

HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS OF ITINERACY AND SALARY

Michael G. Nickerson

Since the formation of the Methodist Episcopal, United Brethren and Evangelical churches at the end of the 1700s and into the 1800s, the compensation for ministers has changed greatly. From the early days of seeing compensation as a means of supplying the very minimal physical needs of the minister in the form of an allowance, compensation has evolved into a salary, with an attempt to make that commensurate with professional training required. It is not surprising this change has come about since we live in a much different time than when these denominations were first formed.

What is often not taken into account in present salary discussions is the close relationship between allowance or salary and the itineracy. The church has spent much time studying the itineracy, trying to understand how it can still be a viable structure in the 1980s and beyond. But one of the characteristics very basic to the formation of the itinerant system was the way the preachers were compensated. We have a need to see how that interaction first occurred and what changes evolved to shape the present system. In this paper I am going to concentrate on the pre-Civil War period because the basic attitudes in the predecessor denominations of the United Methodist Church evolved from the style of compensation which developed in the circuit system to ones which are similar to the present system of compensation. Most of the later compensation changes were the logical conclusion of these earlier attitudinal changes. The early denominations were committed to equal compensation for traveling clergy. Ministerial salaries today have a much higher differentiation within the denomination than would have ever been thought possible by the founders.

At the end of the eighteenth century all American churches faced a tremendous missional problem. Stated simply it was how best to convert and serve a sparse population over a very large area. The Evangelical and United Brethren churches were better able to concentrate on certain areas in which the population had a German background because of their use of the German language for preaching

and church meetings. The area was further limited to certain German populations which might be amenable to the pietistic Protestant preaching of our predecessors. The Methodist Episcopal Church tried to reach a vast region with very few preachers. When Francis Asbury first came to the United States, he recognized the problem of preachers concentrating on the cities. America in that period was essentially rural and would continue to be rural for many years.

The response to this predominantly rural population pattern was the circuit system which owed much of its architecture to Francis Asbury. He adapted a system that had already been developed in England to the American frontier. The system seems to be a response to the problem of how to use a limited number of clergy among a dispersed population. In England there were only a certain number of Methodist preachers; and while the population was densely settled, relatively speaking, preachers needed to go to the different parts of the population rather than setting up meetings in one specific place hoping that the people would come to them. Early in the movement in England, of course, setting up meeting places and trying to build large structures to serve the population of a region did not make sense. In the United States, conditions were different. When the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed as a denomination in 1784, it was not with the understanding that large churches would serve specifically dense populations. Rather it was a church organization which would reach the whole nation and effectively evangelize the frontier. This required three things: mobility, low costs, and flexibility. The circuit system addressed these specific needs. The frontier expanded continually, and the preachers needed to be mobile as people moved farther west. Second, because most of the people moving west generally were not people of great means, the ministry to these people could not require large amounts of money. Third, since it was not clear where the population centers would be in the future, a certain amount of flexibility had to be provided. The circuit system in many ways provided for these three criteria. But because it was a system whereby the preacher was not in one place, another requirement arose which also strengthened the denomination, a heavy dependency upon the laity. Stewards were given complete control over temporal affairs.¹ Each preacher had to depend upon lay persons to make their preaching appointments and provide the meeting places so that when they arrived people would already know where and when they were going to preach. The laity also provided housing and meals for the circuit rider.

¹David Sherman, *History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Nelson B. Phillips, 1874), p. 391.

In drawing these many facets together — mobility, a ministry with small financial cost to the hearers, a flexibility of places to meet and a dependence upon laity — a strategy was developed to cover the entire United States. A significant part of that strategy was the way salary or allowances, as they were called at that time, fit into the total strategy. The salary or the allowance was given to the preachers for living expenses and to buy horses, etc. Economic gain was not expected, and in fact the idea of gaining any economic stature through the allowance was frowned upon. In a few cases the preachers came from well-to-do circumstances where they rejected their claim to the allowance. Probably the most famous case was Freeborn Garrettson, who, though he served many years, did not collect any allowances from the church.

In 1968 when the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist churches merged, their itinerant systems were similar. This similarity, however, was formulated during a century-and-a-half of work. A good understanding of how salary fits into the itinerant system can be gained by looking at the differences in the itinerant system and in the compensation of the three founding groups.

