

instituted a group of Bible societies...beginning with the United Society of 1740. A society was made up of local companies of twelve persons who studied the Word together. The group received ministry from lay preachers after 1742...designated by Wesley for such services although not officially ordained. Wesley visited the groups himself with the object of preaching the Gospel and teaching the facts of spiritual living. By 1744 his groups had developed the idea of an annual conference when all would meet together for edification and instruction and by 1746 he was using the circuit method for lay preachers to conduct help in several given points. At about this time he oversaw the development of officers (superintendents) and began giving the sacraments with some misgiving. He and his group were still part of the Anglican order...a church within a church.

While Wesley thought of himself as an Anglican, much of the Anglican church did not favor him or his groups. After his death there would be a wholesale departure of "methodists" from the Anglican communion. Wesley himself discouraged such separatism and found it necessary to ordain his own workers in the face of Anglican disapproval.

His followers in the colonies began meeting in the 1750's and in 1771 Francis Asbury came to America as the Wesleyan representative, having served as "circuit" man the previous five years. In 1773 the first annual conference was held in the colonies and Asbury held the group together through the Revolutionary war although most of the sentiment of the group was Tory. In 1784 Thomas Coke was appointed superintendent of the work and in that year he and Asbury formally launched the Methodist Episcopal Church. The move did not please Wesley but he was forced to recognize the legitimacy of it and in 1788 Asbury and Coke were appointed bishops of the new group and Wesleyanism was firmly established in the colonies.

Wesley moved into the Arminian track of the Anglican church...vigorously opposed by the more Calvinistic track of Whitefield and such Calvinistic Anglicans as Toplady. His influence lay in preaching the Gospel with a strong emphasis on holy living...perfectionalism being a goal. In this regard he anticipated the social reformers of a later century and his own work was such as to bring much social reform, through the Gospel and honest living, to England and the colonies. In theology he feared that the Calvinistic understanding of the decrees would leave man static and would not promote holy living. Whitefield and others