

2020 UMC Social Principals (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.

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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.

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.