

# THE WHOLE STORY

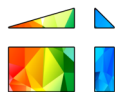
GOD'S VISION FOR A NEW WORLD



## PART 2

**The Season of Lent:  
Reflecting Theologically  
in a Broken World**

**March 5 – April 20, 2025**



**Hilliard**  
**United Methodist Church**

God Loves You  No Matter What

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# **THE SEASON OF LENT**

## **Reflecting Theologically in a Broken World: Lamentations & the UM Social Principles**

Wednesday, March 5, 7am & 6:30pm – ASH WEDNESDAY  
Covenant of Renewal Service in the Sanctuary

Sunday, March 9 – An Introduction to Lament & the United  
Methodist Social Principles  
Lamentations 1:1-5, Matthew 5:4

Sunday, March 16 – Community of All Creation:  
The Environment  
Lamentations 2:6-8, Romans 8:18-26

Sunday, March 23 – Economic Community:  
Economic Justice  
Lamentations 2:11-13, 19, Isaiah 58:6-12

Sunday, March 30 – Social Community: Social Justice  
Lamentations 3:49-58, Luke 14:15-24

Sunday, April 6 – Political Community (Part 1):  
Restorative Justice  
Lamentations 4:5-8, 17-18 Isaiah 2:1-4

Sunday, April 13 – Political Community (Part 2):  
Welcoming the Stranger  
Lamentations 5:1-5, 19-22, Luke 19:41-44

Thursday, April 17 – MAUNDY THURSDAY, 7pm in  
Warehouse 839, Washing the Disciples Feet & the  
Commandment to Love One Another  
John 13:1-17, 34-35  
Prayer labyrinth in the gym, 5:30-7pm & 8-9pm.

Friday, April 18 – GOOD FRIDAY, 7pm in the Sanctuary,  
Crucifixion of Christ, A Service of Lament  
John 19:1-30, Isaiah 53:3-9

Saturday, April 19 – EASTER VIGIL, 7pm at Resurrection  
Evangelical Lutheran Church (3500 Main St., Hilliard)

**Sunday, April 20 – EASTER – New Life**

John 20:1-18, Lamentations 5:21, 1 Corinthians 15:19-26

## **Easter Worship, Sunday, April 20**

- 6:30am Sunrise Service, outside
  - 9am Traditional Worship, Sanctuary
  - 10:30am Family Worship, Sanctuary
  - 11:15am Nontraditional Worship, Warehouse 839
- Children's Easter Egg Hunts: 10am, 11:15am, 12:15pm

## **Why Lamentations?**

The book of Lamentations is a poetic expression of deep grief and sorrow, written in the wake of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jewish people. Its verses capture the pain of loss, the weight of brokenness, and the yearning for renewal. Yet, amid its lament, Lamentations holds space for hope — a reminder that even in despair, God's steadfast love and faithfulness remain.

In our Whole Story journey through Lent, Lamentations offers us a framework to name and engage with the relevant griefs of our own time: the environmental crises, economic injustices, social inequalities, and political turmoil. Each week during worship, we will take time for confession — acknowledging where we have strayed from God's path — and reflect on how we can align our work as a church more fully with God's vision.

We will pair Lamentations with excerpts from the United Methodist Church's recently updated Social Principles. Adopted by the 2024 General Conference, this is the first major rewrite of the Social Principles since their creation in 1972. The updated Social Principles are a renewed guide for how we, as followers of Christ, can live faithfully and justly in our communities. They address pressing issues of our time with clarity and hope, calling us to confront hard truths about our world while also challenging us to imagine and work toward a better one.

By sitting with the rawness of lament, alongside space for deeper theological reflection, we have an opportunity to see, confess, and respond to the ways we have fallen short of God's vision for justice, mercy, and restoration. Lament will be a tool to face our reality with courage, allowing our grief to fuel thoughtful theological reflection that catalyzes faithful responses, as we draw closer to the renewal and resurrection of Easter.

# The United Methodist Social Principles

*Adopted by the 2024 UM General Conference, this is the first major rewrite of the Social Principles since their creation in 1972. All the major headings and sections are included here, but we didn't include sections that won't be covered during the Lenten sermon series. For the complete text, visit <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/what-we-believe/our-social-positions>, or scan the QR code.*



## Preface

The United Methodist Church, including its predecessor bodies, has a long and rich history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles. In addition to carrying out acts of mercy, Methodism's founder, John Wesley, spoke out against the abuse of animals, the exploitation of poor people, and the treatment of human beings as chattel. Following in Wesley's footsteps, some early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners. Similarly, the United Brethren strongly condemned slavery.

In 1908, The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) was the first denomination to adopt a Social Creed, which called for "equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life." Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (South) and by The Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a statement of Social Principles in 1946 at the time of the uniting of The United Brethren and The Evangelical Church. In 1972, four years after the uniting in 1968 of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which was revised in 1976 and by each successive General Conference. In 2008,

the General Conference added a Social Creed companion litany.

