

THE DISCIPLINE
of
THE WESLEYAN CHURCH
2016

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PART 1

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Chapter 1

HISTORY

A. The Origin of the Wesleyan Movement

1. The Wesleyan movement centers around the scriptural truth concerning the doctrine and experience of holiness, which declares that the atonement in Christ provides not only for the regeneration of sinners but for the entire sanctification of believers. A revival of these scriptural truths concerning Christian perfection and scriptural holiness took place under the leadership of John Wesley in the eighteenth century, and continues in various ways until the present.

2. Nurtured in a devout home, John Wesley committed himself to a search after God from earliest childhood. While at Oxford, together with his brother Charles and a few other serious-minded collegians, he methodically pursued holiness through systematic Bible study, prayer, good works, intensive examination, and reproof. The group earned the nicknames of the “Holy Club” and of “Methodists,” but Wesley did not earn the assurance of salvation. Having graduated from Oxford, and having been ordained as a clergyman in the state church, he intensified his search for peace through legalism and self-discipline. The turning point came at a prayer meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, May 24, 1738, when he perceived the way of faith and found his heart “strangely warmed” in the new birth. As he went on to the experience of entire sanctification, he shared his testimony and teaching with others, and a spiritual awakening spread across the British Isles and to America.

3. It was not Wesley’s purpose to found a church, but the awakening brought about the spontaneous origin of the “societies” which grew into the Methodist movement. Near the end of 1739, there came to Wesley, in London, eight or ten persons who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. A day was appointed when they might all come together, which from thence forward they did every week; namely, on Thursday in the

evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices which he judged most needful for them and they always concluded their meeting with prayer. The Membership Commitments found in this *Discipline* (260–268) represent in revised form the General Rules which Wesley gave to the members of the societies to enable them to test the sincerity of their purpose and to guide them in holy living.

4. The movement spread to America by the emigration of Methodists, who, beginning in 1766, began to organize the Methodist “classes” and “societies” in the colonies. In December 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. The new church experienced a miraculous growth, especially on the frontier, and quickly became one of the major religious forces in the new nation.

B. The Organization of The Wesleyan Methodist Connection

6. John Wesley and the early Methodist leaders in America had been uncompromising in their denunciation of human slavery. But with the invention of the cotton gin, the economic advantages of slavery involved many ministers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in slaveholding. When a group of ministers in the New England Conference, led by Orange Scott, began to agitate anew for the abolition of slavery, the bishops and others in the church sought to silence them lest the peace of the church be disturbed.

7. The inward compulsion of truth met by the outward compulsion of ecclesiastical authority led to a series of withdrawals of churches and ministers from the Methodist Episcopal Church. The earliest extensive withdrawal was in Michigan, and led on May 13, 1841, to the formation of the annual conference using the name, “The Wesleyan Methodist Church.” The withdrawal which had the most far-reaching consequences occurred in New England and New York late in 1842. In November 1842, Orange Scott, Jotham Horton, and LaRoy Sunderland withdrew, publishing their reasons in the first issue of *The True Wesleyan*, and they were joined in the following month by Luther Lee and Lucius C. Matlack. A call was issued to those interested in the ultimate formation of a new church, free from episcopacy and slavery, to meet at Andover, Massachusetts, February 1, 1843. At Andover a call was issued for an organizing convention.

8. The organizing convention for the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America was held at Utica, New York, May 31 to June 8, 1843. The new

organization was a “Connection” of local churches organized in annual conferences. It avoided the episcopacy, and provided for equal ministerial and lay representation in all of its governing bodies. Moral and social reform were strongly emphasized, with slaveholding and all involvements with intoxicating liquors being prohibited.

C. The Revival of the Wesleyan Experience

11. The Wesleyan Methodist Connection saw the crusade against slavery carried to a conclusion in the Civil War. Afterwards, many felt there was no reason for the Connection as such to continue, and returned to the larger Methodist bodies. Others felt, as was expressed by the 1867 General Conference, that the effects of slavery were not yet eradicated, and that the historic stand against intoxicating liquors, and the increasingly firm stand against lodges and secret societies, could only be maintained by the continued existence and activity of the Connection.

12. At its first General Conference in 1844, the Connection had adopted an article of religion on “Sanctification,” becoming the first denomination to do so. But the doctrine and experience suffered neglect and decline among all branches of Methodism in the mid-nineteenth century. To renew them, God raised up a revival of holiness promoted through literature, evangelistic meetings, and camp meetings that swept throughout Methodism and across denominational lines. The first national camp meeting, which developed into the National Holiness Association, was held in 1867. The revival led to the establishment of several new holiness denominations and to the renewing and redirecting of others.

13. This spiritual revival, promoted vigorously by a corps of itinerant evangelists, soon established holiness as the major tenet of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, which had formerly majored on social and political reform. In 1883, the General Conference adopted a resolution requiring the preaching of entire sanctification, and by 1893 new articles of religion on regeneration and entire sanctification had been adopted by the General Conference, the annual conferences, and local churches.

D. The Development of The Wesleyan Methodist Church

16. The revival of holiness which swept the Wesleyan Methodist Connection introduced a new emphasis on evangelism. The need for organized efforts of church extension and the need to conserve converts led to the gradual

development of a more formal organization as a church rather than a connection. In 1891, the name was changed to the *Wesleyan Methodist Connection (or Church) of America*, and the denomination moved beyond a leadership largely confined to publications (editor and publisher) to elect a general missionary superintendent. Gradually other departmental executives were added. In 1947, the name was changed to *The Wesleyan Methodist Church of America*, and a central supervisory authority was established with the general conference president as the full-time leader of the denomination, and the Board of Administration as the central and coordinating board of control. In 1957, the denominational headquarters was moved from Syracuse, New York, where it had been for over a century, to Marion, Indiana. In 1959, the plan for a general conference president was superseded by one calling for three General Superintendents.

17. Various ministers and local churches affiliated themselves with The Wesleyan Methodist Church at different times throughout its history. But its home base and missionary work were appreciably augmented by the affiliation of three organizations.

(1) *The Hephzibah Faith Missionary Society* was organized in 1893 and eventually established headquarters at Tabor, Iowa. Some of its ministers and churches in Nebraska, its Brainerd Indian School near Hot Springs, South Dakota, and its mission field in Haiti became part of The Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1948.

(2) *The Missionary Bands of the World*, organized in 1885 as the Pentecost Bands, an auxiliary of the Free Methodist Church, became a separate organization in 1895, changed names in 1925, and in 1958 merged its churches in Indiana and its mission fields in central India and Jamaica with The Wesleyan Methodist Church.

(3) *The Alliance of the Reformed Baptist Church of Canada* was organized in 1888 as the result of the sanctification of several Baptist ministers. In 1966, it merged its churches in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Maine, and its mission fields in Africa with The Wesleyan Methodist Church.

18. The Wesleyan Methodist Church became international with its spread to Canada, and the establishment, development, and acquisition through merger of mission fields in Sierra Leone, India, Colombia, Japan, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Honduras, Mexico, Taiwan, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Nepal, Rhodesia, and South Africa.

E. The Formation and Development of The Pilgrim Holiness Church

23. The Pilgrim Holiness Church came into being as a result of the revival of scriptural holiness that swept across the various denominations in America in the last half of the nineteenth century, the same awakening that had rechanneled the energies of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection from social and political reform to holiness evangelism (12–13). The awakening crystallized in the establishment of many nondenominational and interdenominational holiness unions and associations and independent churches. Toward the close of the nineteenth century many of like precious faith began to draw together in the unity of the Spirit.

