Two Separate Unions Formed One United Church
by David Oberlin, 1979

The United Methodist Church is the product of two recent church mergers – one in 1946, which brought the Evangelical and United Brethren in Christ denominations together to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church (hereafter called the EUB Church); and one in 1968, which combined the EUB and Methodist denominations to form the United Methodist Church. Each merger created a new denomination, altered church organization, and had an impact on its membership. This paper examines these two mergers and their impact on members of affected congregations in Union County, Pennsylvania.

Located in a rural setting in central Pennsylvania, Union County includes many small communities and two major towns – Lewisburg with almost 9,000 residents, and Mifflinburg with a population close to 7,000. Within the county are 17 United Methodist churches – three of which are former Methodist, and fourteen of which are former EUB. While the United Brethren in Christ Church was active in central Pennsylvania, all of the former EUB congregations in Union County were originally Evangelical. Each of the former Methodist congregations has its own pastor, and ten of the fourteen former EUB congregations make up three circuits within the county.

Because there were no United Brethren in Christ churches in Union County, the 1946 merger did not have much of an impact on the congregations of the county. The 1968 merger, on the other hand, had a large impact in Union County because EUB and Methodist churches were located throughout the county. In Mifflinburg and Lewisburg, for example, the 1968 merger resulted in two United Methodist churches located within a block of each other.

The 1968 merger was also significant in Union County because of the imbalance in favor of EUB congregations. This was rare, and one of the few counties in the United States where the EUB’s outnumbered the Methodists. Nationally, there were more than 10,200,000 Methodists and only about 740,000 EUB’s at the time of the 1968 merger – and the Methodists predominated numerically in every Conference. One reason for the local exception to the usual pattern was that New Berlin, on the southern border of Union County, is considered to have been the first headquarters of the Evangelical Church. That denomination’s first church building and first printing house were erected there in 1816.

Members of Union County’s Evangelical churches quietly accepted the 1946 merger, but 1968 was a different story. Most members of the EUB churches were very much opposed to uniting with the Methodists. On the other hand, most members of the local Methodist churches – and the officials of both Conferences – were in favor of the merger. This study covers the crucial periods of 1943-1947 and 1966-1969.
The Background for Merger in 1946

The EUB Church came into being on November 16, 1946. This merger was one of many in the early part of the twentieth century, when American Protestantism was showing a sense of essential oneness. Among the impressive unions during this time were the Evangelical Church, formed in 1922 from the United Evangelical Church and the Evangelical Association, and the Methodist Church, formed in 1939 from the Methodist Episcopal and the Methodist Protestant and the Methodist Episcopal South denominations. About fourteen million of America’s forty-five million Protestants were involved in church union between 1918 and 1946.¹

But the EUB Church was more than a result of the contemporary mood. There was more than a century of friendship, interest, and fraternity between the Evangelicals and the United Brethren in Christ. Even though the two denominations came from different leadership, there was marked similarity. As they each initially proclaimed their messages in German, their ministries developed in the same geographic areas. Both groups called people to fundamental, protestant, evangelical faith; and both were influenced and indelibly impressed by Methodism in spirit and in practice.²

Because they stood on common ground, and were aware of it, it is only natural that early reports of personal and official attempts to unite the Evangelicals and the United Brethren in Christ appear. Christian Newcomer’s journal reflects his many efforts between 1813 and 1816 to bring the two denominations together. In 1816 the possibility of union was so great that each group appointed a committee of six to meet in Washington County MD to discuss the matter. But union was not forthcoming, presumably because of minor differences in church policy – which, at the time, were apparently more important than fusion of the churches.³ Church union is always accomplished at a cost, and this was one time that the cost seemed prohibitive.

The Evangelicals had a tightly-knit connectional system. A higher status was given to the itinerant than to the local preacher, and rosters and records were kept at the local and Conference and denominational levels. The United Brethren in Christ, on the other hand, granted local preachers equal status with itinerants in church administration. The denomination was not overly concerned about structure and organization – and there were no official records before 1857. Although each group went its own way after 1817, their cordiality and goodwill toward each other continued.⁴

On October 14, 1922, the United Evangelical Church and the Evangelical Association re-merged to form the Evangelical Church.⁵ Two years later, in

² Ibid., p8.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., p9.
⁵ Ibid., p10.
December 1924, leaders of the Evangelical Church and the United Brethren in Christ met in Atlanta GA, during the meeting of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. At this time, the United Brethren in Christ representatives made a proposal for a full organic union between these two bodies.6

The proposal was well taken by the leaders of the Evangelical Church, and they agreed to give a definite answer as soon as the lingering details of the 1922 merger between their own respective groups were addressed. But it was May 9, 1933, before Bishop Matthew T. Maze of the Evangelical Church appeared before the General Conference of the United Brethren in Christ to say,

It is my great pleasure to say to this General Conference that the Evangelical Church is ready to enter into negotiations with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ for the fullest possible spiritual and organic union – assuming, of course, that the negotiations will comprehend a careful and mutual study of spiritual and economic problems and a mutual willingness to make such unit adjustments as will make possible the greatest measure of efficiency for the united body.7

The United Brethren in Christ General Conference approved proposals to enter into negotiations on merging, and the 1934 General Conference of the Evangelical Church heartily approved as well.8

The Commissions began their arduous process in 1934 and completed their work February 17, 1942, when they submitted the Basis of Union to the GeneralConferences of both denominations. The Basis of Union was approved 226-6 by the Evangelical General Conference on October 13, 1942, and by the similarly overwhelming margin of 224-2 by the United Brethren in Christ General Conference in May 1945.9