The Social Principles are not church law. Instead, they represent the prayerful and earnest efforts of the General Conference to speak to issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation that is in keeping with the best of our United Methodist traditions. The Social Principles are thus a call to faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. Moreover, they challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in deliberative reflection and encourage intentional dialogue between faith and practice. (See ¶ 509.)

The Social Principles are also a living document. In recognition of the important changes that have taken place in The United Methodist Church over the past 50 years, including significant developments in Africa, Europe and the Philippines, the 2012 General Conference mandated that the Social Principles be revised to increase their theological grounding, succinctness and global relevance. To accomplish this task, the General Board of Church and Society initially sought input and advice through consultations held in each of the five U.S. Jurisdictions and a majority of the Central Conferences. The initial draft of the revised Social Principles was developed by six writing teams, whose members reflected the broad diversity of the church. Following this, an Editorial Revision Team perfected additional drafts, based on feedback received via online surveys, extensive consultations with central and annual conferences, and comments solicited from United Methodist scholars, bishops, church bodies and leaders across the denomination.

Special Editorial Notes: Throughout the Social Principles, the term “we” refers specifically to the General Conference and more broadly to members of The United Methodist Church. Unless otherwise stated, the term “church” refers specifically to The United Methodist Church rather than, for example, the Church Universal.

# Preamble

We, the people called United Methodists, affirm our faith in the living God, who created everything that is and called it good, and created human beings in God's own image. We give thanks for Jesus Christ, incarnation of God's love and our Savior, who redeems and heals our relationship with God. We trust in the movements of the Holy Spirit, transforming human lives and the whole creation. Further, we declare our faith that God's grace is available to all and "nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other thing that is created" (Rom. 8:38–39).

From the beginning, God called us into covenant, bound with God, with one another, and with God's wonderfully diverse creation. God called us, further, to live lovingly in those relationships and to be stewards of God's created world, to tend God's garden. As we do our part in caring for creation, we allow all other parts of creation to fulfill their distinctive roles in the covenantal relationship with God (Gen. 2:7–15). According to Jesus' commandment, we are to love one another: "Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other" (John 13:34–35).

Created in God's image to live in covenant with God and the world, we honor the dignity of all beings and affirm the goodness of life. Knowing that we are held in God's grace, we are able to confess our sins. We have failed to love God with our whole hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. We have participated in unjust and life-destroying social systems. We have not been faithful stewards of God's creation, nor have we valued the role that every part of creation plays in the flourishing of God's world. Further, we have not followed Jesus Christ in sharing God's extravagant love and ministering with "the least of these" (Matt. 25:45) We have closed ourselves to God's guiding Spirit in our daily interactions with the human family and the earth. We have fallen short, and yet God loves us still.

We are grateful for God's forgiving and sanctifying love, given to us and to all and drawing us toward perfect love. By God's grace, we are called to be more Christ-like, and thus to be merciful, just and compassionate. Responding to that call, we seek to follow

Jesus, who gave boundless love to all—the children, the outcast, the condemned and the confused. Jesus calls every generation to wholehearted discipleship: opening our hearts to the people we encounter daily; practicing compassion with our families and neighbors; honoring the dignity and worth of all people near and far; recognizing the systems that destroy human lives through poverty, war and exclusion; and advocating justice and care in our churches, communities and social structures. God calls us further to be stewards of creation, caring for the skies and waters, soil and plants, and all beings.

We give thanks for God’s good gift of the Church Universal and for the Christian values embodied in the Wesleyan tradition and in The United Methodist Church. We recognize that the Body of Christ has many parts, and all are valuable. Thus, we respect differences within Christ’s Body, including differences in understanding and expressing faith, in gifts and practices of ministry, and in life experiences, as shaped by ethnicities, cultures, communities, abilities, age, sexual orientation and gender. We affirm our belief in the inestimable worth of each individual to whom God gives unique gifts. We renew our commitment to be faithful witnesses to the Gospel in our daily lives and work and to magnify our witness as the church.

Differences are a precious gift and daunting challenge. They can stretch the church’s capacity to live and minister faithfully. Yet God calls our church to difficult discipleship, with Jesus as our guide and the Spirit as our daily strength. With God’s help, we accept the challenge to follow the high calling “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” (Mic. 6:8, NRSV) John Wesley’s General Rules continue to inspire United Methodists to faithful practices that will do no harm, do good, and follow the ordinances of God.<sup>1</sup> We recognize the challenges before the church to engage with honesty and compassion through deep listening, hard conversations and shared ministry, even when we do not agree on all matters.

We acknowledge that the church is a living body gathered from the many and diverse parts of the human community. Thus, unanimity of beliefs, opinion, and practice have never been characteristic of the church from the beginning. From



its earliest times, as witnessed in the Gospels, Paul's letters, the Acts of the Apostles, and other New Testament texts, diverse understandings and controversies on many matters have been the reality. Therefore, whenever significant differences of opinion occur among Christians, some of which continue to divide the church deeply today, faithful Christians need to face their disagreements and even their despair, and not cover differences with false claims of consensus or unanimity. On the contrary, the church needs to embrace conflicts with courage and perseverance as we seek together to discern God's will. With that understanding and commitment, we pledge ourselves to acknowledge and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arise among us, accepting them as evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God's people.