24. A focal point for the beginning of The Pilgrim Holiness Church as an organization was the formation of the *International Holiness Union and Prayer League* in September 1897, at Cincinnati, Ohio, in the home of Martin Wells Knapp. Rev. Seth C. Rees was chosen President, and Rev. Martin Wells Knapp, Vice-President. The Union was not thought of as a church, nor intended as such, but was an interdenominational fellowship, marked by simplicity and the absence of restrictions. The primary purpose of the Union was to unite holiness people in promoting worldwide holiness evangelism. A fourfold emphasis was declared concerning the regeneration of sinners, the entire sanctification of believers, the premillennial and imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the evangelization of the world. The Union met the need of many people for fellowship and cooperation in the spread of scriptural holiness and grew rapidly. Extensive revival work was carried on by members of the Union, resulting in the formation of many city missions, churches, rescue homes, and camp meetings.

25. In the annual meeting of the Union held in July 1900, the name was changed to *International Apostolic Holiness Union* in order to express more fully the aim of promoting a return to apostolic principles and practices. Also in 1900 the foreign missionary work began as members of the Union went out as faith missionaries to South Africa, India, Japan, the West Indies, and South America.

26. The Union gradually developed into a church organization in order to provide church homes for the converts and the conservation of the work. In 1905, the name was changed to *International Apostolic Holiness Union and Churches*. The interdenominational features also faded out, and in 1913, the name was altered to *International Apostolic Holiness Church*.

27. In 1919, the Indiana, Illinois-Missouri, and Kansas-Oklahoma Conferences of the *Holiness Christian Church* were received by the *General*

Assembly of the International Apostolic Holiness Church. The Holiness Christian Church had its beginning in a revival movement around Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1882, and was organized at Linwood, Pennsylvania, in 1889 as the *Holiness Christian Association*. By 1919, it was known as the Holiness Christian Church and was composed of four conferences; it also sponsored a missionary work in Central America.

28. *The Pentecostal Rescue Mission* joined the International Holiness Church in March 1922, and became the New York District. It had originated at Binghamton, New York, in 1897, and had spread until it included missions, rescue work, camp meetings, orphanage activities, churches, and a missionary work in Alaska.

29. In October 1922, the General Assembly, in special session, received *The Pilgrim Church* of California and adopted the name, *The Pilgrim Holiness Church*. The Pilgrim Church was first organized on May 27, 1917, as the *Pentecost-Pilgrim Church* in Pasadena, California. By 1922, a school known as Pilgrim Bible School had been established and a periodical was being published at Pasadena, California, and missionaries had been sent out to Mexico.

30. In 1924, a group of several churches known as the *Pentecostal Brethren in Christ* united with and became a part of the Ohio District of The Pilgrim Holiness Church.

31. In 1925, *The People's Mission Church*, with headquarters at Colorado Springs, Colorado, became a part of The Pilgrim Holiness Church. It was the outgrowth of revival work that began in 1898 in Colorado Springs and spread through several surrounding states. A Bible school was operated, a periodical published, and a camp meeting maintained at Colorado Springs.

32. In 1946, *The Holiness Church* of California was received by the General Conference into The Pilgrim Holiness Church. This Church, which began in a revival movement in 1880 and was first known as The Holiness Bands, maintained a Bible school at El Monte, California, and a growing missionary work in Peru and Palestine.

33. *The Africa Evangelistic Mission*, with headquarters at Boksburg, Transvaal, South Africa, was received by The Pilgrim Holiness Church in 1962. The Mission carried on work organized into three districts, two of which were located in the Orange Free State and Transvaal in the Republic of South Africa, and a third district comprising extensive work in Mozambique.

34. The growth of The Pilgrim Holiness Church continued through revival work and evangelism in greater measure than by the uniting of other bodies. An important turning point in the organizational structure was

reached in 1930 when the General Assembly unified the administration of the denomination by providing for one General Superintendent, one General Board, and a general headquarters at Indianapolis, Indiana. In 1958, a plan for three General Superintendents was inaugurated. In 1962, the General Conference, known until 1942 as the General Assembly, was designated as The International Conference in recognition of the growth and development of the overseas work.

35. The original purpose of the founders of The Pilgrim Holiness Church to promote worldwide holiness evangelism remained an indelible characteristic. Missionary work was carried on in many lands, and The Pilgrim Holiness Church extended beyond the United States and Canada to the following places: South Africa, including Natal, Transvaal, Cape Province, and Orange Free State; Swaziland; Mozambique; Zambia; the Caribbean area, including Grand Cayman, Jamaica, St. Croix, St. Thomas, Saba, St. Kitts, Nevis, Antigua, Barbuda, Barbados, St. Vincent, Trinidad and Tobago, and Curacao; Guyana; Suriname; Brazil; Peru; Mexico; Philippine Islands; and England.

F. The Formation of The Wesleyan Church

50. Merger between The Pilgrim Holiness Church and The Wesleyan Methodist Church of America was proposed at various times, and was voted upon by the General Conferences of the two bodies in 1958 and 1959, failing to pass in the Wesleyan Methodist General Conference by a margin of a single vote. In 1962, the General Conference of The Pilgrim Holiness Church took action expressing renewed interest in union with The Wesleyan Methodist Church. In 1963, the General Conference of The Wesleyan Methodist Church took like action, instructing its Committee on Church Union to pursue its work with all due diligence. On June 15, 1966, the Thirty-Second General Conference of The Wesleyan Methodist Church adopted The Basis for Merger and Constitution, and subsequently the annual conferences and local churches ratified the action. On June 16, 1966, the Twenty-Fifth International Conference of The Pilgrim Holiness Church also adopted The Basis for Merger and Constitution. Thus the formation of *The Wesleyan Church* was authorized. The General Board of The Pilgrim Holiness Church and the General Board of Administration of The Wesleyan Methodist Church cooperated in planning the uniting General Conference, and in preparing the new book of *Discipline* for its consideration. On June 26, 1968, The Pilgrim Holiness Church and The Wesleyan Methodist Church of America were united to form The Wesleyan Church.

G. The Development of the World Organization

60. The merging General Conference provided tentatively for the development of the overseas churches into national or regional general conferences, as they matured and qualified for such status. As a result, the General Board of Administration appointed a World Organization Planning Committee. Its work led to a meeting of mission coordinators and national representatives from around the world in the World Organization Planning Conference, June 6–9, 1972, prior to the Second General Conference. The Planning Conference recommended setting apart those portions of the Constitution which contained the name, doctrines, and standards of conduct plus some new organizational articles, as the Essentials of The Wesleyan Church, which would be binding upon all General Conferences of The Wesleyan Church. It recommended the formation of a Wesleyan World Fellowship governed by a Charter, functioning through a General Council, with eventually an International Board of Review assisting in maintaining faithfulness to the Essentials. The entire plan was approved by the 1972 General Conference, and subsequently the members of the World Organization Planning Conference effected the organization of the General Council.

65. During the following quadrennium two provisional general conferences, one step short of full status, were formed. The Caribbean Provisional General Conference was organized April 3, 1974, and the Provisional General Conference of the Philippines was organized April 22–23, 1975. The 1984 General Conference incorporated the Essentials in the Charter as an historic statement of faith with which all disciplines must agree. On June 20, 1988, the General Conference approved the elevation of The Wesleyan Church of the Philippines to full standing equivalent to that of the North American General Conference, providing for the formation of the International Board of Review. On June 21, 2004, the North American General Conference approved the elevation of The Wesleyan Holiness Church of the Caribbean to full General Conference standing. This coincided with the restructuring of The Wesleyan World Fellowship as The International Conference of The Wesleyan Church.