After the plan was approved by the General Conferences, it was submitted to the Annual Conferences of both denominations.10 It had to be approved by majority vote by 75% of the Annual Conferences in each denomination.11 This was no problem, as every Annual Conference approved union. The aggregate vote was 2173-51 within the Evangelical Church and 2291-154 within the United Brethren in Christ.12 Without the loss of a single congregation, the EUB Church opened its first General Conference on November 16, 1946, in Johnstown PA.13

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p12.
9 Eller, These Evangelical United Brethren, p11.
11 The Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, p30.
13 Eller, These Evangelical United Brethren, p 12.
The Uniting Session in 1946

On November 16, 1946, at 9:00 am, the delegates constituting the General Conferences of the Evangelical and United Brethren in Christ denominations met in the First United Brethren Church in Johnstown PA, formally and officially, to announce a new Christian fellowship and to organize the first General Conference of the EUB Church. Also at this time, boards and agencies of the new denominations were established according to the Plan and Basis of Union.14

At exactly 9:00 the bishops entered the sanctuary to the processional hymn “Lead on, O King Eternal.”15 Evangelical Bishop John S. Stamm and United Brethren in Christ Bishop Arthur R. Clippinger presented the Declaration of Union, a formal recognition of the merger between the two denominations by the Bishops of both Churches. The Uniting Session was a service of profound impression and great joy. The Lord’s Supper provided a spiritual symbol that represented the union of more than 705,000 members.16

The first adjustment made as a result of the Uniting Session was in the ministry. Former United Brethren in Christ quarterly conference preachers, who were not ordained, were phased out as the merged Church moved toward a better-prepared ministry. Also, a minimum of two years of college was required for entering into the ministry. Men interested in the ministry were also urged to attend seminary.17 [Editor’s note: The United Brethren in Christ had ordained women, while the Evangelical Church did not. The Joint Commission on Church Federation agreed that “in the new Church there be no ordination as ministers granted to women” but also that “church union as such will not change nor take away the ministerial status of any man or woman in such ministry at the time of union.” – see The Chronicle, volume XIV (spring 2003), page 90.]

Another important adjustment was made regarding missions. When the EUB Church was formed, the world was gasping from the conclusion of World War II and all missions were disrupted to some extent. So that all mission programs could be better coordinated, a single agency, The Board of Missions, was formed to assume responsibility for the total effort – both at home and abroad.18

A third adjustment worthy of note was the formation of The Commission on Social Action. This agency combined a new emphasis on the need for social justice with a remaining durable residue of traditional concern for personal morality.19

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14 John H. Ness Jr., One Hundred Fifty Years (Dayton, OH: The Board of Publication of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1966), p463.
15 The Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, p37.
17 Ibid
18 Ibid., p424.
19 Ibid., p425.
Annual Conferences of the Pennsylvania Conference (United Brethren): 1943-47

At the 1943 annual session of the Pennsylvania Conference of the United Brethren in Christ, held at Third UB Church in York, the sentiment for union was beginning to build. On October 6, Rev. Mervie H. Welty read the Report on Church Union. The report called for the churches and pastors to become familiar with the expected changes, and for the churches of both denominations to work together. The report was adopted on a motion by Rev. John W. Fisher.  

The message of the report was simple: Both Churches have a common heritage, a similarity of structure, and a unity of spirit which urges organic union. In doctrine, polity, life, and purpose, these two Churches are in essential agreement. The relationship between them has always been a good one, and in recent times it has become more difficult to justify the continued separate existence of the Evangelical Church and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

The report reached a stirring conclusion when it urged support of the union “realizing that these two churches are essentially one; that such a union will not only make a numerically larger church, but that it will also make for greater strength, efficiency, inspiration, and enthusiasm; that it will also make our service more effective and far-reaching” and “believing that we shall be fulfilling the prayer of our Lord when he prayed ‘that they may all be one, as we are.’”

During the Annual Conference in 1944, local congregations were encouraged to study the handbook My Church Faces Union, so that church members would better understand the implications of union. Bishop Grant D. Batdorf, together with Bishop George E. Epp of the Central Area of the Evangelical Church, guided members of the session in a study and discussion of the proposed union between the two Churches. This event and others like it fostered a positive feeling toward merger at the local level.

At the 1945 annual session of the Pennsylvania Conference, meeting in Waynesboro, Resolution #1 was read on October 11 by Bishop J. Balmer Showers and adopted by a combined vote of ministerial and lay delegates of 138 to 1. The resolution stated:

Resolved, that the Plan and Basis of Union and the proposed Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, including the Confession of Faith contained therein, submitted to this 34th session of the General Conference of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ by the Joint Commission on Church Federation and the Union of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ and The Evangelical Church for effecting

20 Proceedings of the One Hundred Fifty-Fifth Annual Session of the Pennsylvania Conference, 1943, p51.
21 Ibid
22 Ibid., p52.
23 Proceedings of the One Hundred Fifty-Sixth Annual Session of the Pennsylvania Conference, 1944, p30.
the organic union of The Church of the United Brethren in Christ and The Evangelical Church, be and the same are hereby approved and adopted. 24

Resolution #2 was read and carried. It gave the bishops, or a majority of them, with the advice and consent of 2/3 of all Annual Conferences, power to call a special session of General Conference, and the special session had all the power of General Conference in quadrennial session. 25 Resolution #3 was also adopted. It stated that if Resolution #2 was accepted and all the provisions for church union were made according to the Plan and Basis of Union, that we join with other Annual Conferences in authorizing the Board of Bishops to call a special session of General Conference for the purpose of consummating the proposed union and such other business as may come before the session. 26

The 1946 annual session of the Pennsylvania Conference was its last meeting within the United Brethren Christ denomination. John H. Ness was the Conference Superintendent. This was fitting because Dr. Ness had been a member of the Central Committee on Church Union from its beginning, as well as a member of many other committees dealing with union. His happiness with the impending union was reflected in his superintendent’s report, which stated “the day for which we have worked and prayed is now near at hand” and “in a small but sincere way I have tried to do what I could in this great work.” 27