Recognizing that God is our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, we seek to center our lives and witness on God. We are confident that nothing can separate us from the grace of God, and that the social witness of the church is a testimony to that grace. With God's help, we pledge to share ministry and honor everyone's dignity, even when we disagree, to seek the mind of Christ, and to follow God's will in all things.

## **7 Revised Social Principles**

### **Community of All Creation**

#### **Preface**

*The great lesson that our blessed Lord inculcates here...is that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God...who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe.*

~John Wesley, "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount"

We affirm that all creation belongs to God and is a manifestation of God's goodness and providential care. Human beings, nonhuman animals, plants, and other sentient and non sentient beings participate in the community of creation, and their flourishing depends on the care of all God's creation. Rather than treating creation as if it were placed here solely for humanity's use and consumption, we are called to practice responsible stewardship and to live in right relationship with the Creator and with the whole of God's creation (Gen. 1:26–31; Matt. 6:26–30; Rom. 8:22–24). We are also called to honor the role of every part of creation in healing the whole; thus we praise God with the whole of creation (Ps. 148) and recognize that we are part of complex ecosystems, all valued by God.

We affirm our sacred calling to be responsible stewards and to lovingly tend all that God has wrought. We recognize the inherent worth of God's creation, celebrate earth's abundance and diversity, and, along with the entirety of the cosmos, give praise to its Creator. We recognize we are interconnected members of complex ecosystems, intricate webs of life, all of which have their origins in God's gracious act of creation.

## **Creation in Peril**

We acknowledge that unsustainable human activities have placed the entirety of God's creation in peril. Further, we confess that the degradation and wholesale destruction of the natural environment threatens unprecedented harm, bringing danger to human and nonhuman life alike.

A. Destruction of Ecosystems

B. Global Warming and Climate Change

Global warming and climate change are already creating extreme conditions that threaten the entirety of life on earth. Over industrialization, widespread deforestation, and overreliance on fossil fuels are but some of the human activities that have contributed to the buildup of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere.

A sharp upsurge in greenhouse gases over past decades already has resulted in a steady rise in sea levels, growing acidification of the world's oceans, increased droughts and famines, and the

intensification of extreme weather events. Climate scientists warn that the window of opportunity for reversing the negative effects of global warming and climate change is rapidly closing. Without concerted action by individuals, churches, communities, shareholders, businesses, governments, and international organizations, the negative effects will become irreversible.

### C. Dependence on Fossil Fuels

## **Stewardship of Creation**

In Genesis 1, we read that God declares creation good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 25, 31), and we read in Genesis 2 that God “took the human and settled him in the garden of Eden to farm it and to take care of it” (Gen. 2:15). The goodness of God’s creation, and the value given to every part of it, call people to respect, protect, and care for the creation and all interrelated aspects of it.

### A. Environmental Racism

### B. Sustainable Policies and Practices

Sustainability is crucial to the development of ecologically sound policies and practices that seek to restore balance to the natural world and end the disruptive relationships between humanity and the rest of God’s creation. Sustainable policies and practices aim to meet present human needs while ensuring that future generations have the resources they need to thrive.

Sustainable policies and practices prioritize the protection of all forms of life and natural ecosystems, while supporting human beings to live in healthy balance with the earth.

We urge United Methodists to adopt sustainable habits and practices, including refraining from overconsumption, repurposing and recycling materials, avoiding products that pollute or otherwise harm the environment, and reducing the carbon footprints of individuals and families by

reducing overall reliance on fossil fuels for heat, transportation and other goods.

Recognizing that simply changing our personal habits will not be enough to reverse decades of environmental damage, the church supports local, regional, national, and international cooperative efforts aimed at redressing the ecological harms humans have wreaked on a global scale. Such cooperative efforts must include the development and enforcement of policies and practices that protect all sentient beings, and the promotion of sustainable economic development. We also encourage responsible consumption and urgent action against global warming and climate change.

C. Food Justice

D. Caring for All Creatures

E. Protecting Space

F. Affirming Science and Traditional Wisdom

## **The Economic Community**

### **Preface**

*When the Possessor of heaven and earth brought you into being, and placed you in this world, [God] placed you here not as a proprietor, but a steward: As such [God] entrusted you, for a season, with goods of various kinds; but the sole property of these still rests in [God], nor can be alienated from [God]. As you yourself are not your own, but [God's], such is, likewise, all that you enjoy. ~John Wesley, "The Use of Money"*

As United Methodists, we profess that all we are and all that we possess, belong to God. We are temporary stewards of the resources and material goods that we have accumulated. In our financial dealings and relationships no less than other aspects of discipleship, we are compelled to serve God and neighbor in all we do.

Few biblical themes are as prominent or as numerous as the scriptural injunctions to stand in solidarity with “the least of these,” including the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, and all other vulnerable members of society (Amos 5:7–13; Matt. 25:3–46; James 2:15–16). Accordingly, we pledge ourselves to the establishment of just, equitable, and sustainable economies that work for all.