Often we are told that the denominations forming the Evangelical United Brethren Church were merely German-speaking Methodists. This is an opinion held by many scholars, as well as the general clergy and laity.² Jeffrey Mickle, however, points to the many differences in the doctrines of ministry and itineracy between Francis Asbury and Phillip Otterbein.³ These men were so fully identified as the leader of each emerging denomination that their opinions to a large extent determined early denominational development. The members of the early Evangelical Church and the United Brethren Church spoke German. However, they did not merge until 1946. Raymond Albright in his history of the Evangelical Church points out that a constitutional barrier existed as to who was duly authorized to complete a merger, and "the itinerant system for its ministry had not as yet been clearly established in the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, whereas the Evangelical Association was very strict and from the beginning unyielding in this matter of the itinerant system for its ministry, allowing only itinerants to vote or hold office in the annual con-

²Jack M. Tuell, *The Organization of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1977), p. 12. Paul Blankenship, "Bishop Asbury and the Germans," *Methodist History*, 4 (April, 1966), p. 5. Charles Kachel noted some differences arising later because of new immigrants of the groups but saw mainly similarities in origin, beliefs, spirit, and purpose in "Similarities and Differences Between The Methodist Church and Evangelical United Brethren Church," *Methodist History* 3 (October, 1964), pp. 12-22.

³Jeffrey Mickle, "A Comparison of the Doctrines of Ministry of Francis Asbury and Philip William Otterbein," *Methodist History* 19 (July, 1981), pp. 187-205.

ference."⁴ Mickle points to the tendency in the United Brethren Church for the itinerant system to be more voluntary than it was in the Methodist Episcopal or Evangelical churches.

All three denominations shared similar pietistic backgrounds, and each employed a circuit-riding itinerant system to some extent. Their development as three separate entities occurred because of differences in the geographical extent of their initial mission and the corresponding distinctions in the way they used the itinerant system. These characteristics help to clarify the relationship between the corresponding differences in their systems and in the support of the clergy.

In each of these denominations salary was seen as an integral part of the total system. Asbury set clear priorities pertaining to who should draw upon the collections made for the support of the traveling ministry.

I drew the outlines of a subscription, that may form a part of a constitution of a general fund, for the sole purpose of supporting the travelling ministry; to have respect, first, to the single men that suffer and are in want. Secondly, to the married travelling preachers. Thirdly, to the worn-out preachers. Fourthly, the widows and orphans of those who have lived and died in the work. And fifthly, to enable the yearly conference to employ more married men; and, finally, to support the wants of all the travelling preachers, under certain regulations and restrictions, as the state of the fund will admit.⁵

Today we romanticize circuit riders as lonely people plodding through the wilderness who would not have had any time to be married. Many also see Asbury as that autocratic bishop whose own celibacy was a demonstration of strong theological and personal attitudes against marriage of preachers. Quite the contrary. It seems that Asbury questioned marriage for traveling preachers on economic grounds. Married preachers cost twice as much as single preachers on a circuit. He comments in his journal from a conference in Maryland in 1811, "But here are eight young men lately married; these will call for four hundred dollars per annum, additional — so we go."⁶ In his history written in 1810, Jesse Lee reported that in 1783

Some of the leading men in particular circuits did not approve of it [the support of wives]; and thought it unreasonable that they should raise money for a woman they never saw; and whose husband had never preached among them. But the Methodist

⁴Raymond W. Albright, *A History of the Evangelical Church* (Harrisburg, Pa.: The Evangelical Press, 1942), p. 123.

⁵Elmer T. Clark, Editor, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), Vol. II, p. 92.

⁶Clark, *Journal*, Vol. II, p. 666.

cause is but one in every place; and he who loves his neighbour as himself, will feel for every circuit, every preacher, and every preacher's family.⁷

That Lee was defending the support of wives as late as 1810 shows that it was not a dead matter even then and that there was still controversy as to the proper place and the proper reasons for supporting a preacher and his family. In 1783 the conference proposed to raise a general fund of 260 pounds for the purpose of supporting preachers' wives. Eleven wives were named out of eighty-one preachers.⁸ Although few preachers were married in the beginning, the number increased and as it did a change occurred in the understanding of the proper support of a preacher. The support of wives and families became more and more a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church's itinerant system. By 1828 the Discipline required stewards to provide houses for preachers in every circuit.⁹

Francis Asbury tried at every opportunity to make it clear that Methodist preachers did not preach for hire. This was important for two reasons. Methodist preachers needed to be distinguished from independents of the day who preached from place to place to earn a living, sometimes maintaining a rather high standard, but not interested in the organization of churches or mission projects. Asbury stated in his journal, "The matter was talked over, as I am informed, at their quarterly meeting [Quakers]; when it was objected, 'that we spoke for hire;' it was answered, 'No — it was only for a passing support,' — so there was consent given that *Friends* who were free to do it, might give."¹⁰ At another place in his travels, Asbury noted, "They collected me money, but I took none; a man offered me a silver dollar, but I could not take it, lest they should say I came for money."¹¹ Asbury was very clear that a person did not need material goods in order to hear the word of salvation.