70. The first International Conference was held in June 2008 in Orlando, Florida. The 2012 International Conference approved the formation of The South Pacific Established Regional Conference of The Wesleyan Church, consisting of The Wesleyan Methodist Churches of Australia and New Zealand together with the mission units of the Solomon Islands and Bougainville. The

2015 International Conference approved the formation of The Wesleyan Church of Canada as an established national conference, which was ratified by the 2016 North American General Conference. The 2016 North American General Conference also approved the formation of the Ibero-America Established Regional Conference, consisting of nineteen nations in Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Europe, and Africa. This action was forwarded to the 2019 International Conference for approval.

H. Official Church Names

80. The following are the official names of the various units of The Wesleyan Church. Included are those whose adaptation of the name have been approved in keeping with the provisions of 205 and 340:2. These are printed for information only. Changes may be authorized when necessary by the General Board (340:2; 1655:32).

Australia: *The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia*

Bougainville: *The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Bougainville*

Brazil: *Igreja Evangelica Wesleyana*

British Isles: *The Wesleyan Holiness Church*

Caribbean: (cf. 2565) *The Wesleyan Holiness Church of the Caribbean*

Chile: *Ministerio Evangelistico y Misionero “Cristo es la Unica Respuesta”*

Colombia: *La Iglesia Wesleyana de Colombia*

Costa Rica: *Iglesia Wesleyana Internacional de Costa Rica*

Egypt: *The Standard Wesleyan Church*

Ghana: *Wesleyan Church Ghana*

Guyana: *The Wesleyan Church*

Haiti: *L’Eglise Wesleyenne d’Haiti*

Honduras: *Mision Methodista Sión*

India, Central: *The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Central India*

India, East: *The Wesleyan Methodist Church of East India*

India, Western: *The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Western India*

Indonesia: *Yayasan Gereja Wesleyan Indonesia*

Liberia: *The Wesleyan Church of Liberia*

Mexico: *Iglesia Evangélica de los Peregrinos*

Mozambique: *Igreja Emmanuel Evangelica Wesleyana*

Myanmar: *The Wesleyan Methodist Church*

New Zealand: *Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand*

Nicaragua: *Asociación Mundial de Iglesias Wesleyanas de Nicaragua*

Pakistan: *The Wesleyan Church—Pakistan*

Peru: *Iglesia Wesleyana Peregrina*

Philippines (cf. 2560): *The Wesleyan Church of the Philippines*

Puerto Rico: *Iglesia Evangélica Wesleyana*

Sierra Leone: *The Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone*

South Africa: *The Wesleyan Church of Southern Africa*

South Korea: *Jesus Korea Wesleyan Church*

South Pacific: *The South Pacific Conference of The Wesleyan
Methodist Church*

Suriname: *De Wesleyaanse Gemeente*

Swaziland: *Emmanuel Wesleyan Church of Swaziland*

United States and Canada: *The Wesleyan Church*

Venezuela: *Iglesia Evangélica Wesleyana*

Zambia: *Pilgrim Wesleyan Church of Zambia*

Zimbabwe: *The Wesleyan Church*

Chapter 2

MISSION OF THE WESLEYAN CHURCH

100. The Wesleyan Church has grown out of a revival movement which has historically given itself to one mission—the spreading of scriptural holiness throughout every land. The message which ignited the Wesleyan revival was the announcement that God through Christ can forgive men and women of their sins, transform them, free them from inbred sin, enable them to live a holy life, and bear witness to their hearts that they are indeed children of God. The message was based on the Scriptures, was verified in personal experience, and came not only in word but in the power of the Spirit. It was dynamic and contagious, and was communicated from heart to heart and from land to land. It adapted itself and gave new vitality and purpose to various kinds of church organizations.

105. The Wesleyan Church believes that to spread scriptural holiness throughout every land involves joining the entire church of Christ in a full-orbed mission to the world, including the following:

(1) Sharing the divine revelation of full salvation through Christ as recorded in the Holy Scriptures so as to evangelize the lost and to minister redemptively to human society and its institutions.

(2) Relating new converts to local churches and providing Spirit-filled and well-trained pastors and leaders for the same.

(3) Developing in the converts patterns of worship to God and of fellowship with other believers.

(4) Discipling new believers in turn to be witnesses for their Lord.

(5) Guiding believers to experience entire sanctification so they are enabled to live whole and holy lives.

(6) Providing for developing Christians lifelong nurture and instruction, encouraging each to grow toward spiritual maturity in Christ Jesus.

(7) Helping maturing Christians to develop a Christian interpretation of life and the universe, training them to be good stewards of the talents, time, opportunities, and resources with which Christ has entrusted them.

(8) Equipping believers for lives of dynamic service toward God and humanity, so that the full potential God has designed for each of them may be realized.

Chapter 3

CLASSIFICATION OF CHURCH LAW

A. Constitutional Law

125. Relationship to Essentials. The Essentials of The Wesleyan Church consist of an historic statement of faith and practice and are set forth in the Charter of The International Conference of The Wesleyan Church (see Appendix A). Each general conference of The International Conference must subscribe to the Essentials' pronouncements and must not contravene any of its provisions in its constitutions, articles of religion, or discipline. The North American General Conference does so subscribe. The Articles of Religion and other statements of faith and practice which are a part of the Constitution of the North American General Conference are in accord with the Essentials of The Wesleyan Church and are not intended to contravene or contradict them at any point.

135. Identification. The Constitution of the North American General Conference of The Wesleyan Church consists of Articles 1 through 12, paragraphs 200 through 385, including the Preamble, Name, Articles of Religion, Membership Commitments, Elementary Principles, Observance of Sacraments, Membership, The Ministry, Organization and Government, Powers and Restrictions of the General Conference, The Supreme Judiciary, and Amendments to the Constitution. The Constitution may be amended as set forth in paragraph 385.

145. Function. The Constitution is that body of laws (cf. 135) that sets forth fundamental doctrines and practices, the basic laws, principles, and restrictions by which the Church is governed, and guarantees certain rights to its members and ministers. The Constitution takes precedence over statutory law, ritual, and all other laws and official actions of the governing bodies and officers within its jurisdiction (cf. 185). It is the law to which all statutory law, ritual, and any other legislative or official actions must conform.

B. Statutory Law

155. Statutory law consists of legislation passed by the General Conference by a majority vote in fulfillment of its duties as set forth in the

Constitution and in keeping with its provisions and restrictions and printed by order of the General Conference in *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church*. Such statutory law is the authority for all of the North American General Conference of The Wesleyan Church, including its members, ministers, churches, districts, institutions, auxiliary organizations, corporations, general divisions and offices, agencies, and any other official bodies (cf. 185). Statutory law remains in effect until amended, rescinded, or declared unconstitutional.

165. All changes in or additions to the statutory laws take effect when *The Discipline* is published following the adjournment of the General Conference unless an earlier time is ordered by a two-thirds vote of the General Conference.

C. Ritual

175. The ritual of The Wesleyan Church consists of those rites and ceremonies contained in *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church* (cf. 5500–5999), officially approved by the General Conference by a majority of those present and voting. The “Reception of Members,” “Covenant Questions,” and “Declaration of Purpose,” in the ritual for the “Reception of Members” (5565–5567); the “Examination of Candidates” in the rituals for the “Ordination of Ministers” (5772); and the “Commissioning of Ministers” (5825) have the authority of statutory law and must be followed as prescribed. In the remainder of the Ritual, a measure of flexibility is permitted as long as nothing contradicts the Articles of Religion or any other part of the Constitution.