## **Economic Challenges**

### A. Globalization

### B. Poverty and Income Inequality

As United Methodists, we follow in the footsteps of our founder, John Wesley, who sought to improve the lives of those who suffered from debilitating conditions such as poverty, starvation, illiteracy, imprisonment, slavery, addictions and disease.

We decry the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the concentration of wealth in the hands of ever smaller percentages of the global population. We lament that too many of the world’s people lack the basic resources necessary for survival and pledge ourselves to work toward the eradication of the roots and effects of poverty. We further lament the multiple causes of poverty, such as war, famine, diseases and desertification.

We reject religious teachings that view the accumulation of wealth as a sign of God’s favor and poverty as a sign of God’s disfavor. We confess that we have not always heeded the words of Jesus, who preached good news to people living in poverty, taught that they were not far from God’s coming reign, and challenged the rich young man to give up all that he had to follow him (Luke 6:20; Matt. 19:23–25).

We commit ourselves to be in active ministry with impoverished communities by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and by supporting their efforts to secure equal opportunities and meet human needs, including food,

water, health care and education. We reject preferential treatment in the church on the basis of wealth and income. We also commit to work toward eradicating unjust practices, policies, and systems that have condemned entire generations to live in unrelenting poverty.

C. Human Trafficking and Slavery

D. Graft, Bribery, and Corruption

## **Economic Justice**

*I entreat you, in the name of the Lord Jesus, act up to the dignity of your calling! No more sloth! Whatsoever your hand findeth to do, do it with your might! No more waste! Cut of every expense which fashion, caprice, or flesh and blood demand! No more covetousness! But employ whatever God has entrusted you with, in doing good, in every possible kind and degree to the household of faith, to all people!*

~John Wesley, "The Use of Money"

Our commitment to achieving economic justice is rooted in the covenantal understanding that God's creation is meant to be shared by all humans and sentient beings. Just as the oikos or household served as the heart of the economy in ancient times, our belief in the inclusive nature of God's global household motivates our pursuit of just, equitable, and sustainable economies.

As members of God's oikos and followers of Jesus, who taught that we must "give to those who ask and not turn away from those who want to borrow," we embrace our charge to share the abundance of God's creation in just and equitable ways (Matt. 5:42). We, therefore, urge governments, businesses and civic associations to ensure that individuals, families and communities not only survive, but also thrive.

A. Responsible Consumerism

Socially responsible consumerism is critical in life today. We urge

individuals, families, and congregations to adopt life habits that reduce unnecessary waste, promote just and equitable compensation, promote sustainability, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.

We urge consumers to exercise their economic power to encourage the manufacture of goods that are beneficial to humankind while avoiding those produced through exploitative labor practices. We support peaceful and nonviolent efforts, including boycotts, letter-writing campaigns, appeals to stockholders and divestiture, as effective means of expressing collective dissatisfaction with companies that engage in unjust or harmful practices. We also call upon stockholders and employees to exercise their moral agency by seeking to influence corporate policies. When such actions are necessary, we urge that they be in alignment with the teachings of the Gospel and the church's commitment to the dignity and worth of all beings.

In recognition that developed nations now consume the vast majority of the world's natural resources, we also support international policies and cooperative efforts aimed at producing economies that are more just and that promote human flourishing.

## B. Farming and Agricultural Production

### C. The Dignity of Work

We believe in the dignity of work, not merely as a means of subsistence, but as a way for individuals to contribute to the flourishing of their families and contribute to the common good. This affirmation of the dignity of work leads us to support the right to safe and secure working conditions, free from health and safety hazards. We also endorse the establishment and enforcement of policies that guarantee workers fair and equitable compensation, sometimes referred to as a living wage. We recognize that full employment is a distant dream in many communities and cultures and, in such situations, the challenges in establishing workers' rights are significant. Still, the church advocates for the fair and decent treatment of workers and

supports policies that expand opportunities for more people to find meaningful work with just compensation and benefits.

We oppose the widespread reliance on child labor, which forces children under the age of 18 to relinquish their childhoods and forgo educational opportunities, and instead to work in commercial agriculture, industrial manufacturing or extractive industries.

We support workers' freedom of association, including their rights to organize unions, to engage in collective bargaining, and to protest both unsafe working conditions and unjust employment policies and practices. We also support workers' right to strike. We reject efforts to permanently replace workers engaged in strikes or to make organized work stoppages illegal.

We support measures that limit the length of both the workday and workweek and endorse policies that guarantee every worker paid time off, including but not limited to sick time and bereavement leave, opportunities to vote and carry out other civic duties, holiday or vacation time, and parental leave for those caring for newborns or newly adopted children.