The methods of collection for support of preachers was one way Methodists demonstrated they were not preaching for hire. In the questions of the conference at Baltimore in 1772, question number 6 was, "Shall we make collections weekly, to pay the preacher's board and expenses? This was not agreed to."¹² There were collections in the weekly class meetings, as the *Discipline* required, and the stewards were to receive what people willingly gave toward the relief of the preachers, the church and the poor,¹³ but most of the preachers' support came from

⁷Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists* (Baltimore: MaGill and Cline, 1810), p. 83.

⁸Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, Vol. II (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1867), p. 114.

⁹Sherman, *Revisions*, p. 39.

¹⁰Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 447.

¹¹Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 353.

¹²Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 60.

¹³Sherman, *Revisions*, p. 113.

quarterly collections made in the classes. This meant that only the people who were members were the ones who provided the main support for the circuit riders, whereas many non-members attended preaching services. The *Discipline* also allowed, and it seems to have been a common practice, for the quarterly conference meetings to have a public collection which went for the support of the preachers. These quarterly collections were augmented by collections taken during annual conference, when it often was found that there was a deficiency in the money collected and the amount allowed each preacher. The annual conference collection, if not designated specifically for something else, usually went for the preacher's support. Even with this help a preacher's share often was less than the allowance stated in the *Discipline*. For example, the allowance in 1800 was \$80, yet in 1810 preachers in the New York Conference received only \$59.50.¹⁴

Besides their allowances, preachers also were entitled to traveling expenses, although they often did not receive these traveling expenses, as evidenced from Francis Asbury's journal: "I have traveled, since Monday week, one hundred and fifty miles; [and it has cost me about three pounds, which must come out of my salary of twenty-four pounds per annum, as there is no allowance for my expenses either by the society in Philadelphia or New York]."¹⁵ This was in 1772, and in all of the following conference minutes, and later the *Discipline*, traveling expenses were included as an addition to the preacher's salary. It was in the area of expenses that the differentiation began.

The importance of equal salaries to the itinerant system was defended by Asbury many times, and he seems to have taken pride in the fact that he received no more than anyone else. "We found it a serious, awful season: and after all was over, she offered me some money; but being in a place where I could receive my six pounds per quarter, which was sufficient for keeping me in clothes and a horse, I thankfully refused to take it."¹⁶ But while Asbury was thankful when he did not need to receive any more than his allowance, he was willing to ask for money when he was truly in need as demonstrated in Virginia when he writes, "On the *Sabbath Day* I preached, feebly, upon John 1, 50. The Superintendent Bishop of the Methodist Church in America being reduced to two dollars, he was obliged to make his wants known."¹⁷ It is clear that Asbury considered the money given to preachers as a means of supporting their bare necessities, nothing more, and he was under the same standard.

¹⁴Ms. journal of the New York Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, 1810.

¹⁵Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 49.

¹⁶Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 202.

¹⁷Clark, *Journal*, Vol. II, p. 446.

The feeling of Asbury on the question of salaries was best summarized by the notes of Coke and himself in the 1798 *Discipline*:

Those who read this section attentively, will see the impossibility of our ministers becoming rich by the gospel, except in grace. And here there is no difference between bishops, elders, deacons, or preachers, except in their travelling expenses, and consequently in the greater labours of one than the other. The gifts they have to impart, are not silver and gold, but, through the Divine blessing on their labours, and the operations of the Holy Spirit accompanying their word, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance." And we may add, that the impossibility of our enriching ourselves by *our ministry*, is another great preservation of *its purity*. The lovers of this world will not long continue travelling preachers. Indeed, we may add, that a great many of the preachers do not receive the whole of their annual pittance, generally, we believe, through the poverty, but sometimes perhaps through the inattention of our friends.