D. Current Authority

185. The current issue of *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church* is the only valid authority for the North American General Conference and its subordinate units, with the exception of those units under the Global Partners Division which have been authorized to have their own disciplines by the General Board (cf. 340:2; 2500:4–5; 2610:8).

E. Scripture References and Explanatory Notes

190. Listings of Scripture references and explanatory notes have been appended in support of the Articles of Religion and Membership Commitments. These have the status of statutory law (155).

Chapter 4

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN GENERAL CONFERENCE

Preamble

200. In order that we may wisely preserve and pass on to posterity the heritage of doctrine and principles of Christian living transmitted to us as evangelicals in the Arminian-Wesleyan tradition, and to ensure church order by sound principles of ecclesiastical polity, and to prepare the way for more effective cooperation with other branches of the church of Christ in all that makes for the advancement of God's kingdom among all people, we, the ministers and lay members of The Wesleyan Church meeting in official assemblies, do hereby ordain, establish, and set forth as the fundamental law, or constitution of The Wesleyan Church, the articles of religion, rules of Christian living, privileges and conditions of church membership, and articles of organization and government, here following:

Article 1. Name

205. The name of this communion is *The Wesleyan Church*. Wherever the use of this name is impossible or impractical, adaptation may be made by the authorized body (340:2).

Article 2. Articles of Religion

1. Faith in the Holy Trinity

210. We believe in the one living and true God, both holy and loving, eternal, unlimited in power, wisdom, and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things. Within this unity there are three persons of one essential nature, power and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Gen. 1:1; 17:1; Ex. 3:13–15; 33:20; Deut. 6:4; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28–29; Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; John 1:1–2; 4:24; 16:13; 17:3; Acts 5:3–4; 17:24–25; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Eph. 2:18; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16–17; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 1:8; 1 John 5:20.

2. The Father

212. We believe the Father is the Source of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, He made man, male and female, in His image. By intention He relates to people as Father, thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives penitent sinners.

**Ps. 68:5; Isa. 64:8; Matt. 7:11; John 3:17; Rom. 8:15;
1 Peter 1:17.**

3. The Son of God

214. We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, truly God and truly man. He died on the cross and was buried, to be a sacrifice both for original sin and for all human transgressions, and to reconcile us to God. Christ rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge all humanity at the last day.

**Ps. 16:8–10; Matt. 1:21, 23; 11:27; 16:28; 27:62–66; 28:5–9,
16–17; Mark 10:45; 15; 16:6–7; Luke 1:27, 31, 35; 24:4–8, 23;
John 1:1, 14, 18; 3:16–17; 20:26–29; 21; Acts 1:2–3; 2:24–31;
4:12; 10:40; Rom. 5:10, 18; 8:34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:3–8, 14;
2 Cor. 5:18–19; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; 4:4–5; Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 1:15;
Heb 2:17; 7:27; 9:14, 28; 10:12; 13:20; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John
2:2; 4:14.**

4. The Holy Spirit

216. We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory, as the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. He is the Administrator of grace to all, and is particularly the effective Agent in conviction for sin, in regeneration, in sanctification, and in glorification. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer.

**Job 33:4; Matt. 28:19; John 4:24; 14:16–17; 15:26; 16:13–15;
Acts 5:3–4; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6.**

5. The Sufficiency and Full Authority of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

218. We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures. They are the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority, and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. We believe that they contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man or woman that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. Both in the Old and New Testaments life is offered ultimately through Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and humanity. The New Testament teaches Christians how to fulfill the moral principles of the Old Testament, calling for loving obedience to God made possible by the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit.

The canonical books of the Old Testament are:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The canonical books of the New Testament are:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation.

Ps. 19:7; Matt. 5:17–19; 22:37–40; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; 5:46; 17:17; Acts 17:2, 11; Rom. 1:2; 15:4, 8; 16:26; 2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 1:8; Eph. 2:15–16; 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Heb. 4:12; 10:1; 11:39; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:19–21; 1 John 2:3–7; Rev. 22:18–19.

6. God's Purpose for Humanity

220. We believe that the two great commandments which require us to love the Lord our God with all the heart, and our neighbors as ourselves, summarize the divine law as it is revealed in the Scriptures. They are the perfect measure and norm of human duty, both for the ordering and directing of families and nations,

and all other social bodies, and for individual acts, by which we are required to acknowledge God as our only Supreme Ruler, and all persons as created by Him, equal in all natural rights. Therefore all persons should so order all their individual, social, and political acts as to give to God entire and absolute obedience, and to assure to all the enjoyment of every natural right, as well as to promote the fulfillment of each in the possession and exercise of such rights.

Lev. 19:18, 34; Deut. 1:16–17; Job 31:13–14; Jer. 21:12; 22:3; Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:44–48; 7:12; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 6:27–29, 35; John 13:34–35; Acts 10:34–35; 17:26; Rom. 12:9; 13:1, 7–8, 10; Gal. 5:14; 6:10; Titus 3:1; James 2:8; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 John 2:5; 4:12–13; 2 John 6.

7. Marriage and the Family

222. We believe that every person is created in the image of God, that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger whole, and fulfillment. God's Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for His relationship with His covenant people and for revealing the truth that this relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore God's plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship which is divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a covenant union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship. We adhere to the teachings of Scripture regarding gender identity, sexual conduct, and the sacredness of marriage, and believe that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful.¹

Gen. 1:27–28; 2:18, 20, 23–24; Isa. 54:4–8; 62:5b; Jer. 3:14; Ezek. 16; Hosea 2; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:9; John 2:1–2, 11; 1 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 5:23–32; 1 Tim. 5:14; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 19:7–8.

¹The last sentence of Article 7 was added by the 2016 North American General Conference and submitted for approval to the subsequent Caribbean and Philippine General Conferences in keeping with the provisions of 6765:1.

8. *Personal Choice*

224. We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are unable in their own strength to do the right. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each mortal, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the preventient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.

Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; 1 Kings 20:40; Ps. 51:5; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21–23; Luke 16:15; John 7:17; Rom. 3:10–12; 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1–3; 1 Tim. 2:5; Titus 3:5; Heb. 11:6; Rev. 22:17.

9. *Sin: Original, Willful, and Involuntary*²

225. We believe that through the disobedience of Adam and Eve sin entered the world and all creation suffered its consequences. The effects of sin include disruption of the relationship between God and humanity, deterioration of the natural order of creation, and exploitation of persons by evil or misguided social systems. The whole of creation groans for redemption. Each person is born with a proclivity toward sin, manifested in an inordinate orientation toward self and independence from God, leading to deliberate acts of unrighteousness. The residual effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience include a marred human nature from which arise involuntary shortcomings, faults, infirmities, and imperfect judgments, which should not be accounted the same as willful sin. However, as manifestations of the fallen nature of humanity, these shortcomings of God's holiness still necessitate the merits of the atonement, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the self-control of the believer. Willful sin results when a morally accountable person chooses

²Article 9 was approved by the 2016 North American General Conference and submitted for approval to the subsequent Caribbean and Philippine General Conferences in keeping with the provisions of 6765:1.

to violate a known law of God, using freedom of choice to please self rather than obey God. The consequences of willful sin include a loss of fellowship with God, a self-absorption with one's own interests rather than love and concern for others, a bondage to things which distort the divine image, a persistent inability to live righteously, and ultimately everlasting misery and separation from God. The atoning work of Christ is the only remedy for sin, whether original, willful or involuntary.