D. Sabbath and Renewal Time

E. Corporate Responsibility

## **The Social Community**

### **Preface**

*When it comes to faith, what a living, creative, active, powerful thing it is! It cannot do other than good at all times. It never waits to ask whether there is some good which is to be done; rather, before the question is raised, it has done the deed, and keeps on doing it. [One] who is not active in this way is a [person] without faith.*

~Martin Luther, Preface, Explanatory Notes on Romans



*The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social;  
no holiness but social holiness.*

~John Wesley, Preface, Hymns and Sacred Poems

As United Methodists, we affirm that human beings are made for God and for one another (Gen. 1:26–27, 31; Phil. 2:3–8). We live out our lives, grow in the faith, and engage in acts of discipleship and witness in the context of a variety of interconnected communities, including families, schools, neighborhoods, workplaces and the broader society.

The church is called to be a distinctive community, marked by preaching of the Gospel, studying of Scripture, breaking of bread, and witnessing to the power of redemption in the midst of a broken world. We respond to God's call in the world by giving witness to the transformative power of the Gospel, engaging in acts of mercy, and striving toward the attainment of justice and peace as hallmarks of God's coming reign. In all of these efforts, Christians are reminded that diverse as we may be, we are all a part of the same body under the sovereignty of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–31).

## **The Nurturing Community**

### **A. The Family**

We recognize that families come in a variety of sizes and forms, and acknowledge their significant role in nurturing the physical, moral, and spiritual development of children, youth and adults. Nurture and support are fundamental to the proper functioning of families. We, therefore, urge all family members to treat one another with love and respect. We also encourage parents and other caregivers to exercise appropriate diligence and care, raising their children in ways that promote their physical, spiritual, emotional, and moral growth.

Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We lament that in some instances, birth parents are unable or unwilling to fulfill their caregiving obligations. Under these circumstances, we applaud the willingness of extended families and foster and adoptive parents to step in as primary nurturers.

Even in these situations, however, we recognize the trauma that may be caused by separating children from their families of origin and urge that such actions be handled justly, sensitively and compassionately. Where appropriate and possible, we encourage open adoption so that children may know all information relevant to them, both medically and relationally.

## B. Single People

We celebrate the contributions of single people and reject all social practices that discriminate against them or subject them to bias and prejudice. We respect the decisions of single people regarding marriage and we affirm the many ways in which they may participate in family and community life. This profound sense of respect extends to single parents. We recognize the extra burdens and challenges that single parenthood entails and offer our love, support, and care in the fulfillment of this special vocation.

## C. Human Sexuality

We affirm human sexuality as a sacred gift and acknowledge that sexual intimacy contributes to fostering the emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being of individuals and to nurturing healthy sexual relationships that are grounded in love, care and respect.

Human sexuality is a healthy and natural part of life that is expressed in wonderfully diverse ways from birth to death. It is shaped by a combination of nature and nurture: heredity and genetic factors on the one hand and childhood development and environment on the other. We further honor the diversity of choices and vocations in relation to sexuality such as celibacy, marriage and singleness.

We support the rights of all people to exercise personal consent in sexual relationships, to make decisions about their own bodies and be supported in those decisions, to receive comprehensive sexual education, to be free from sexual exploitation and violence, and to have access to adequate sexual health care.

## D. Marriage

Within the church, we affirm marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith, an adult man and woman of consenting age, or two adult persons of consenting age into union with one another.

While The United Methodist Church does not recognize marriage as a sacrament, we celebrate and cherish this union as an expression of the couple's faith, grounded in their relationship with God and one another. Marriage thus reflects a continued willingness to grow together in Christ and a commitment to cultivate a covenantal bond that encompasses intimacy, grace and love.

As members of the larger society, we also affirm the importance of civil marriage, the legal recognition of domestic unions by the state. Such legal recognition is vital for guaranteeing family stability and the orderly regulation of inheritances, and for providing assurance that spouses and children are afforded all the rights, benefits, and protections to which they are entitled.

1. Child Marriage. We reject marital relationships with children and youth under the age of 18, even in places where such relationships are culturally or legally permissible. Child marriages and premature sexual activities disrupt the normal course of emotional, biological, and social development of minor children. For underage girls, in particular, premature sexual activities—and the pregnancies resulting from such activities—can permanently damage internal organs, lead to lifelong medical problems, and preclude other opportunities in their lives. Waiting until a more appropriate age to wed offers better opportunities for children and youth to grow into healthy adulthood and become full, contributing members of society. We therefore believe that young people should be of legal age to give their consent before entering into marriage.

2. Polygamy. We cannot endorse the practice of

polygamy, which entails living in relationship with multiple spouses. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that the forced dissolution of such relationships presents significant problems. All too often, the women and children forced out of polygamous relationships find themselves cast into abject poverty with no means of support.

We, therefore, urge church leaders, when dealing with the dissolution of polygamous relationships, to exercise the utmost care and to prioritize considerations related to the continued health and well-being of dependent women and children.

We reject attempts to ostracize families who are or have been in polygamous relationships, especially women and children, or deny them access to the ministries of the church, including participation in the sacraments. Instead, we urge pastors and congregations to extend the same gracious welcome and hospitality to all those in need.