The clause concerning the allowance for a preacher's wife, may need some explanation. The wife is to have *the same claim* in respect to salary as the travelling preacher: so that if there be a married and a single preacher in the same circuit, and the money for the support of the ministry be not sufficient to make up all the salaries, the whole is to be divided into three parts, one part of which belongs to the wife.¹⁸

One of the strongest forces for maintaining equal compensation was Francis Asbury's own insistence on experiencing the same hardships and receiving the same allowance as all other preachers. Since he was head of the church, this made it difficult for another preacher to ask or expect more compensation than his fellow itinerants.

This was unusual for church organizations of that day, possibly even more so than today. In Asbury's time only two churches used the title of bishop — the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. In both cases bishops lived in great opulence and had not only ecclesiastical power but also tremendous political power. In fact there was much anti-episcopal sentiment in the United States; and even in Virginia, which was most loyal to the Church of England, the majority of the membership did not want a bishop in the United States for fear of the entanglement of the ecclesiastical with the political.¹⁹ Because of the bad image of bishops, Asbury continued to distinguish himself from the bishops of that day. As he traveled through Georgia he wrote in his journal,

For myself, I pity those who cannot distinguish between a pope of Rome, and an old, worn man of about sixty years, who has the *power given him* of riding five thousand miles a year, at a salary of eighty dollars, through summer's heat and winter's cold, traveling in all weather, preaching in all places; his best covering from rain often but a blanket; the surest sharpener of his wit, hunger — from fasts, voluntary and involuntary; his best fare, for six months of the twelve, coarse kindness; and his reward, suspicion, envy, and murmurings all the year round.²⁰

¹⁸*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, 10th Edition (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), p. 69.

¹⁹Edwin Scott Ganstard, *A Religious History of America*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 122.

²⁰Clark, *Journal*, Vol. II, p. 417.

The salary or allowance of preachers was indeed considered a mere matter of providing the necessities of life so that the preacher could preach full time. In the 1804 General Conference it was stated that a salary was not to be made up to an equal conference share if the preacher had other resources. The gifts in kind the preacher often received along his circuit had to be counted into the salary adjustments. The stewards gathered with the preachers and determined the worth of each gift at quarterly conferences. The value of these gifts, along with the collections received, were reported to the annual conference when it came time to determine the shares for each preacher.

This practice of supporting the preachers' necessities so they could ride a circuit and preach the Word freely was the basis of a traveling rather than a settled ministry.

Asbury gives several reasons why Methodists preferred a traveling ministry. First of all, he felt it was a more productive utilization of the church's limited number of preachers. He comments when coming to Antietam settlement, "A travelling ministry would be more productive of good among these people; their preachers and people are too fond of *settling*, and having things established on the *regular plan*."²¹ He also observed how by traveling circuits and by changing circuits often a preacher began to understand the whole work of the church rather than in just one area. As he explained in his journal in 1809,

We formed our own Church, and claim the power of a reform every four years. We can make more extensive observations, because our preachers in six or seven years can go through the whole continent, and see the state of other Churches in all parts of this new world. We of the traveling ministers, who have nothing to mind but the gospel and the Church of God, may and ought to be very useful.²²

Settling involved staying in one place, where the problems of everyday life such as keeping a household and getting involved in other matters besides preaching of the Gospel and the extension of the church of God took up one's time. In his now famous quote, Asbury warns against settling. As he stated on November 21, 1771, "I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way. I am in trouble, and more trouble is at hand, for I am determined to make a stand against all partiality."²³ The idea of bias and partiality for one preacher as opposed to the other was heavy on Francis Asbury's mind, and he commented on this many times in his journal. "I find that the preachers have their friends in the cities, and care not to leave them. There is a strange party-spirit. For my part I desire to be faithful to God and man."²⁴ And another time,

²¹Clark, *Journal*. Vol. I, p. 512.

²²Clark, *Journal*. Vol. II, p. 155.

²³Clark, *Journal*. Vol. I, p. 10.

²⁴Clark, *Journal*. Vol. I, p. 16.

I am determined that no man shall bias me with soft words and faith speeches: nor will I ever fear (the Lord helping me) the face of man, or know any man after the flesh, if I beg my bread from door to door; but whomsoever I please or displease, I will be faithful to God, to the people, and to my own soul.²⁵

Besides moving the preachers every year, the itinerant system provided another check against people identifying with one minister. Usually two or more itinerants were assigned to the same circuit so they would hear preaching from different ministers.