Gen. 3; 6:5; Ps. 1; 32:1–5; 51; Is. 6:5; Jer. 17:9–10; Matt. 16:24–27; 22:36–40; Mk. 7:20–23; John 16:8–9; Rom. 1:18–25; 3:23; 5:12–14; 6:15–23; 7:1–8:9; 8:18–24; 14:23; I Cor. 3:1–4; Gal. 5:16–25; Eph. 2:1–22; Col. 1:21–22; 3:5–11; I Jn. 1:7–2:4; 3:7–10.

10. The Atonement

226. We believe that Christ's offering of himself, once and for all, through His sufferings and meritorious death on the cross, provides the perfect redemption and atonement for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual. There is no other ground of salvation from sin but that alone. This atonement is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. It is unconditionally effective in the salvation of those mentally incompetent from birth, of those converted persons who have become mentally incompetent, and of children under the age of accountability. But it is effective for the salvation of those who reach the age of accountability only when they repent and exercise faith in Christ.

Isa. 52:13—53:12; Luke 24:46–47; John 3:16; Acts 3:18; 4:12; Rom. 3:20, 24–26; 5:8–11, 13, 18–20; 7:7; 8:34; 1 Cor. 6:11; 15:22; Gal. 2:16; 3:2–3; Eph. 1:7; 2:13, 16; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; Heb. 7:23–27; 9:11–15, 24–28; 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

11. Repentance and Faith

228. We believe that for men and women to appropriate what God's prevenient grace has made possible, they must voluntarily respond in repentance and faith. The ability comes from God, but the act is the individual's.

Repentance is prompted by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It involves a willful change of mind that renounces sin and longs for righteousness,

a godly sorrow for and a confession of past sins, proper restitution for wrongdoings, and a resolution to reform the life. Repentance is the precondition for saving faith, and without it saving faith is impossible. Faith, in turn, is the only condition of salvation. It begins in the agreement of the mind and the consent of the will to the truth of the gospel, but issues in a complete reliance by the whole person in the saving ability of Jesus Christ and a complete trusting of oneself to Him as Savior and Lord. Saving faith is expressed in a public acknowledgment of His Lordship and an identification with His Church.

Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; 13:3; 24:47; John 3:16; 17:20; 20:31; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 11:18; 16:31; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 1:16; 2:4; 10:8–10, 17; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8; 4:4–6; Phil. 3:9; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 11:6; 12:2; 1 Peter 1:9; 2 Peter 3:9.

12. Justification, Regeneration and Adoption

230. We believe that when one repents of personal sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, that at the same moment that person is justified, regenerated, adopted into the family of God, and assured of personal salvation through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that justification is the judicial act of God whereby a person is accounted righteous, granted full pardon of all sin, delivered from guilt, completely released from the penalty of sins committed, by the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith alone, not on the basis of works.

We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that work of the Holy Spirit whereby, when one truly repents and believes, one's moral nature is given a distinctively spiritual life with the capacity for love and obedience. This new life is received by faith in Jesus Christ, it enables the pardoned sinner to serve God with the will and affections of the heart, and by it the regenerate are delivered from the power of sin which reigns over all the unregenerate.

We believe that adoption is the act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer becomes a partaker of all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a child of God.

Justification: Hab. 2:4; Acts 13:38–39; 15:11; 16:31; Rom. 1:17; 3:28; 4:2–5; 5:1–2; Gal. 3:6–14; Eph. 2:8–9; Phil 3:9; Heb. 10:38.

Regeneration: John 1:12–13; 3:3, 5–8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:5, 10, 19; 4:24; Col. 3:10; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3–4; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1.

Adoption: Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5, 7; Eph. 1:5.

Witness of the Spirit: Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 2:3; 3:14, 18–19.

13. Good Works

232. We believe that although good works cannot save us from our sins or from God's judgment, they are the fruit of faith and follow after regeneration. Therefore they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and by them a living faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

**Matt. 5:16; 7:16–20; John 15:8; Rom 3:20; 4:2, 4, 6;
Gal. 2:16; 5:6; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess.
1:3; Titus 2:14; 3:5; James 2:18, 22; 1 Peter 2:9, 12.**

14. Sin After Regeneration

234. We believe that after we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to fall into sin, for in this life there is no such height or strength of holiness from which it is impossible to fall. But by the grace of God one who has fallen into sin may by true repentance and faith find forgiveness and restoration.

**Mal. 3:7; Matt. 18:21–22; John 15:4–6; 1 Tim. 4:1, 16;
Heb. 10:35–39; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 24–25.**

15. Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire

236. We believe that sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is separated from sin unto God and is enabled to love God with all the heart and to walk in all His holy commandments blameless. Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God. This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin. The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers that person for effective service. It is followed by lifelong growth in grace and the

knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The life of holiness continues through faith in the sanctifying blood of Christ and evidences itself by loving obedience to God's revealed will.

Gen. 17:1; Deut. 30:6; Ps. 130:8; Isa. 6:1–6; Ezek. 36:25–29; Matt. 5:8, 48; Luke 1:74–75; 3:16–17; 24:49; John 17:1–26; Acts 1:4–5, 8; 2:1–4; 15:8–9; 26:18; Rom. 8:3–4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:13, 24; 5:25–27; 1 Thess. 3:10, 12–13; 4:3, 7–8; 5:23–24; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 2:11–14; Heb. 10:14; 12:14; 13:12; James 3:17–18; 4:8; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 1:7, 9; 3:8–9; 4:17–18; Jude 24.

16. The Gifts of the Spirit

238. We believe that the Gift of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself, and He is to be desired more than the gifts of the Spirit which He in His wise counsel bestows upon individual members of the Church to enable them properly to fulfill their function as members of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit, although not always identifiable with natural abilities, function through them for the edification of the whole Church. These gifts are to be exercised in love under the administration of the Lord of the Church, not through human volition. The relative value of the gifts of the Spirit is to be tested by their usefulness in the Church and not by the ecstasy produced in the ones receiving them.

Luke 11:13; 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:38–39; 8:19–20; 10:45; 11:17; Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–14:40; Eph. 4:7–8, 11–16; Heb. 2:4; 13:20–21; 1 Peter 4:8–11.

17. The Church

240. We believe that the Christian Church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only Head of the Church. The Church includes both those believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those who remain on the earth, having renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and having dedicated themselves to the work which Christ committed unto His church until He comes. The Church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body

of believers formally organized on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship, and worship. The Wesleyan Church is a denomination consisting of those members within district conferences and local churches who, as members of the body of Christ, hold the faith set forth in these Articles of Religion and acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of its governing bodies.

Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:41–47; 9:31; 11:22; 12:5; 14:23; 15:22; 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:28; 16:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:22–23; 2:19–22; 3:9–10, 21; 5:22–33; Col. 1:18, 24; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:23; James 5:14.

18. The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

242. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are tokens of our profession of Christian faith and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith.

We believe that water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord and administered to believers. It is a symbol of the new covenant of grace and signifies acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ. By means of this sacrament, believers declare their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Matt. 3:13–17; 28:19; Mark 1:9–11; John 3:5, 22, 26; 4:1–2; Acts 2:38–39, 41; 8:12–17, 36–38; 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Rom 2:28–29; 4:11; 6:3–4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27–29; Col. 2:11–12; Titus 3:5.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death and of our hope in His victorious return, as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other. To such as receive it humbly, with a proper spirit and by faith, the Lord's Supper is made a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.

Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; John 6:48–58; 1 Cor. 5:7–8; 10:3–4, 16–17; 11:23–29.

