneth I. Brown of the Danforth Foundation to make a three-day 
survey in Washington of the situation. Brown is my close friend; 
previously he had been President of Denison University and Hiram 
College and was President of the Association of American Colleges 
in 1948-49. 
Largely as a result of the Brown investigations, this National 
Council Committee voted on October 4, 1951 “to lay on the table 
the proposal for any affiliation at present with the American Uni-
versity in Washington, but to continue to give the major proposal 
careful study.” 
It is refreshing to note that four years after this report was ac-
cepted by the Methodist General Conference of 1952, one million 
dollars was voted by the General Conference of 1956 to establish
The School of International Studies of American University. This Division of the University has now been in operation since 1958 and has already won a high place in the academic world.

In his extended report to the National Council of Churches President Brown noted that in 1948 the accrediting committee of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools had raised questions "on the score of inadequate administrative procedures" at American University. This committee threatened in another report, issued in the Spring of 1951, "the withdrawal of the accreditation of American University if certain changes were not made by April, 1952." Other deficiencies were noted, particularly the downtown buildings.

Postponement of action by the Middle States College Committee was engineered in 1948 by its chairman, President Levering Tyson of Muhlenberg College. He was a long-time friend of mine. When he told me of the plan of his committee I urged him to delay action until the report of our Commission of Nine could be acted upon by the Methodist General Conference of 1952. This he promised to do.

After conferences with a number of other prominent Methodist leaders, notably John O. Gross and Charles W. Flint, Bishop of the Washington Area, I felt it incumbent on me to write a report that might find acceptance by the 1952 General Conference. My urge to do this resulted, doubtless, from life-long happy and rewarding labor in the work of The Methodist Church. This included service for thirteen years as an officer and faculty member of Allegheny College, president of Birmingham-Southern College for seventeen years, delegate to three General Conferences of the Southern Methodist Church, member of the General Board of Education of the Southern Church for twelve years, and for eight years in the United Methodist Church.

After submitting my tentative proposal to fellow committeemen, Jack and Wildman, I made some modifications after several consultations with John O. Gross and Bishop Flint who were quite enthusiastic about the plan. At the request of Judge Robert V. Fletcher, Chairman of the American University Board of Trustees for many years, I eliminated a reference to the number of trustees to be elected. For many years the number had been set at a maximum of fifty.

The substance of the report was the assumption of American University under the aegis of The Methodist Church with the condition that all trustees be confirmed through the office of the General Board of Education of The Methodist Church and that the Church at large contribute annually substantial sums for its operation.
Copies of the report as finally adopted were turned over to the President and Archivist of American University.

Upon receipt of my proposed report, President Jack promptly wrote that he would concur and President Wildman did likewise, though prefacing his letter of approval with two pages of reluctance.

The report received unanimous approval at the final meeting of the commission held at the Cosmos Club in Washington, January 7, 1952. Written approval was obtained from the commissioners unavoidably absent from the meeting. Accompanied by Judge Fletcher I presented the report to a committee of the Council of Methodist Bishops in the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco on April 16, 1952. Chairman Fred Corson referred it to a sub-committee of five of which Bishop Bromley Oxnam seemed to be the chairman. At any rate he put me on the spot steadily while I was explaining the report. Finally he inquired how large an annual contribution would be expected. I surmised something like $400,000 a year would be appropriate. In slang parlance "he hit the ceiling" and roared that I should be realistic. When I asked his definition of "realistic" he promptly replied that $100,000 was all that could be possibly allocated this late in the quadrennium. Judge Fletcher and I meekly acquiesced.

Nothing more was heard until we received the news that the Bishops had included the report of the commission in their message and that it received approval without comment from any of the delegates to the 1952 General Conference of The Methodist Church.

It is worthy of mention here that Bromley Oxnam became a most valuable member of the American University Board when he transferred from the New York Episcopal Area to the Washington Area in the Spring of 1952. He became an honorary trustee on his retirement in 1960. During his eight years as a trustee he gave unstinted support and valuable aid to President Hurst Anderson, not only in the area of finances but in many other ways. It is most appropriate that the Wesley Seminary Chapel is named for him and that his portrait hangs in the main room of the School of International Service. Bishop Oxnam and President Anderson were largely responsible for a gift of $1,500,000 from the Kresge Foundation which helped greatly to make possible the moving of the Seminary from Westminster, Maryland, to the campus of American University in Washington.

Effective October 27, 1951, Paul Douglass resigned the presidency of American University to become consultant to his friend, Syngman Rhee, President of the Republic of Korea. At the January 12, 1952, meeting of the American University Board approval had been given to Judge Fletcher's proposal that I become a member subject to the approval of the Board at its June 7, 1952, session.
He also requested that I recommend three “young” Methodist University presidents who were doing well from whom one might be chosen as the new President of American University.

President G. Herbert Smith of Willamette University in Oregon, President David A. Lockmiller of the University of Chattanooga in Tennessee, and President Hurst R. Anderson of Hamline University in Minnesota were my nominees. At my first meeting of the Board on June 7, 1952, it was my “pleasure and privilege” to make a speech endorsing Hurst R. Anderson for the presidency. His name had been presented to the Board by its Executive Committee. After my statements about his Methodist family background, his educational record, and his success as a college administrator at Allegheny, Centenary, and Hamline, a number of searching questions were directed to me, particularly by several alumni trustees. I am glad to report that Hurst was unanimously elected to take office after the June, 1952, Commencement of American University.

The new president has made things hum since his inauguration, in which I participated by bringing greetings as Executive Director of the Association of American Colleges. Since 1952 the American University Campus has a “new look,” a dozen buildings have been added, the students and faculty increased in number as well as in quality, finances greatly improved, prestige extended nationally and internationally. Inspiring indeed are the results of the past nine years. When in Washington I have attended regularly the Board and Committee meetings and have served on the Executive, Faculty, and Honorary Degree Committee.