The importance of remaining a free agent for God and the church was one of the cornerstones of the itinerant system as it first was practiced by the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States. The other spinoff to this was that the Methodists more than any other group were able to serve impoverished groups of people. Through the circuit system and the sharing of the collections at conference people who had little or no material goods could receive the Word and sacraments. Preachers could minister in places where other churches could not field a regular ministry. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the south. Many times in his travels through the southern states, where the majority of the black population resided, Asbury made notes such as this: "I met the people of colour, leaders and stewards; we have 878 Africans, and a few whites in fellowship."²⁶ Because of the system of compensation, the Methodist Episcopal Church was able to offer preaching and sacraments in areas of sparse population and to people of low income. However, as we know, this system began to change.

I would identify as the most important change the one that occurred in 1816, during the first General Conference after Francis Asbury's death. At the time it seemed like a small change because it was not a change in salary, but a change in expenses. Previously the only expenses covered by the societies for a traveling preacher were his traveling expenses. But in 1816 the General Conference mandated the circuits to form a committee of lay people to determine the preachers' expenses. The expenses referred to, however, were not those of traveling but those for food and fuel. It became readily apparent that some circuits could afford to support a preacher in much more comfortable circumstances than other circuits.

The changes in the *Discipline* in 1816 reflect the changing mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church. While circuits were still functioning effectively on the frontier, adjustments needed to be made for the more populated areas. The low allowance was causing great hardships, especially for the married preachers. Sherman notes that the limited compensation was a frequent reason for leaving the traveling

²⁵Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 10.

²⁶Clark, *Journal*, Vol. II, p. 380.

ministry.²⁷ The disciplinary changes tried to meet some of these needs while still being able to hold to the principle of equal compensation. The actual elimination in the *Discipline* of an equal allowance for all traveling preachers, presiding elders and bishops did not occur until 1860.

Equal compensation was of great value to Asbury and later bishops as they decided on appointments. In the many thousands of appointments that Asbury made, he considered characteristics of the preachers and the circuits, but he never needed to consider whether a certain circuit could pay for a "highly qualified" preacher. The freedom that this gave made the itinerant system one of the best strategies for evangelizing and organizing a large, thinly settled population.

The effectiveness of this system was recognized while it was operating. Not only Asbury, but many of the church leaders following him, made comments such as this one from the *Methodist Quarterly Review*: "We do not believe that the Christian church has ever used a system of means better adapted [than the Methodist itinerant system] to diffuse the gospel over a vast and growing country, such as we occupy."²⁸ Today historians are still impressed by the effectiveness of this system for missionary activity. Winthrop S. Hudson states, "The Methodists were almost equally tardy in forming their first missionary society (1819), but they had little need of this type of organization since every conference was in effect a missionary society and every itinerant a missionary. As soon as a traveling elder could be recruited, a circuit would be laid out that would take him through the newest settlement no matter how remote."²⁹

The itinerant system was effective because the needs of the circuits could be matched with the abilities of the preachers without concern for salary. The change in the *Discipline* in 1828 requiring parsonages, when the number of married itinerants was increasing, also points to the desire of the Methodist Episcopal Church to make the appointment of preachers a matter of missional needs. This priority could not be kept unless all circuits could provide somewhat equal facilities for married preachers.

Asbury understood the pitfalls of the system as well as the possibilities. In 1792 he wrote, "I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the

²⁷Sherman, *Revision*, p. 311f.

²⁸*The Methodist Quarterly Review*, April, 1847, p. 285.

²⁹Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1965), p. 147.

usefulness of the preachers."³⁰

That other considerations such as friendship or status in the church were not thoughtfully considered in appointments is evidenced by William Colbert's appointment to a western Pennsylvania circuit in 1806. Previously he had been the presiding elder of the Albany District from 1802 to 1804 and then was appointed to Philadelphia in 1805. He married in Philadelphia, believing that his tough frontier circuit days were over. In a letter to Asbury he asked for reconsideration regarding the western Pennsylvania appointment. Asbury responded that although he knew it would be hard for Colbert, the circuit needed a man of his ability.³¹ He went.

The continual changing of preachers also seemed to have helped avoid attachment and partiality that would get in the way of appointing for missional reasons only. Before the Revolutionary War circuits were changed every six months and for the cities every three. By 1784 the general pattern was to change every year as the movement became institutionalized. Gradually some preachers were appointed for a second year. This pattern continued until 1844, when a move was made to extend the term to three years, but it failed.³² The subsequent changes in the length of tenure also affected the itinerant system, with a corresponding effect on compensation for preachers. Partiality and identification with a certain area that Francis Asbury tried so hard to eliminate became more and more a part of appointments as more of the preachers took stations rather than traveling on circuits.