3. Divorce. We recognize that divorce may become a regrettable but necessary alternative when marital relationships are strained beyond repair or become destructive or when spouses become irrevocably estranged. In such instances, we advise married couples to seek appropriate counseling and, if divorce proceedings become unavoidable, to conduct them in a manner that minimizes detrimental impacts on all family members.

Fidelity to the marriage covenant does not require spouses to remain in a physically or mentally abusive relationship. We do not support efforts to withhold the church's ministries from divorced people or to deny them opportunities for leadership in the church, whether clergy or lay. We urge pastors and congregations to provide ministries and programs that support divorced people in overcoming social and religious stigmas that they too often face. Divorce does not preclude remarriage.

## **Other Social Issues**

- A. Substance Abuse, Alcohol and Tobacco
- B. Bullying and Other Forms of Violence
- C. Colonialism, Neocolonialism and their Consequences
- D. Death with Dignity
  - 1. Faithful Care for the Dying
  - 2. Euthanasia and Suicide

We believe that suicide does not bar people from God's grace, which is all-sufficient. We urge pastors and local congregations to establish appropriate protocols in responding to people considering suicide and the survivors of suicide attempts. Such protocols should include referrals to experienced counselors or medical professionals. Rather than ostracizing or condemning survivors or family members affected by suicide, we urge pastors and congregations to provide compassion and support to these people.

### E. Gambling

### F. Gender Equality and Diversity

We support both gender equality and gender diversity as important goals for ensuring that the aspirations of women and girls are taken seriously and guaranteeing that paid positions and leadership opportunities are distributed equally for all. We decry the persistence of sexism and misogyny in the church through its practices and theological teachings, as well as in the broader society. We regret that such prejudices have too often led to the denigration and dismissal of women's leadership and participation.

Consequently, we reject any beliefs, policies or practices that envision women and men as unequal in either religious or secular settings. We exhort congregations, pastors, boards of ordained ministries, bishops, and other church

officials to implement concrete efforts to nurture and promote the leadership of all people, regardless of gender. We also urge governments, businesses, and civil society to enact laws and policies to ensure that all members of society are afforded equal access, opportunities and protections.

## G. Media and Communication Technologies

## H. Pornography

## I. Medical Experimentation and Research

## J. Organ Donation and Transplantation

## K. Reproductive Health and Abortion

We support the provision of comprehensive, age-appropriate education for sexual health, as well as access to consistent, effective, and affordable contraception. We also affirm ministries and initiatives aimed at promoting reproductive health and enhancing the quality of life for women and girls. Because of the dangers and risks involved in childbearing, we believe that women and girls should have consistent access to gynecological care. We, therefore, urge governments, businesses, churches, and other civic institutions to make access to prevention education, medical check-ups, treatment, and counseling high priorities for women and girls of childbearing age.

Our commitment to the sanctity of human life makes us reluctant to condone abortion. We unconditionally reject it as an acceptable means of birth control or a mechanism for gender selection and other forms of eugenics. We support measures requiring parental, guardian or other responsible adult notification and consent before abortions can be performed on girls who have not yet reached the age of legal adulthood, except in cases of alleged incest.

We oppose late-term or partial-birth abortion, a process also known as dilation and extraction. We call for the end to this practice, except when the life of the mother is in danger, no other medical treatments are feasible, or when

severe abnormalities threaten the viability of the fetus. We recognize that these and other tragic conflicts of life with life may justify decisions to terminate the life of a fetus. In these limited circumstances, we support the legal option of abortion and insist that such procedures be performed by trained medical providers in clean and safe settings.

We urge all those considering abortions to seek appropriate medical advice and pastoral counseling and to engage in searching, prayerful inquiries into other alternatives, such as making babies available for adoption. We pray for those facing unintended pregnancies and offer our prayers and support as they attempt to discern God's will and seek God's wisdom and guidance. Regardless of the circumstances in which someone might get an abortion, we do not condone bullying or shaming people for their decisions or actions.

We acknowledge that young women of childbearing age frequently report that they lack the ability to make meaningful life choices or exercise effective control over their own lives. We challenge pastors, congregations, campus ministries, and others to be at the forefront of efforts to empower these young women. Additionally, we support resource centers that offer compassionate care and help women explore alternatives to abortion.

We recognize that access to reproductive health services is too often limited by economic factors. Women living in poverty are often unable to make choices about when to become pregnant or about the size of their families. They also lack access to safe prenatal and postnatal care. Such a lack of agency perpetuates cycles of poverty by restricting the ability of women to participate in the workforce and by increasing the strain on scarce family resources. We support policies and programs that extend reproductive health services to women in economically challenged areas.

We support the use of a variety of reproductive strategies for those desiring to have children, including fertility treatments, in vitro fertilization (IVF), embryo or sperm donation, surrogacy, and others. We believe the decision

whether to use reproductive alternatives is best left to those considering the use of these options, in consultation with their health care providers. In all instances, the use of reproductive alternatives should be in keeping with the highest ethical standards, prioritizing the health and well-being of both women and children.