19. *The Second Coming of Christ*

244. We believe that the certainty of the personal and imminent return of Christ inspires holy living and zeal for the evangelization of the world. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies made concerning His final and complete triumph over evil.

Job 19:25–27; Isa. 11:1–12; Zech. 14:1–11; Matt. 24:1–51; 25; 26:64; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 17:22–37; 21:5–36; John 14:1–3; Acts 1:6–11; 1 Cor. 1:7–8; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:1–11, 23; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; 2:1–12; Titus 2:11–14; Heb. 9:27–28; James 5:7–8; 2 Peter 3:1–14; 1 John 3:2–3; Rev. 1:7; 19:11–16; 22:6–7, 12, 20.

20. *The Resurrection of the Dead*

246. We believe in the bodily resurrection from the dead of all people—of the just unto the resurrection of life, and of the unjust unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection which will occur at Christ's Second Coming. The raised body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable.

Job 19:25–27; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 22:30–32; 28:1–20; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 14:14; 24:1–53; John 5:28–29; 11:21–27; 20:1–21:25; Acts 1:3; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:1–58; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:1–11; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; Rev. 20:4–6, 11–13.

21. *The Judgment of All Persons*

248. We believe that the Scriptures reveal God as the Judge of all and the acts of His judgment are based on His omniscience and eternal justice. His administration of judgment will culminate in the final meeting of all persons before His throne of great majesty and power, where records will be examined and final rewards and punishments will be administered.

Ecl. 12:14; Matt. 10:15; 25:31–46; Luke 11:31–32; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10–12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 9:27; 2 Peter 3:7; Rev. 20:11–13.

22. *Destiny*

250. We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that there is a conscious personal existence after death. The final destiny of each person is determined by God's grace and that person's response, evidenced inevitably by a moral character which results from that individual's personal and volitional choices and not from any arbitrary decree of God. Heaven with its eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence is the final abode of those who choose the salvation which God provides through Jesus Christ, but hell with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who neglect this great salvation.

Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:34–46; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 13:3; John 8:21–23; 14:2–3; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8, 10; Heb. 2:1–3; 9:27–28; 10:26–31; Rev. 20:14–15; 21:1–22:5, 14–15.

Article 3. Membership Commitments

260. To be identified with an organized church is the blessed privilege and sacred duty of all who are saved from their sins and are seeking completeness in Christ Jesus. From the Church's beginnings in the New Testament age, it has been understood that such identification involves putting off the old patterns of conduct and putting on the mind of Christ. In maintaining this Christian concept of a transformed life, The Wesleyan Church intends to relate timeless biblical principles to the conditions of contemporary society in such a way as to respect the integrity of the individual believer, yet maintain the purity of the Church and the effectiveness of its witness. This is done in the conviction that there is validity in the concept of the collective Christian conscience as illuminated and guided by the Holy Spirit. The following items (265) represent historic, ethical and practical standards of The Wesleyan Church. While it is hoped that our people will earnestly seek the aid of the Spirit in cultivating a sensitivity to evil which transcends the mere letter of the law, those entering into membership are encouraged to follow carefully and conscientiously these guides and helps to holy living. Disregard of the principles embraced in these Membership Commitments subjects all credentialed ministers and any member serving in an elected leadership capacity to Church discipline (268; see also 550–610).

265. Those admitted to membership in our churches commit themselves to demonstrate their life in Christ in such ways as:

Toward God

(1) To reverence the name of God and to honor the Lord's Day by divine worship and spiritual edification, participating in those activities which contribute to the moral and spiritual purposes of this day.

Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:3, 7–11; Deut. 5:11–15; Isa. 58:13–14; Mark 2:27; Acts 20:7; Heb. 4:9.

(2) To seek only the leading of the Holy Spirit and to abstain from all forms of spiritism, such as the occult, witchcraft, astrology and other similar practices.

Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10–14; Acts 19:18–19; Gal. 5:19–20.

Toward Self

(3) To exercise faithful stewardship through the wise use of their time and material resources, practicing careful self-discipline in order to further the mission of Christ's church (remembering the principle of tithing which is basic to the New Testament standard of stewardship) and to demonstrate compassion to those in need.

Prov. 3:9; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 25:34–40; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 5:16; Col. 3:17; James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17.

(4) To demonstrate a positive social witness by abstaining from all forms of gambling and by abstaining from using or trafficking (production, sale or purchase) in any substances destructive to their physical, mental and spiritual health, such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco and drugs (other than proper medical purposes of drugs); and by refraining from membership in secret societies and lodges which are oath bound, believing that the quasi-religious nature of such organizations divides the Christian's loyalty, their secret nature contravenes the Christian's open witness and the secret nature of their oaths is repugnant to the Christian conscience.

Ex. 20:17; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12. Gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship and the tenth commandment, is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive, is a poor example to others, and pollutes the moral climate of society.

Prov. 20:1; Rom. 6:12; 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 10:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:22. Christians are to regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. While no “thing” of itself is sinful, the Christian should avoid the use of anything which would not help build the fellowship of the church, would not help the believers to realize their full potential in Christ, or which would enslave them. In the light of the scientific knowledge of our day concerning the actual and potential harm of these substances, total abstinence is more in keeping with these biblical principles than is moderation.

Ex. 20:3; Matt. 5:34–36; John 18:20; Acts 4:12; James 5:12. These prohibitions do not restrict membership in labor, civic or other organizations which do not contradict loyalty to Christ and the Church. When in these relationships Christian principles are violated, members shall be dealt with because of such violations and not because of the membership itself.

(5) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding gender identity and sexual conduct.

Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 7:17–24.

Toward Family

(6) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding marriage and divorce. We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. We further affirm that marriage between one man and one woman is God’s design, and we regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behavior, bestiality or incest, as clear biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counseling has failed to restore the relationship.

Ex. 20:14, 17; 22:19; Lev. 20:10–16; Matt. 5:32; 19:19; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18.

(7) To preserve the sanctity of the home by honoring Christ in every phase of family life and by demonstrating Christlike love (always avoiding violence,

including physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual abuse toward one's spouse or family members, as well as sexual infidelity or desertion, any of which warrant church discipline for the offender and may justify separation or divorce if true repentance and appropriate counseling cannot bring about reconciliation), and by living peacefully with one another, thereby building up one's spouse and family members through word and deed, and encouraging the nurture and education of the children in the Christian faith so as to bring them early to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Prov. 22:6; Malachi 2:13–16; Mark 10:9; 1 Cor. 7:10–16, Eph. 5:28; 6:4.

Toward The Church

(8) To work together for the advancement of God's kingdom and for the mutual edification of fellow believers in holiness, knowledge and love; to walk together in Christian fellowship by giving and receiving counsel with gentleness and affection; by praying for each other; by helping each other in sickness and distress; and by demonstrating love, purity and courtesy to all.

Rom. 15:1–2; Eph. 4; 1 Thess. 5.

(9) To grow in the knowledge, love and grace of God by participating in public worship, the ministry of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, family and personal devotions and fasting.

Mark 2:18–20; Acts 13:2–3; 14:23; Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 11:23–28; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 10:25; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18.

(10) To preserve the fellowship and witness of the Church with reference to the use of languages. The Wesleyan Church believes in the miraculous use of languages and the interpretation of languages in its biblical and historical setting. But it is contrary to the Word of God to teach that speaking in an unknown tongue or the gift of tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit or of that entire sanctification which the baptism accomplishes; therefore, only a language readily understood by the congregation is to be used in public worship. The Wesleyan Church believes that the use of an ecstatic prayer language has no clear scriptural sanction, or any pattern of

established historical usage in the Church; therefore, the use of such a prayer language shall not be promoted among us.