It is interesting to note that in the Centenary Celebration Conference in New England in 1866 a large debate arose over whether to keep stations or go back to a circuit system, especially in the rural areas. Arguments referred to the effectiveness of the circuits and the problems that were arising on the stations. While the conference seems to have been favorable to circuits, stations were not disbanded.³³ Along with the settling of ministers, the settling of bishops also occurred. Asbury was not seen as a bishop of any one or several conferences but rather as a bishop of the church. This tradition was carried on for several years; but with the schism of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, bishops became more identified with a certain geographical area. In effect they were settled, although their area was much larger than a town or a small city. Gradually, with the allowances and the

³⁰Clark, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 734.

³¹Letter of William Colbert to Elizabeth Stroud, June 17, 1805 and several letters between Asbury and Colbert in 1806 in the Colbert Papers at Garrett-Evangelical, Evanston, Ill.

³²Sherman, *Revisions*, p. 46.

³³*New England Methodist Centenary Convention* (Boston: B.B. Russell & Co., 1866), pp. 19-30.

settling of ministers for more than one year into stations rather than circuits, the system as we now know it came into being. Many of the advantages of the itineracy, such as reaching a larger population and the ability of poor people to be part of that membership, were lost. However, the question of what structure, including salary, would assist in making the itineracy most effective, continues to the present day.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century all the predecessor denominations moved toward a more congregational-oriented system of salary support. By 1915 the salary structure had completely evolved into the system as we know it. If one looks at the salaries in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1912 and a recent salary study done in 1976 by the United Methodist General Council on Finance and Administration, one can see that the change to the congregational system occurred before 1912. Although it is a commonly held belief in the United Methodist Church that the salary differential between small churches and large churches has been increasing, this is not the case. All salaries have increased due to inflation and better compensation for all ministers, but the differential between the lowest salaries and the highest salaries in the church interestingly enough, has actually diminished. In 1912 the median salary for pastors in the Methodist Episcopal Church was \$900. The top one and a half percent of the pastors received \$3,000 or more. This is approximately three and a half times more than the median salary. In 1976 the median salary was just under \$10,000. The top one and a half percent of the salaries were those \$19,000 and above. The difference here is only about two times for the lowest part of that one and a half percent. The same relationship seems to hold no matter what other percentages we tend to take from the two years, 1912 and 1976, and it appears that the differentials have actually decreased somewhat during the time span. From this researcher's viewpoint it appears that there is no strong trend either toward higher differentials between pastors or toward going back to a more equal compensation of all pastors.

The Evangelical Association also developed its itinerant system very quickly. As mentioned previously, when the United Brethren Church and the Evangelical Association came together for what was later termed a social conference, there was an attempt to become one organic unit. Raymond Albright, however, attributed the difference in the itinerant systems to be a major stumbling block to the union of the two denominations at that time in the early 1800s. Basically the *Evangelical Discipline* stated that each preacher was entitled to an allowance of sixty dollars,³⁴ which was in effect in 1816. In the 1832 *Discipline* a slight change is made from sixty dollars to sixty dollars

³⁴Albright, *History*, p. 122.

and necessities from the yearly conference for needy families. While the *Discipline* did not state any figure, but rather the necessities for families, Breyfogel says that in 1828 the practice was to give married preachers with five years in active service twice the amount of single preachers.³⁵

Salaries were equally divided by the conference. As with the Methodists the amount received by setting equal shares hardly ever equaled the allowance stated in the *Discipline*. Collections were made for a general salary fund at conference and at quarterly meetings in much the same manner as the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, there seems also to have been a subsidiary collection taken at conference. The subsidiary collections were not equally divided between the preachers but were given to those who had extraordinary expenses, such as a new horse.³⁶ Problems addressed by the itinerant system in the Evangelical Church were somewhat different than the Methodist Episcopal Church. The area covered was much smaller, and yet there were many different areas which needed to be covered by only a few preachers. The most striking difference in compensation between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Association was that the Evangelical Association from the beginning seemed to have had several city preachers who were already in one station and did not itinerate. These preachers received salaries in a different method from the allowance and did not draw from the general fund. In 1836 they received even more privileges since they could estimate their expenses higher than rural preachers.³⁷ It was not until 1839 that the conference actually fixed the salary for city preachers, and when they fixed it, it was higher than that for the circuit preachers. For example, a Philadelphia preacher received two hundred and fifty dollars when the allowance was still much less for traveling preachers.