During the evening of October 9, the Pennsylvania Conference held an EUB fellowship hour. It was observed with song, prayer, and the presentation “Our Common Heritage” by conference historian Paul E. Holdcraft. Dr. Holdcraft’s message was simple but meaningful. His theme was “We are brethren!” He reminded the audience that it was these words, so familiar within the United Brethren in Christ denomination, that were uttered by Otterbein to Boehm at a meeting in Lancaster County in 1766. Now in 1946, he continued, “The spiritual sons of Philip William Otterbein are saying to the spiritual sons of Jacob Albright, ‘We are brethren!’” 28

Dr. Holdcraft also called attention to statements by others that compared the heritage of the Evangelical and United Brethren in Christ traditions. “The late Bishop Maze referred to our denominations being so similar as to time, place and nationality that they are as streams flowing out from the same high mountain range.” Bishop Trout said, “The good people of both communities are hoping and believing that the time draweth near when the springs which were so alike in the healing qualities of their waters will flow together in a river which shall make glad the city of God.” 29

24 Proceedings of the One Hundred Fifty-Seventh Annual Session of the Pennsylvania Conference, 1945, p89.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p90.
27 Proceedings of the One Hundred Fifty-Eighth Annual Session of the Pennsylvania Conference, 1946, p46.
28 Ibid., p73.
29 Ibid., p74.
So related are the two churches, Holdcraft noted, that it was United Brethren in Christ preacher Adam Riegel who led Jacob Albright to Christ after he [Albright] had lost three children to death and was looking for guidance. Both churches are American born, and their governments were patterned after the United States government. Both denominations emerged from the great evangelical revival that swept the nation in the late 1700’s and early 1800’s. Their doctrine, position and emphases are identical. 30

“From the very beginning,” Dr. Holdcraft continued, “the United Brethren Church has been evangelical, and from its inception the Evangelical Church people have been united brethren. Simple logic, as well as tradition and sentiment, has brought this merger about.” 31 He closed his presentation by saying, “The important thing is that we have been true to the faith of the founding fathers. We have made one of their most cherished dreams come true, and it makes our hearts glad.” 32

At the 1947 annual session of the Pennsylvania Conference of the EUB Church, the Conference Superintendent said in his report, “The Pennsylvania Conference solemnly pledges full and unreserved allegiance and loyalty to the Evangelical United Brethren Church and fellowship.” 33 Other reports that year noted the following.

A spirit regard and good will characterized the adjustments in the local churches necessitated by the merger. Some churches completed the transition in ten months. Others went more slowly. This was a time and occasion for patience… The former Evangelical Church faced a major adjustment within the local churches in the formation and operation of the local Council of Administration. This council was practically the same structure that was in the former United Brethren in Christ churches… As far as the United Brethren in Christ churches were concerned, they had to adjust to congregational meetings, with certain elections held by that body. Both parties complied in good will.” 34

**Annual Conferences of the Central Pennsylvania Conference (Evangelical): 1943-47**

The 1943 report of the District Superintendents noted that the General Conference was almost unanimously in favor of union between the Evangelical and the United Brethren in Christ denominations. It also stated the will of the General Conference, that the years ahead would be filled with cordiality and good

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p75.
34 Ibid., p54.
faith, so that when union does take place there will be a feeling of God’s presence.

Nothing official appeared about the proposed merger in the minutes of the annual sessions of 1944 or 1945. On May 10, 1946, the vote on Church Union was taken at St. Paul’s Evangelical Church in Lewisburg. The resolution was presented to the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church and adopted unanimously by a “yea” and “nay” vote. The resolution, that passed by an official count of 190-0, went as follows.

Whereas, The Plan and Basis of Union and the Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church have been submitted to this conference in printed form for approval by “yea” and “nay” votes; therefore, be it

Resolved, That the proposed Plan and Basis of Union, and the proposed Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, including the Confession of Faith contained therein, submitted to the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church by the Joint Commission on Church Federation and Union of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church for affecting the organic union of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church, are hereby approved and adopted.

In general, the proceedings of the 1946 annual session revealed the closeness between the two merging churches during the time of gloom of World War II. The District Superintendents’ Report, which preceded the all-important vote, stated that Evangelicals are ever-grateful for their heritage and for the prospect of an enlarged fellowship. It maintained there is reason to believe that the new church would be able to contact people world-wide for the Kingdom of God. It closed by affirming that, “Tomorrow when this Conference faces the church union issue, we will not only be casting our votes for this particular church merger, important as that is, but we shall also thereby be committing ourselves and our Conference anew to…the ideal of Christian unity.”

The accomplished union was formally announced at the May 1947 annual session and placed in the minutes as an historical record as follows: “On the sixteenth day of November, 1946, at 9 o’clock am, the official delegates duly elected by the several conferences of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church met at the First United Brethren Church at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and…the Union was consummated.” At that same annual conference a Committee on Church Union Adjustments reported changes

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35 Minutes of the 104th Annual Session of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1943, p52.
36 Minutes of the 107th Annual Session of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical Church, 1946, p37.
37 Ibid., p48.
38 Minutes of the 1st Annual Session of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1947, p37.
made in the Discipline of the EUB Church that affected Annual Conferences – mainly offices, term lengths, and new structures.\textsuperscript{39}

**Changes at the Local Level**

Although the EUB Discipline was a denominational document, its application necessitated changes at the local level. Such changes, however, involved only polity and not belief. There were essentially no doctrinal differences between the two merging bodies, and the former Evangelical and United Brethren in Christ Confessions of Faith were included as one. The organization and government of local EUB churches was similar to that of local congregations in the predecessor bodies except for the Council of Administration and congregational meetings.