Acts 8:14–17; 1 Cor. 12:1–14:40; Gal. 5:22–24.

Toward Others

(11) To do good as much as is possible to all people as God gives opportunity, especially to those in the body of Christ; by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the destitute, by visiting or helping those who are sick or in prison; by instructing, correcting or encouraging them in love.

Matt. 25:31–46; Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:13; 10:23–25.

(12) To respect the inherent individual rights of all persons, regardless of race, color or sex.

1 Cor. 8:13; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 5:21.

(13) To live honestly, be just in all dealings and faithful in all commitments.

Eccl. 5:4–5; Rom. 12:17; Phil. 4:8–9; 1 Peter 2:12.

268. These are the Membership Commitments of our Church. We believe all these to be consistent with the principles of Christ as taught in the Word of God, which is the only and sufficient rule both of our faith and practice. If any among us do not observe them, and/or habitually break any of them, we will admonish such persons in love with the hope of restoring them to lives of harmony with the above Membership Commitments. If such efforts of restoration continue to prove fruitless, official action may be taken toward termination of said persons' church membership. However, the church members are encouraged to continue efforts toward the spiritual restoration of these persons.

Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:6–7, 9–13; 2 Cor. 2:5–7; 5:18–20; 6:14–18; Gal. 6:1–10; Eph. 4:25–32; Titus 3:10–11.

Article 4. Elementary Principles

270. Christ is the only Head of the Church, and the Word of God the only rule of faith and conduct.

272. No person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and obeys the gospel of God our Savior, ought to be deprived of church membership.

274. Every person has an inalienable right to private judgment in matters of religion, and an equal right to express personal opinions in any way which will not violate the laws of God or the rights of others.

276. All church hearings should be conducted on gospel principles only; and no minister or member should be excommunicated except for immorality, the propagation of unchristian doctrines, or for neglect of duties enjoined by the Word of God.

278. The pastoral or ministerial office and duties are of divine appointment, and all ordained ministers in the church of God are equal; but ministers are forbidden to be lords over God's heritage, or to have dominion over the faith of the saints.

280. The Church has a right to form and enforce such rules and regulations only as are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, and may be necessary or have a tendency to carry into effect the great system of practical Christianity.

282. Whatever power may be necessary to the formation of rules and regulations is inherent in the ministers and members of the Church; but so much of that power may be delegated from time to time, upon a plan of representation, as they may judge necessary and proper.

284. It is the duty of all ministers and members of the Church to maintain godliness and oppose all moral evil.

286. It is obligatory upon ministers of the gospel to be faithful in the discharge of their pastoral and ministerial duties, and it is also obligatory upon the members to esteem ministers highly for their works' sake, and to render them a righteous compensation for their labors.

Article 5. Observance of Sacraments

290. All persons to be baptized shall have the choice of baptism by immersion, pouring or sprinkling. Since children are born into this world with natures inclined to sin, and yet the prevenient grace of God provides for their redemption during the period before reaching the age of accountability, those parents who so choose may testify to their faith in God's provision by presenting their small children for baptism, while those who prefer to emphasize

baptism as a testimony by individual believers to their own act of faith may present their children for dedication.

Mark 10:13–16; Acts 2:38–39; 16:15; 18:8.

293. The Lord's Supper shall be observed in each local Wesleyan church at least once each three months.

Article 6. Membership

295. The privileges and conditions of membership in the Church are constitutional, and changes therein may be made only by constitutional enactment. The General Conference may at its own discretion establish categories of membership. Nothing shall be included in the membership ritual that is contrary to the following definitions, conditions, and privileges of membership.

297. The conditions of membership are:

(1) Confession of faith in Jesus Christ as evidenced by an inner witness of new birth through the Holy Spirit and a commitment to pursue holiness in all things.

(2) Christian baptism.

(3) Instruction in, acceptance of, and a commitment to abide by the Articles of Religion which are summarized in 299, the Elementary Principles, and the authority of The Wesleyan Church in matters of church government.

(4) A commitment to live out the mission and vision of The Wesleyan Church through a discipling relationship within the local church.

299. Candidates for membership shall declare their agreement with the following summary of the Articles of Religion:

We believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ the Son suffered in our place on the cross, that He died but rose again, that He now sits at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge every person at the last day.

We believe in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

We believe that by the grace of God every person has the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and that those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified by faith.

We believe that God not only counts the believer as righteous, but that He makes such persons righteous, freeing them from sin's dominion at conversion, purifying their hearts by faith, perfecting them in love at entire sanctification, and providing for their growth in grace at every stage of spiritual life, enabling them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live victorious lives.

302. The rights of membership are:

(1) The fellowship of the saints and the encouragement, admonition, and spiritual guidance of the ministry.

(2) The access to the sacraments and ordinances of the Church.

(3) The right to participate in any vote being taken by the local church conference.

(4) The eligibility to hold leadership positions (552:2–3), providing the qualifications are met (260–268; 558) and if not under discipline.

(5) The right to hearing and appeal if charged with failure to maintain the conditions of membership, with the specific provision that joining another religious body shall of itself sever membership in the Church.

(6) A member in good standing in any Wesleyan church is entitled to membership privileges in any Wesleyan church to which a transfer of membership may be desired, subject to 567.

305. Church membership may be terminated only by one or more of the following (585):

(1) Voluntary withdrawal.

(2) Joining another religious body or a secret order.

(3) Expulsion after proper hearing and conviction.

(4) Persistent neglect of church relationship as defined by *The Discipline*.

(5) Death.

Article 7. The Ministry

310. The General Conference shall from time to time enact provisions for the training, qualification, and ordination of the ministry. Every Wesleyan minister must be a member of some Wesleyan church, and each ordained minister must be a member of a district. An ordained minister is a minister of the gospel fully invested with all the functions of the Christian ministry.

313. The constitutional rights of ministers in The Wesleyan Church if not under discipline shall include the following:

(1) To preach the gospel and in the case of ordained ministers to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, to perform all parts of divine worship, and to solemnize the rite of matrimony.

(2) To be eligible, in the case of ordained ministers, for election to any office in the Church for which ordained ministers are eligible.

(3) To contract the pastoral relationship with local Wesleyan churches subject to the other provisions of this Constitution (313:6; 323:1-2).

(4) To enjoy the use for religious meetings of the church building or buildings of the pastoral charge to which appointment has been made by the district conference.

(5) To serve the assigned pastoral charge without interference by unauthorized activities of another minister of The Wesleyan Church.

(6) To transfer in the manner prescribed by *The Discipline* from one district to another, subject to the approval of the district superintendent and the General Superintendent supervising the area which includes the district into which the transfer is sought.

(7) To have recourse, even if under discipline, to a proper court of jurisdiction in any matters involving complaint against the minister's character or ministerial conduct and to appeal the decision of such court.

Article 8. Organization and Government

Local

315. Pastoral Charges. The members of the denomination shall be grouped into local churches, one or more of which shall constitute a pastoral charge. The following are the constitutional rights of each pastoral charge:

(1) To receive and expel or discontinue members subject to the provisions of *The Discipline*. This right vests severally in each local church. (Cf. 365.)

(2) To call its own pastor, subject to confirmation by the district conference.

(3) To grant or revoke local licenses for various ministries as provided in *The Discipline*. This right may be delegated to the church board. (Cf. 365.)

(4) To recommend persons for various ministries to the district conference. This right may be delegated to the church board.

(5) To elect its own officers and to remove the same for cause. Except as provided in 365, no pastor or other official has any right to appoint an officer or declare an office vacant. This right belongs to the church alone, and vests severally in each local church.