The differences between the Evangelical and the Methodist Episcopal itinerant systems and systems of compensation reflects a somewhat different feeling toward the itinerant system. In both cases a circuit system of going to several different appointments solved the problem of having a shortage of preachers. For practical reasons both denominations used a circuit system. Asbury's insistence upon it in all parts of the church's work, however, precluded the possibility of some preachers being compensated more than others. In the Evangelical Association it was possible, if you became a city preacher, to receive more compensation.

³⁵S. C. Breyfogel, *Landmarks of the Evangelical Association, 1800-1887* (Reading, Pa.: Eagle Book Print, 1888), p. 56.

³⁶Breyfogel, *Landmarks*, p. 17.

³⁷Breyfogel, *Landmarks*, p. 83.

The United Brethren Church had a unique itinerant system. The differences in understanding between Asbury and Otterbein led to consequent differences between the two denominations.³⁸ One indication of this difference is in the United Brethren *Discipline* of 1817 in which one of the questions for conference is, "Who gives himself up to travel?"³⁹ It seemed to be a more voluntary system in the United Brethren Church. Unlike the Methodist Episcopal Church and Evangelical Association, if ordained persons did not travel they were still allotted full rights in conference. The possibility of moving from a traveling ministry to locating and still maintaining full rights is exemplified by Philip Otterbein, the denomination's leader, who stayed at the same station for forty years. The equality of compensation, however, for the traveling preachers was the same as in the Methodist Episcopal Church and Evangelical Association. All received a certain allowance through disciplinary stipulation, and each conference divided up shares amongst the traveling preachers. It is especially important to note that the United Brethren Church gave no higher status to the traveling ministry than the settled ministry.

For the traveling ministers, the situation was much the same as with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Single preachers received a certain amount plus traveling expenses; married persons received double that amount plus traveling expenses. However, from the beginning, preachers in towns and cities received what is called in the *Discipline* "the usual salary." That meant that stations in the cities were able to give the preacher any amount that they and the preacher negotiated. This did not ever become a matter of discussion in General Conference or in the annual conferences as it did with the Evangelicals. The United Brethren conception of itineracy was one of a temporary solution, and there seems to be an implicit assumption from the beginning that stations would develop and that the circuits would break up into stations so that more and more of the preachers would serve in the same way that Philip Otterbein did.

The idea of equal compensation among all the preachers seems to have been very closely tied with the idea of a traveling ministry which did not depend upon the laity's personal allegiance to any specific minister. Rather the minister was someone who came and preached, held class meetings, administered the sacraments and other ordinances, and was representative of the whole church. Great pains were taken to keep down the possibility of partiality or bias or friendliness toward certain preachers and not toward others.

³⁸Mickle, *Comparison*.

³⁹A. W. Drury, *Disciplines of the United Brethren in Christ, Part I in English, 1814-1841* (Dayton, Ohio: United Brethren Publishing House, 1895), p. 50.

The itinerant system that was in place between the late 1700s and early 1800s was highly successful as can be seen by the geographical patterns of the United Methodist Church today. The success of that system, however, was a success peculiar to the time and situation. We cannot expect that the system that worked well at the beginning of this country's history can remain unchanged. But looking at the present day missional challenges within our nation, we need to develop a system which will coordinate the idea of salary and itineracy in a way that brings the church's resources to the most effective use. The whole concept of the itinerant ministry impacts many different facets of the church's life.⁴⁰ The way in which salary is related to the itineracy strongly influences whether the itinerant system successfully serves the church's mission.

Given this brief historical look at salary structures in the United Methodist Church, the question becomes, "What salary structure will best serve to enhance the mission of the United Methodist Church?" Although the situation is much different today than it was in 1800, one interesting fact to note in terms of evangelism is that the United Methodist predecessor denominations reached five and a quarter percent of the total United States population in 1840. Since that time the percentage of population that is United Methodist has remained relatively stable. It has been either five or six percent in every succeeding decade. Each of the churches grew numerically after that time but did not have a larger proportion of the population. In 1970 the United Methodist Church claimed five and a quarter percent of the United States population, exactly the same as it was in 1840.⁴¹ I would not argue that the only reason for this growth was the difference in the salary structure. Undoubtedly the circuit structure which went along with the salary structure was important. Both the connectional salary structure and the circuit system were in their last phases in the 1840s. Other factors undoubtedly also contributed to the lack of any further increase in proportion of the population. Some of the factors that might be cited are the elimination of a contiguous frontier and the rise of several frontiers at once occurring in the 1840s and 1850s as different areas of the West became focal points of growth. The circuit system was more suited to population movement that settled in contiguous sequence. Undoubtedly the split of 1844 in the Methodist Episcopal Church hindered continuous advancement and presented new problems for that denomination.