#### L. Racism, Ethnocentrism and Tribalism

We condemn racism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, and any ideology or social practice based on false and misleading beliefs or ideologies that one group of human beings is superior to all other groups of human beings. Additionally, we utterly reject laws, policies and social practices that marginalize, discriminate and/or encourage the use of violence against individuals, communities or other social groups based on perceived racial, ethnic or tribal differences.

We call on congregations and on pastors, bishops, and other church authorities to educate themselves about the root causes and manifestations of racism, ethnocentrism, and tribalism within communities of faith and to develop strategies for overcoming these kinds of social divisions. We likewise urge governments, businesses, and civil society organizations to renounce statements, policies, and actions aimed at promoting exclusion, discrimination and violence.

#### M. Sexual Harassment, Abuse and Assault

## **The Political Community**

### **Preface**

*"Love is the fulfilling of the law, the end of the commandment." Very excellent things are spoken of love; it is the essence, the spirit, the life of all virtue. It is not only the first and great command, but it is all the commandments in one. "Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are amiable," or honorable; "if there be any virtue, if*



*there be any praise," they are all comprised in this one word,—love.*

~John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart"

Our involvement in political systems is rooted in the Gospel imperative to love our neighbors, to do justice, and to care for the vulnerable. As United Methodists, we acknowledge that love requires responsible political action and engagement aimed at the betterment of society and the promotion of the common good. We acknowledge that such political engagement demands humility and mindfulness of our own complicity in perpetuating injustice. It also necessitates compassion, prayer, and a willingness to discern God's guidance.

We believe in the inherent worth of all people, which is established through God's gracious act of creation and most fully revealed in the power of Jesus's life, death and resurrection. The understanding that people are created in the image of God is a central theme in John Wesley's teachings.

We further believe that God calls all members of the human family to recognize and protect the dignity and worth of all people and to work for the well-being of all God's creation. We, therefore, support structures in the church and in civil society that honor the basic freedoms and rights of all human beings and protect God's creation. In particular, we affirm the important work of the United Nations in promoting peace and security, championing human dignity and human rights, and advocating for sustainable development.

## **Government Responsibilities**

### A. Church and Governments

We affirm that both church and state have vital and distinct

roles to play in relation to the larger society. Though the formal relationships between religious communities and governments vary from country to country, we generally affirm the independence and integrity of both institutions, and we advocate for a relationship of mutual respect in which neither institution seeks to dominate or unduly influence the other.

We affirm that every form of government stands under God's judgment and must therefore be held accountable for protecting the innocent, guaranteeing basic freedoms and liberties, protecting the natural world, and establishing just, equitable, and sustainable economies.

We urge those elected or appointed to public posts or holding other positions in government to act as responsible leaders and stewards of the authority and resources entrusted to them. We call on all government officials to aspire to the highest standards of professionalism, honesty and integrity. Furthermore, we urge all governments to adopt policies and practices that guarantee accountability and transparency in fostering and maintaining the trust of the public.

We reject governmental use of threats, extortion, unlawful detentions, extrajudicial killings, and other forms of coercion to silence political opponents and those objecting to unlawful or immoral government policies and practices. In keeping with international laws and ordinances, we vehemently protest the use of torture, slavery, genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and crimes of aggression by any government and call for the strictest international sanctions to be imposed in such cases.

While we do not believe churches should affiliate with particular political parties, we do encourage churches to speak out boldly on social issues from a Gospel perspective. We further believe churches have a right and a responsibility to educate and equip their members to be effective advocates for justice in the wider world.

## B. Civil Disobedience

## C. Restorative Justice

The Gospels place a premium on the restoration of right relationships (Matt. 18:15– 20). When relationships are violated or broken through crime or wrongdoing, such restoration is critically important. We, therefore, urge governments to develop systems that emphasize restorative justice, which requires people who have committed crimes to make amends for their offenses, and allows victims, if they elect to do so, to share with offenders how they have been harmed. Restorative justice seeks to prioritize the victim and the victim's family. It also seeks to repair damages, right wrongs, and bring healing to the victim, the offender, families and the community.

We urge congregations, governments, and businesses to support diversion programs that allow those who have committed offenses to receive counseling, education, skills training, community service, and other assistance to help them become fully contributing members of society. We encourage citizens to partner with law enforcement personnel in local communities to create alternatives to practices that emphasize retribution rather than restoration.

## D. The Death Penalty

## E. Criminal Justice

John Wesley campaigned tirelessly for improved conditions for prisoners. Once, in a period of nine months, he preached at least 67 times in various jails. He bemoaned the deplorable conditions under which most prisoners in his day lived. Claiming this heritage, we affirm the rule of law, the guarantee of civil liberties and rights, and equal access to justice for all people. We condemn discriminatory enforcement or any abuse of power for reasons of tribe, ethnicity, native language, country of origin, economic disadvantage, gender, sexual orientation, disability or citizenship status. We encourage systemic monitoring for prejudice and bias in all criminal justice systems. We further support access to competent legal representation for people who are accused and/or convicted of criminal acts.