The EUB Discipline called for a Council of Administration. This was the successor to the Official Board in the United Brethren in Christ Church, and it was empowered to act for the local church between Quarterly Conferences.\textsuperscript{40}

The new Discipline also mandated that there be an annual congregational meeting in every local church. Such a meeting, open to all members of the congregation, was to review the work of the local church for the year, to consider local opportunities and needs, to acquaint the members with the programs of the Annual Conference and the General Church, and to elect trustees and other officers as the congregation may decide. It shall include reports of the present status and future programs of the local church, recommendations to the Council of Administration and/or Quarterly Conferences, and any other business called for.\textsuperscript{41}

Previously, congregational meetings had been part of the local church structure within the Evangelical denomination.

The local governments of the merging denominations had been similar in the rest of their make up. Each Discipline stated that the local church should have class officers, stewards, and Quarterly Conferences.

The class officers were to be Christian examples to the congregation. They had to know and understand the Discipline, to preside over meetings when the preacher could not attend, and to visit the sick.\textsuperscript{42}

Stewards met with the pastors to find out what the congregation’s financial claims were for the year, saw to it that each class paid its proportionate amount for meeting such claims, received voluntary contributions for the support of the preachers, and paid such money to the preachers regularly. They also

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p49.  
\textsuperscript{40} The Discipline of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, p60.  
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p61.  
provided bread and wine for the Lord’s Supper and procured dwellings for married preachers.\textsuperscript{43}

Quarterly Conferences met four times a year. Their job was to enforce the Discipline and to make sure that everyone within the local church was living a Christian life. Quarterly Conferences heard from the various groups and organizations within the church. They also evaluated the program of the local church as a whole.\textsuperscript{44}

**Attitudes to the Changes in Union County**

The merger of the Evangelical and United Brethren in Christ denominations in 1946 went very well in Union County. One reason for the smooth transition may have been that there were no United Brethren in Christ congregations within the county. Getting a true and complete picture of the attitudes about the merger, however, requires contacting both church officials and typical church members. To those ends, formal interviews were arranged with Rev. William Woods and Mr. Fenton Swartz. Although currently serving outside Union County, Rev. Woods’ tenure as a district superintendent living in Lewisburg within the former EUB and newly created United Methodist denominations 1966-71 renders him a church official qualified to speak to the issue. A member of the Forest Hill United Methodist (formerly Evangelical) congregation, Mr. Swartz lives in Cowan and is a life-long resident of Union County with views representative of the county’s laity. In addition to these two formal interviews, informal conversations with these and other individuals contributed to the writing of this paper.

Rev. Woods identified several factors he believes created a willingness to participate in the 1946 merger. First, both denominations were similar in size. This was important because it allowed members to feel as though they really had a voice in what was happening, and that they did not have to fear being pushed around by an overpowering partner. In addition, both denominations had similar beliefs and were similar in organization at the local level. This meant there were no changes in the Confession of Faith, worship services, or congregational meetings. Each church, however, had to form a Council of Administration consisting of the minister and various other officers of the church. “This change,” said Rev. Woods, “was easy to accept.”\textsuperscript{45}

The interview with Mr. Swartz confirmed the information provided by Rev. Woods. Mr. Swartz stated there were absolutely no hard feelings among the church members in Union County effected by the merger of the Evangelical and

\textsuperscript{43} Doctrines and Disciple of the Evangelical Church, p39. Discipline of the United Brethren in Christ Church, p35.

\textsuperscript{44} Doctrines and Disciple of the Evangelical Church, p41. Discipline of the United Brethren in Christ Church, p35.

\textsuperscript{45} Dr. William Woods, Interview on Church Union (Carlisle, PA; October 1979).
United Brethren in Christ denominations. “You might say,” he remarked, “that the Evangelicals in Union County didn’t even know they [the United Brethren in Christ] existed.” The essence of his comments were that the citizens of Union County gladly accepted the union of 1946, and that to the local members the merger meant only the formation of a local Council of Administration.46

In summary, the residents of Union County willingly embraced the 1946 merger of the Evangelicals and the United Brethren in Christ because they lost none of their powers and they were allowed to continue worshipping God as they had traditionally done. They saw the union not as bringing two separate denominations together, but rather as a rejoining of the fragmented portions of a single body. Furthermore, examination of the minutes from several local churches failed to yield a single official mention or discussion of the merger. The affected congregations in Union County just quietly changed their names from Evangelical to EUB.

The Background for Merger in 1968

The United Methodist Church brings together two streams of spiritual life with similar emphases which had their beginnings in the evangelistic concerns and passions of John Wesley, Francis Asbury, Philip William Otterbein, Jacob Albright, and others who labored with them. These men often conferred with one another and sometimes even traveled together on their preaching missions. In many communities they shared the same buildings, with the Methodists conducting services in English one hour and the Evangelicals or United Brethren in Christ conducting services in German at another.47

The two streams were so similar that the Asbury (Methodist) groups were called “English Methodists,” and the Otterbein-Albright (EUB) groups were known either as “German Methodists” or “Dutch Methodists.”48 Their firm belief that Christian faith and experience ought to be expressed in holy living led these early leaders to adopt similar patterns of ecclesiastical organization and discipline to assist their followers in spiritual growth and Christian witness.49

Over the years there were many conversations concerning union, but they had been fruitless. Believing the familiar saying that “If you fail – try, try again,” this is just what the Methodists and EUB’s did. This persistence finally paid off in 1956, when the two denominations began formal discussion on merging.50

The first meeting of the Joint Commission took place in Cincinnati on March 5-7, 1958, and opened the way to planning for union. When the

46 Mr. Fenton Swartz, Interview on Church Union (Cowan, PA; October 1979).
48 Ibid.
49 The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, p.15.
recommendation to unite was made to the EUB General Conference in 1958 and the Methodist General Conference in 1960, two decisions were made: (1) both denominations formally agreed to proceed with a plan of union; (2) the Methodists ended their merger discussion with the Episcopal Church. This was significant in that it showed, for the time-being at least, that Methodism was more congenial to its Pietist than its Anglican heritage. The EUB Church, which also had been discussing merger possibilities with other denominations, likewise agreed to end such talks when the prospects for a union with the Methodists materialized.