⁴⁰E. Dale Dunlap, "The United Methodist System of Itinerant Ministry: Its Nature and Future," *Occasional Papers of the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry*, No. 30, 1980.

⁴¹See *Research Information Bulletin*, 72-1 (July 1, 1972), published by The General Council on Ministries, United Methodist Church.

Conclusion

The question of which direction pastoral compensation should take in the future in our denomination is an open one. The choice we make will reflect the mission which our church wants to emphasize. This brief historical statement makes possible a few general statements about the relationship of mission, itineracy, and compensation.

The principle of equal compensation for all preachers allowed the church to minister to several segments of the society. Two examples point to the ability of the itinerant equal salary ministry serving the poorer segments of society. A high proportion of the Methodists in the South were slaves who owned nothing but were able to hear the preaching of the Word and participate in the governance of their societies. The Evangelical Association had a difficult time raising money to support their preachers, but through the equal sacrifice of all the preachers many members were served who would not have had contact with the Evangelical preachers if the predominant system of the day had been used by the church.

The congregational-oriented salary system we are now using has the following advantages. Ministers may receive extra motivation through appointment to higher salaried churches. This motivational factor is, however, somewhat modified by the fact that the really high salaries are garnered by a few and others desiring those salaries will always be somewhat disappointed with their own situation. Asbury did not have to deal with motivation by salary increases since the position as a preacher was so difficult and the compensation so meager that only those who were motivated by other than economic means survived in the itineracy. How much motivation for preachers in the present church should be constructed on an economic basis is something that needs to be seriously considered.

In congregational salary structure the preacher is more oriented toward pastoral care concerns, toward wondering what the congregation is going to think of a certain action, and how the congregation is going to evaluate the preacher. This sensitivity toward congregational attitudes is much greater in our present system of salary compensation than would have been thought possible by the founders of the United Methodist predecessor denominations.

While using a congregational salary structure for pastors, our denomination still affirms the idea that when a certain mission priority is paramount then compensation is not determined by where one is located. The compensation of missionaries working for the Board of Global Ministries is a good example. A connectionally oriented compensation system would be more sensitive to denominational ideas of mission and outreach and less sensitive to those attitudes in the local

congregation. It would also make the appointive process a more effective activity if salary were not the primary determinant of where preachers were moved. Then district superintendents and bishops would need to understand the congregations and the pastors better since appointments would be made on the basis of congregational needs and pastoral attributes. Such appointments might more effectively fit the mission needs of that local community rather than using the present salary based system.

In this very brief summary I have tried to give some idea of the history of our different salary structures in the denomination and have outlined very briefly the underlying emphases of different structures and the historical results that have occurred from these different structures. The salary question cannot be understood or evaluated in a vacuum. The considerations of the itinerant system, its importance, and what the actual mission of our church is in the 1980's and beyond, need to be considered. The United Methodist Church may continue the present system of compensating pastors or change to a more connectional-oriented basic salary type of system. The decision will greatly affect the church's mission and effectiveness for years to come.

The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; being Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Rev. Henry Boehm, by Rev. J. B. Wakeley. Reprint of 1875 edition. 587 pp. *Index to the Reminiscences*, prepared by Abram W. Sangrey, 26 pp. \$12.50 per set. Order from Boehm's Chapel Society, Boehm's Road, Box 100, Route 1, Willow Street, PA 17584.

Reminiscences is a faithful (including the embossed hard cover) reproduction of its 1875 edition — the original 493 pages published in 1865, plus one hundred additional pages added in 1875. It brings to all a very rare and almost extinct book which was evaluated by the one thousand people who attended Henry's birthday party on June 8, 1875, as "one of the richest volumes in Methodist literature."

Index is a companion volume, written by the Rev. Abram W. Sangrey, complete on names, places, subjects, and scripture texts.

Reminiscences is must reading for all who want to update their joyful appreciation and rewarding study of that movement in the colonies which aspired to see a church grow up with every village. It is also for scholars and historians. And it should be of special interest to those celebrating the 1984 bicentennial of Methodism in America.