We believe that offenders must be held accountable for criminal actions, particularly those that result in a loss of life or livelihood, so we support measures that prevent, deter or eliminate crimes, and set apart dangerous offenders. While insisting on accountability, we are also committed to fair and proportional sentencing and to the humane treatment of those who are imprisoned. We strongly support programs in prisons designed to promote rehabilitation and restoration of inmates. We do not believe that prisons should be for-profit enterprises.

In our communities, we support measures designed to address the root causes of crime, including poverty and the lack of educational opportunities, recreational activities, substance abuse treatment and counseling, mental health services, and job training. We endorse initiatives designed to promote positive interactions between law enforcement and members of local communities. Further, we encourage efforts to reintegrate people who have been released from prison back into the community, including the provision of employment opportunities, the restoration of voting rights and, where appropriate, the sealing of criminal records.

We encourage churches to be in ministry with those who are incarcerated, advocating for these people and for criminal justice reform as well. As forgiven people, Christians must combat the stigma often attached to people who have been in prison. We applaud the involvement of many United Methodists in prison ministries centering on worship, education and rehabilitation.

F. War and Military Service

## **Basic Rights & Freedoms**

We declare that all individuals, no matter their circumstances or social standing, are entitled to basic human rights and freedoms. These rights are grounded in God's gracious act in creation (Gen. 1:27), and they are revealed fully in Jesus's incarnation of divine love. As a

church, we will work to protect these rights and freedoms within the church and to reform the structures of society to ensure that every human being can thrive.

As set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other important international treaties, basic rights and freedoms include the right to life, liberty, and security as well as to equal treatment before the law and freedom from unlawful detention. Additional liberties include the rights to fair trial, privacy, public assembly, free expression, democracy, food and shelter. Further, workers have rights to engage in collective bargaining, receive just compensation and work in safe, healthy environments.

Rights call forth responsibilities. We urge individuals, congregations, and other church bodies to advocate vigorously not only for their own rights, but also for the rights of those who are voiceless or whose voices are unheard in society. Governments must be held responsible for guaranteeing human rights and liberties; such responsibilities include ensuring that all people have access to affordable, high-quality education, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, economic status or any other divisive marker.

We condemn all attempts to deny individuals their basic rights or freedoms or to strip human beings of their inherent dignity and worth. We, therefore, reject within the church and wider society any act of discrimination, hatred or violence directed against individuals or groups based on national origin, tribal affiliation, ethnicity, age, gender identity, disability status, economic condition, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or other any factors. Additionally, in the face of historic wrongs perpetrated against indigenous peoples, enslaved African peoples and other marginalized groups, we call for forthright confession and repentance as well as concrete acts of reparation to redress past and present forms of social injustice.

A. Health Care

B. Children and Young People

### C. Elders and the Aging

### D. Women and Girls

### E. Men and Boys

### F. Indigenous, Native and Aboriginal Communities

We support the rights of indigenous, native, and aboriginal communities and affirm that like all people they must be afforded the basic rights set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We condemn acts of genocide against indigenous peoples and call for government treaties and contracts with native and aboriginal peoples to be honored and enforced.

We join with indigenous peoples and tribes to demand that their rights to exercise national sovereignty be upheld by governments and courts. We support the efforts of indigenous people to revitalize their languages and cultures in the face of concerted efforts to assimilate them into mainstream societies. We acknowledge that indigenous, native, and aboriginal peoples are entitled to control their land, water and other resources, and we decry any attempts to forcibly seize these resources or to forcibly remove indigenous people from their territories.

### G. Migrants, Immigrants and Refugees

We affirm the dignity, worth and rights of migrants, immigrants and refugees, including displaced and stateless people. In so doing, we acknowledge that the world today is facing an unprecedented crisis related to the displacement of vast numbers of people due to such factors as ongoing wars and other hostilities, foreign interventions, widespread famine and hunger, global warming and climate change, and the failure of nation-states to adequately protect and care for their people.

We recognize that displaced people are particularly vulnerable as their in-between status often provides them with few protections and benefits, leaving them open to exploitation, violence and abuse. We urge United

Methodists to welcome migrants, refugees, and immigrants into their congregations and to commit themselves to providing concrete support, including help with navigating restrictive and often lengthy immigration policies, and assistance with securing food, housing, education, employment and other kinds of support.

We oppose all laws and policies that attempt to criminalize, dehumanize or punish displaced individuals and families based on their status as migrants, immigrants or refugees. Additionally, we decry attempts to detain displaced people and hold them in inhumane and unsanitary conditions. We challenge policies that call for the separation of families, especially parents and minor children, and we oppose the existence of for-profit detention centers for such purposes.

#### H. People with Disabilities

#### I. Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities

Because all people are of sacred worth and certain basic human rights are due to everyone, we are committed to supporting the equal rights, liberties and protections of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. We see clear issues of equality and justice in protecting the rightful claims of those with shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, because in many countries sexual and gender minorities are disproportionately impacted by social stigmas, discrimination, coercion and violence, we call on churches, governments, businesses, and civic organizations to do all in their power to combat such unjust treatment and to promote equal rights and protections for all.

#### J. Religious Minorities

## NOTES