At their next quadrennial sessions, the EUB General Conference of 1962 and the Methodist General Conference of 1964 directed their respective church union commissions to prepare a complete basis for uniting the two denominations. *The Plan and Basis for Union* was completed by the end of 1965 and published in April 1966.

As the discussions between the two groups continued, however, it was clear that even the best of intentions and goodwill could not ignore several very difficult problems. The first problem was size. Less than eight hundred thousand EUB’s could easily be lost among ten million Methodists. Another was choosing the name for the new body. This decision would have legal, psychological, and substantial overall significance. Thirdly, the nature of the episcopacy had to be addressed. Both denominations had bishops, but the EUB episcopal leaders had considerably less power than their Methodist counterparts. In addition, EUB bishops were elected for four year terms while Methodist bishops were chosen for life.

But perhaps the most troublesome item that confronted the Joint Commission was whether district superintendents should be appointed by the bishop (as in the Methodist Church) or elected by the Annual Conference (as was done by the EUB’s). In addition, the term of the superintendent was a fixed six years in the Methodist Church and four years with the possibility of re-election in the EUB denomination.

The number of ministerial orders created a fifth problem. The EUB’s practiced a single ordination, while Methodists had a two-fold system involving ordination first as deacon and later as elder. Finally, the problem of theology never came up in the negotiating sessions. It did, however, become a problem.

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51 Ibid., p427.
52 Ibid., p425.
53 Ness, One Hundred Fifty Years, p493.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
immediately after the union was accomplished and the United Methodist Church belatedly began to examine its doctrinal standards. 59

There were also problems related to the specific plan of union that had to be dealt with before union could take place. 60 This was the responsibility of the parallel meetings of the General Conferences in early November 1966. The two General Conferences met in different rooms of the same Chicago hotel, allowing each side to meet separately while remaining in close contact with the other. This completed a complex series of moves to address all the previously listed problems. 61

A vigorous minority of the EUB Church opposed the union as a betrayal of its long-standing traditions, as an unacceptable compromise with secular and social radicalism, and as the helpless absorption of a small denomination by a very large one. Another group was still concerned about issues of episcopacy, district superintendents, and black segregation. The majority, however, believed that the idea of unity and the advantages of union were worth the struggle in the expectation that a new denomination could more effectively work for Christian ideals. When the compromises were worked out, the Methodist approach to the offices of the bishop and district superintendent prevailed – but powerful pressure was brought to secure a firmer commitment to racial desegregation within the church. The target date of 1972 was set for the elimination of segregated conferences, jurisdictions, and other ecclesiastical structures. 62

The most important function of these meetings was to take a final vote on union, which was approved by the Methodists 749 to 40 (94.9%) and by the EUB’s 325 to 88 (78.7%). In addition, the annual conferences needed to approve the union by a two-thirds aggregate vote within each denomination. That vote was 70% for the EUB’s and 87% for the Methodists. 63 This meant that the union in 1968 took place with a margin of only 3% on the EUB side. The merger brought together the history and tradition of nine predecessor denominations.

**The Uniting General Conference in 1968**

On April 23, 1968, in Dallas, Texas, Bishop Reuben H. Mueller (EUB) and Bishop Lloyd C. Wicke (Methodist) symbolically and legally joined 738,000 EUB’s and 10,289,000 Methodists. After high moments of spiritual exaltation, the General Conference set itself to struggle with an accumulation of problems, each of which threatened to become divisive. Even though the issues that had occasioned debate in the process of merger reflected relatively small differences between the denominations, there was still work to be done. The common

59 Ibid.
61 Ibid., p429.
62 Ibid
63 Ibid.
heritage of the two bodies, however, was able to overcome most of the lingering differences, and the new Church emphasized this common heritage.\textsuperscript{64}

Changes at the National Level

One major consideration in the United Methodist Church (hereafter designated UMC) was to ensure that the former EUB’s, outnumbered almost 14 to 1, would have a voice in the decision making of the new denomination. To address this issue, every board, committee and agency of the UMC was to operate on a percentage basis for twelve years. This was felt to represent enough time for people to consider themselves United Methodist and not EUB or Methodist. Due to expire at the end of this year (1979), this program can now be said to have achieved its objective.\textsuperscript{65}

In addition, the elimination of black conferences had proven to be a significant positive move of the UMC. Following the turbulent and divisive civil rights movement of the 1960’s, this action by the new denomination pleased black leaders within the UMC and indicated that their church now accepted them as equal to whites.\textsuperscript{66} This had been a new problem for officials from the former EUB Church. Because it had spread across the county primarily via German migration, that denomination had no black conferences and few black members. This also meant that there were very few EUB churches in the southern part of the country.

A challenge familiar to both former denominations was providing effective ministry within rural churches. Such congregations had been a very important part of the past in both of the merging bodies, but now the percentage of people leaving the rural areas and living in the cities was ever increasing. The UMC took a stand in this area by declaring it would not abandon the rural areas that had so long contributed to and been affectively ministered to by the uniting denominations.\textsuperscript{67}

The Constitution of UMC sought to address areas in which potentially divisive differences might occur. Important practical, ethical and theological principles were set forth in language intended to be specific but not dictatorial.\textsuperscript{68}

The UMC went to work with promise for a bright future, but some of the brightness was dimmed by the fact that in the process of union some churches became independent. While about a half dozen claimed independence in Pennsylvania,\textsuperscript{69} a significant portion of EUB congregations in the Pacific

\textsuperscript{64} Norwood, The Story of American Methodism, p429.
\textsuperscript{65} Rev. John Stamm, Interview on Church Union (Mifflinburg, PA; October 1979).
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Norwood, The Story of American Methodism, p430.
\textsuperscript{68} The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, p15.
\textsuperscript{69} Stamm, Interview on Church Union.
Northwest chose to remain outside the UMC.\textsuperscript{70} In order to make a major advancement, a price must be paid; and some local churches were just not willing to pay the price.

**Annual Conferences of the Susquehanna Conference (EUB/UM): 1966-69**

Dr. Paul Washburn, the executive director of the Commission on Church Union, addressed the Susquehanna Conference in 1966 on behalf of the Commission and the proposed union with the Methodist Church. His theme was “Where Is the Promised Land?” He was thanked for his “frank and forceful presentation” on the issues and answers related to the proposed union.\textsuperscript{71}

The positive attitude toward union at the conference is reflected in the report of Alfred J. Thomas, secretary of the Conference Historical Society. He said that the Methodist Church had invited all EUB members to help celebrate its 1966 Bicentennial of American Methodism in Baltimore April 20-24. He added that in response the EUB’s annual Otterbein Church Pilgrimage had been advanced one week to coincide with the Methodist celebration and make it joint affair.\textsuperscript{72}

At the 1967 annual session of the Susquehanna Conference, at Grace Church in Hagerstown MD, the vote on the Methodist-EUB union took place on May 25. After Dr. Washburn gave the Report on Church Union, layman Paul Gilmore of Williamsport St. Paul (former Evangelical) made the motion that the vote be taken by standing. The motion was seconded by another layman, Dr. Raymond G. Mowery of the Quincy congregation (former United Brethren in Christ). That positive and open spirit of unity did not prevail, however, and a substitute motion to vote by secret ballot was approved 244-157 – with the conference journal failing to identify the persons who made and seconded the substitute motion.\textsuperscript{73}

The resolution on the proposed union was then presented to the conference, the votes were cast, and the ballots were placed in the care of the tellers.\textsuperscript{74} When tallied, they revealed a sizable minority opposed to the union. The result was 318 (71.8\%) for the proposed union, and 125 (28.2\%) opposed.\textsuperscript{75} The reasons for the local unwillingness to merge will be discussed later.

The District Superintendents’ Report to the 1968 Susquehanna Conference, now a part of the United Methodist Church, contained a portion titled

\textsuperscript{70} Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, p430.
\textsuperscript{71} Journal of the 178\textsuperscript{th} Annual Session of the Susquehanna Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1966, p100.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p203.
\textsuperscript{73} Journal of the 179\textsuperscript{th} Annual Session of the Susquehanna Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1967, p120.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p121.
“A New Church, A New Beginning.” It said that in Dallas TX on April 23, a new Protestant Church was created and that the future would not be shaped by emphasis on the mechanics of church structure, but rather by an unquenchable longing for church renewal and mission in a needy world.76 The report also indicated that some published accounts were giving the public a wrong impression of the merger. Because of the “bad press,” Bishop Kaebnick sent letters to ministers, ministerial students, and lay members of the Annual Conference reminding them that their priority is to their church. The conclusion of the report contained a list of changes that affected the Susquehanna Conference, the most significant of which were in the areas of organizational patterns and conference boundaries.77

On Wednesday June 11, at the 1969 session of Annual Conference meeting at Lebanon Valley College, Bishop Kaebnick presented the Susquehanna Conference with the Plan and Basis of Union to join with their former Methodist counterparts to form the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. No questions were raised relative to the plan to unite the conferences, and so the bishop directed superintendent Dr. Clair C. Kreidler to read the Enabling Acts. After that the vote was taken – resulting in 389 in favor of the proposal, 0 opposed, and 1 abstention.78

Annual Conferences of the Central Pennsylvania Conference (Methodist/UM): 1966-69

During the 1966 annual conference, Dr. John F. Stamm presented a resolution anticipating that the process of union would necessitate changes in both the Susquehanna Conference (EUB) and the Central Pennsylvania Conference (Methodist). He proposed that a joint Study Committee, consisting of 15 members from each conference, be formed to address the issue and report their findings through the usual channels. The resolution was adopted.79

The 1966 Report on Church Union outlined the steps to be taken before a union could be consummated. First, the General Conferences of both denominations had to meet simultaneously but separately in Chicago in the fall of 1966 to consider the Plan and Basis of Union prepared by the special committees. If the Plan and Basis of Union was accepted, it would be sent to the annual conferences of both denominations for approval. If a two-thirds aggregate majority of voting members in the annual conferences of each denomination

76 Journal of the 180th Annual Session of the Susquehanna Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, 1968, p118.
77 Ibid., p119.
approved, the United Methodist Church would come into existence in April 1968 in Dallas TX. The report also stressed that everything that could be done to make the union a smooth one should be done.  

The following year, on Friday, June 16, at the Ninety-Ninth Session of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Church, Edgar A. Henry moved that...

Whereas, The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church assembled in their General Conferences in Chicago in November of 1966, for the purpose of considering union of the two denominations, each voted by more than the required majority to approve the Constitution and Enabling Legislations of the proposed United Methodist Church, and

Whereas, This matter is now referred to the Annual Conferences of the two denominations for their approval, therefore be it

Resolved, That the Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in session in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, on the sixteenth of June, 1967, does hereby vote its approval of the Constitution and Enabling Legislation of the proposed United Methodist Church. The motion was approved by a vote of 344 in favor and 3 opposed, with one person abstaining.

The reports to the 1967 conference contained much information pertaining to the merger. As of this annual conference session, 43 of 87 Methodist and 21 of 32 EUB conferences had voted on Union. At that point the aggregate vote in favor of Union was 85.8% for the Methodists and 72.8% for the EUB’s. Locally, the Methodist and EUB conferences within the Central Pennsylvania area had formed a number of committees to deal with boundaries, pensions, institutions, and organizations. One particular indicator of the positive attitude toward union within the Central Pennsylvania Conference was the plan to join with the EUB’s to build a new nursing home facility in Lewisburg.

On Wednesday, the nineteenth day of June, 1968, the executive secretary of the Conference Council, F. Lamont Henninger, presented the motion to bring the Susquehanna Conference of the EUB Church and the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the Methodist Church together to form the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. This was mandated by the denominational Plan and Basis of Union, which specified that annual conferences with overlapping boundaries should designate committees to study and bring

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80 Ibid., p128.
82 Ibid., p135.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
about as soon as possible a mutually agreeable rearranging of the boundaries.\textsuperscript{85} The proposed boundary changes were accepted unanimously.\textsuperscript{86}

The report of the district superintendents to the 1968 conference had a special message and plea. It said that the Uniting Conference in Dallas projected the mission of the United Methodist Church to be that of continually opening the door to unity in Christ for all believers. It rejected overwhelmingly denominational isolationism. Bishop Eugene M. Frank had stated in Dallas that the most excitement in the Uniting Conference was not in structure, but in missions. The uniting of the two denominations in Texas, the report concluded, summons us to do the same in our respective annual conferences.\textsuperscript{87}

### Changes at Annual Conference

Following the union of 1946, overlapping annual conferences of the uniting denominations were not combined nearly as fast as they were after the 1968 union. In less than two years after the official April 1968 merger in Dallas, the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church was formed from parts of five conferences of the former Methodist and EUB denominations.

More than a year preceding the unifying General Conference, a special committee had been formed for the purpose of mobilizing the extensive resources of the soon-to-be United Methodist Church in the state. In July 1968, the Committee on Boundaries recommended that there be four Pennsylvania conferences: the Eastern, Central, Western and Wyoming Conferences. The Central Pennsylvania Conference would include churches from two former Methodist conferences (Central Pennsylvania and Philadelphia) and three former EUB conferences (Susquehanna, Eastern Pennsylvania, and Western Pennsylvania).\textsuperscript{88} On October 18, 1969, the five annual conferences united. The Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church composed of nine districts: Altoona, Chambersburg, Harrisburg, Lewisburg, New Cumberland, State College, Wellsboro, Williamsport and York.\textsuperscript{89} Beginning in the next section, this paper will focus on a portion of the Lewisburg District.

The newly formed conference had a total membership of 229,265 (124,879 former Methodists and 104,386 former EUB’s) individuals and 521 charges.\textsuperscript{90} Based on the memberships of the former conferences now within the

\textsuperscript{85} Official Journal: The Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the Methodist Church. 1968, p76.  
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p77.  
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., p135.  
\textsuperscript{88} The Plan and Basis of Union for Establishing the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church. 1968, p2.  
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., p7.  
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p13.
new body, the Conference set the following ratio that membership on committees, boards, agencies and commission had to meet: Central Pennsylvania 5, Susquehanna 3, Eastern 1, Western ½, Philadelphia ½. The Plan and Basis of Union also outlined the staff and structure of the new conference\(^91\) and stated that a committee of 11 laymembers be formed to deal with pension and insurance issues.\(^92\)

The uniting Annual Conference of October 18, 1969, also resolved the following:

1. That we, the members of the First Session of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church, herewith give expression to our great joy and deep gratitude that under the providence of God, we come to participate in this high hour of consummation in which the Central Pennsylvania Conference has become the ecclesiastical and legal successor to the aforesaid uniting Annual Conferences.

2. That we acknowledge with profound gratitude the earnest and tireless labors of the Joint Commissioners on Conference Union, and of all who through the years have helped to make possible this union.

3. That we hereby solemnly pledge our full and unreserved allegiance and loyalty to the Central Pennsylvania Conference, and fervently pray God’s richest blessing to abide upon our Conference.

4. That we will continue to invoke the benediction of Almighty God to rest abundantly upon the leaders, ministers, lay delegates, the local congregations and all the members thereof – young and old, Conference Boards, Agencies with their projects and programs, Institutions – academic and benevolent, in which the Lord has called us to serve and support, to the end that the Central Pennsylvania Conference may give its full measure of devotion to establish the kingdom of our Lord God and His Christ in all the earth.\(^93\)

**The Local Churches**

The doctrinal statement of the United Methodist Church contains both the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church and the Confession of Faith of the EUB Church. The doctrinal traditions of both denominations stem from the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century and have been developed through the generations. These doctrines are preserved in the United Methodist Church, because in 1808 the American Methodists enacted a restrictive rule designed to inhibit doctrinal changes.\(^94\)

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\(^91\) Ibid., p15.
\(^92\) Ibid., p36.
\(^94\) The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, p37.
The government of the two denominations at the local level was also very similar. Both groups had what was called the Quarterly Conference. This was the governing body of the local church. It included the officials of the church and the heads of the various organizations within the church. The Quarterly Conference set everything from goals for missions to the pastor’s salary. It also heard reports from all the organizations, the pastor’s reports, and financial reports. The charge conference of the United Methodist Church is just another name for the Quarterly Conference, except that it is prescribed to meet annually instead of the four times a year that the quarterly conferences originally met. While the name was new, the format was not.\footnote{Stamm, Interview on Church Union.}

The church conference in the Methodist denomination was the same as the congregational meeting in the EUB Church. A building project, for example, requires approval of the entire congregation. Such a meeting is called as necessary, when the officers of the church feel the need for approval from the congregation on important decisions. Congregational meetings are not described in the United Methodist Discipline as part of the local church government. With union, the Administrative Board received a bit more power and freedom.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Official Board of the Methodist Church and the Board of Administration of the EUB denomination had the same responsibility as the Administrative Board of the United Methodist Church. This body deals with the business of the local church, and the monthly financial reports. The Council on Ministries was new to the Methodists. It took over matters of programming and promotion which had formerly been handled by the Official Board. To the former EUB’s, the Council on Ministries was just another name for the Program Council.\footnote{Ibid.}

In dealing with the local church, then, one could conclude that there was no change in the Articles of Faith and very little change in local church government. The biggest change was the assigning of different names to organizations that continued with their same functions.

**Attitudes toward the Changes in Union County**

Unlike the 1946 merger, the 1968 union faced opposition from some church members within the county. An accurate accounting of the situation requires contacting officials and average church members from both denominations. John Stamm of Mifflinburg provided information from an official’s point of view on the Methodist side, while William Woods, former district superintendent in Lewisburg, offered opinions representative of an EUB official. Fenton Swartz of Cowan provided input on the feelings of former EUB
laypersons within the county, and a host of informal conversations with people from both denominations provided important additional information.

While the Methodists were faced with some organizational changes in the structure of the local church government, they were generally pleased with the merger. The main reason for such acceptance of the merger was that it imposed no obvious changes on the typical parishioner. "To the average church member," Rev. Stamm said, "the merger was neither here nor there, because the program in the local church is exactly the same way it was before the merger." The average church member not involved in local church government felt that the only thing the merger changed was the name of the denomination. Rev. Stamm remarked that the Methodists in Union County "seemed to have the attitude that it [the merger] is just one of those things we will have to get used to." 98

One reason the Methodists did not feel threatened by the merger was that they knew that in the big picture the numbers were on their side. This was significant, because within Union County the Methodists were greatly outnumbered by the EUB's – and there were not many counties in the United States where that was true.

The former EUB’s within Union County, however, were not nearly as pleased with the merger as were their Methodist counterparts. The EUB’s had power in this geographical area, and they were afraid this would diminish when they were "swallowed up" by the Methodists. They believed that the bigness of the United Methodist Church had the potential for becoming a denomination so powerful that it would be difficult to hold it accountable – especially with the more numerous former Methodists calling most of the shots. Another problem with merger, the EUB’s supposed, would be the impersonality inherent with bigness. 99

There were also ways in which the merger imposed a direct financial burden on former EUB congregations. After the merger parsonages had to have a washer and dryer, a complete kitchen, and a den or a study that included a desk. The electricity, fuel and telephone also now had to be paid by the congregation. Before 1968 many of these things were not required in the EUB Church. 100 In addition, the better pension plan in place after union required the EUB congregations to contribute more money and match what had been routine for the Methodists. These were hot issues in Union County, where many of the former EUB congregations were small and could not afford the new expenses.

Another fear of the former EUB’s was that of losing a part of their heritage. Their denomination had meant a lot to them, and they would like to see it stay the same. EUB’s tended to relate to and identify with each other nationally across conference lines. Former popular pastors from the area, for example, were now bishops around the country or held high positions in the denomination’s

98 Ibid.
99 Swartz, Interview on Church Union.
100 Ibid.
publishing houses or other institutions – and even the average layperson was moderately aware of the nation’s several EUB colleges. Now they would be a minority in a huge denomination with more bishops, officers and institutions than anyone could keep track of.

These loyalties ran deep. Even today many of the older, although not many of the younger, former EUB’s still consider themselves by that name. Many of the former EUB churches in Union County still sing from their old hymnals and do not use United Methodist literature in Sunday School.

Lewisburg and Mifflinburg are prime examples of another problem created by the merger. Both towns now have two United Methodist churches very close to one another. The members are willing to combine efforts for special events such as Vacation Bible School and revival meetings, but they are absolutely dead set against merging the two congregations. While this would mean less expense, it creates the problem of deciding which church building to close. Neither congregation will stand for closing its church so long as it has the finances to keep it open. Another problem would be whether to keep two preachers, and which one should go if only one is needed. These are touchy issues which need to be dealt with very gradually.

Although the lay members of the local EUB churches were opposed to the 1968 merger, the clergy officials were not. Dr. William Woods reflected the mood of the officials when he pointed out that it was in the best interests of the EUB churches to merge with the Methodist Church. The new denomination would have a great deal of power to work for God worldwide.

As in the 1946 merger, an attempt to confirm what was learned through interviews by investigating minutes of board meetings of the various churches proved fruitless. Although there was unhappiness, it was never officially mentioned in the minutes.

Conclusion

The major difference, from a Union County EUB perspective, between the union of 1946 and the union of 1968 was that in 1968 there was disagreement between the hierarchy of the church and the people at the grassroots. Those in charge during both mergers realized the similarities between the merging denominations. In 1946 the people at the grassroots agreed, but in 1968 all the EUB’s in the pews could see was that their church was being gobbled up by another almost fourteen times larger than their own. Either they did not understand how similar the two denominations were, or they did not care. In such situations, how things are perceived usually proves to be of more importance than how they actually are.

If the members of the two denominations had voted on the union, there would still be no merger between the EUB’s and the Methodists. People, as a rule, do not like change – but when change does occur, it is typically accepted
more and more as time passes. The more years that pass since 1968, the more people will consider themselves as United Methodists and not as former Methodists or former EUB’s.

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