(6) To elect trustees and through such trustees to supervise, control, and maintain its property for the use and benefit of the ministry and members of The Wesleyan Church and subject to its regulations and appointments as from time to time legislated and declared. This right vests severally in each local church.

(7) To be represented in the voting membership of its district conference, if not under discipline.

(8) To have recourse to a proper court of jurisdiction in any matters of controversy between itself and other local, or district, or general units or agencies of the denomination. This right vests severally in each local church.

District

317. The General Conference shall organize the work at large into districts, which shall operate under its jurisdiction and promote the interests of the denomination, and whose voting membership shall include the following: All ordained ministers on the appointed, retired, reserve, and educational leave lists; licensed ministers elected to ordained minister's status; all commissioned and licensed ministers serving as pastors of Wesleyan churches; all commissioned and licensed ministers serving as associate or assistant pastors of Wesleyan churches; members of the district board of administration who are not members by some other right; and lay delegates elected as provided in *The Discipline*. In addition the district conference shall include such nonvoting members as *The Discipline* shall provide. The principle of equal representation of the ministry and the laity in the district conference shall be maintained.

320. In transacting the business of the district conference the ministers and lay members shall deliberate as one body; but on the final vote on any question, at the call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide, and the ministers and lay members shall vote separately; and it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

323. The constitutional rights of each district shall include the following:

(1) The right to take charge of all the ministers and churches within its bounds, as modified by 360:3e and 365 (except those serving the General Church as the General Conference shall define who shall be amenable to the General Board of Administration, and except the district superintendent who shall be amenable to the General Board of Administration), and subject to the right of the ministers and churches to enter into pastoral engagements.

(2) To alter the agreement entered into by any pastor and charge, or veto the action of the church and appoint another pastor on said charge when it deems this to be for the best interest of the charge or pastor involved or when the general interest of the work of the district would be better served by such change; and the said church or charge shall receive the pastor appointed by the district conference, provided that any such alteration of a previous arrangement between a pastor and church shall be separately reported and passed by vote of the district conference to be effective.

(3) To elect and ordain ministers, and to receive ordained ministers from other denominations subject to the restrictions of *The Discipline*.

(4) To receive or decline persons recommended to it for various ministries by the pastoral charges within its bounds.

(5) To organize and receive local churches within the boundaries of the territory assigned to it by the General Conference, and to fix the boundaries of its circuits and stations.

(6) To take such actions and adopt such rules as it shall judge necessary to promote the interest and prosperity of the Church and to amend or rescind the same, provided it shall not add to or take from any provision of the Constitution or of *The Discipline*, and provided further that if three members of a district shall take exception to its action on the ground that it violates this restriction, they may make an appeal therefrom through the channels prescribed by *The Discipline*.

(7) To elect its own officers as outlined in *The Discipline* and to dismiss them for cause.

(8) To elect in the manner prescribed by *The Discipline* its own board of trustees and through them to receive, hold, encumber, and dispose of all district property within the bounds of the district, including local property held by the district, according to the provisions of *The Discipline* and the laws of the state. All properties held by the district shall be held in trust for the use and benefit of the ministry and members of The Wesleyan Church and subject to its regulations and appointments as from time to time legislated and declared.

(9) To be represented in the lay and ministerial voting membership of the General Conference, if not under discipline.

(10) To have recourse to a proper court of jurisdiction in any matters of controversy between itself and other district, local or general units or agencies of the denomination.

General

325. General Conference Membership. The General Conference shall be composed of an equal number of ordained ministers and lay members elected by the several districts, and each district superintendent and a lay delegate elected on the district superintendent's behalf; the presidents of the general educational institutions; such officers serving the General Church as the General Conference may establish by legislation, provided that it shall at the same time enact provisions to secure such further representation as shall be necessary to continue the principle of equal lay and ministerial membership.

327. General Conference Delegates.

(1) Each district, if not under discipline, shall be entitled to send one ordained minister and one lay member as delegates to the General Conference and additional ministerial and lay delegates according to membership on a basis of representation to be fixed by the General Conference.

(2) The delegates shall be elected by ballot. The ministerial delegates must be ordained, and at the time of their election, as also at the time of General Conference, must be members of the district which elected them.

(3) The lay delegates shall be chosen from the members of the Church in full relation within the bounds of the district they represent, and at the time of the General Conference they must be members of a church within the bounds of the district which elected them.

330. General Conference Sessions.

(1) The General Conference shall meet quadrennially, except that in cases of emergency or other unusual circumstances the General Board of Administration shall have the power to shorten or lengthen the interval. Each session shall be held at a time of the year specified in *The Discipline* at a place determined by the General Board of Administration; in case of emergency the General Board of Administration shall have power to change the time.

(2) The president or other elected officer of the General Conference whenever two-thirds of the districts shall request it, or the General Board of Administration, by such vote as the General Conference shall determine, shall call an extra session of the General Conference, fixing the place thereof and the time of assembling later than the next session of each district conference.

332. General Conference Presidency. The various sittings of the General Conference shall be presided over by the General Superintendent(s) in such order as these may determine; but in case no General Superintendent be present, the General Conference shall elect by ballot an ordained minister as president pro tem.

334. Other Officers. The General Conference shall elect by ballot such officers as it shall decide upon.

336. General Conference Quorum. At all times when the General Conference is in session, it shall require a majority of all the delegates elected by the districts to form a quorum to do business, but a smaller number may adjourn from time to time, until a quorum is obtained.

338. General Conference Voting. The ministers and lay members shall deliberate in the sessions of the General Conference as one body, but upon the final vote on any question except proposed amendments to the Constitution, on a call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide and ministers and lay members shall vote separately; and it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

340. General Board of Administration.

(1) There shall be a General Board of Administration to carry out the will of the General Conference during the quadrennium. Such Board shall be composed of the General Superintendent(s) and such other general officers as shall be designated by the General Conference together with an equal number of ordained ministers and lay members chosen by the General Conference to represent equitably the several administrative areas of the Church. The number of such representative members shall be determined by the action of the General Conference.

(2) The General Board of Administration is the chief governing body of the Church in the interim of the General Conferences, and as such is empowered to perfect all plans necessary to the performance of its duties; it shall constitute or create the basic board of control of each and all of the Wesleyan societies and institutions now incorporated or hereafter incorporated under the laws of any state of the United States or of any province of Canada or under any other jurisdiction where such is permitted by the laws of said jurisdiction. The General Board of Administration shall have jurisdiction over mission units under the North American General Conference. It shall have the authority to approve a discipline for each unit achieving recognition as a fully established general conference and for each mission unit. In so doing, it shall have the power to adapt the name of the Church within the restrictions of paragraph 205, and to adapt the provisions of *The Discipline* of the North American General Conference, including both constitutional and statutory law, provided that it does not contravene the Essentials of The Wesleyan Church. In authorizing the adaptation of the name for a unit achieving recognition as an established general conference, it shall first consult with the highest interim administrative bodies of the other

established general conferences which are members of The International Conference of The Wesleyan Church.

350. The General Superintendency.

(1) The General Conference shall elect by ballot from among the ordained ministers one or more General Superintendent(s), who shall be considered as the general spiritual and administrative leader(s) of the Church.

(2) They shall be elected for a four-year term of office to begin on the date determined by the General Conference.

(3) The General Superintendent(s) shall preside over the sittings of the General Conference and over the district conferences. At the district conference over which a General Superintendent is presiding, the district superintendent shall serve by being seated at the presiding officer's table to advise and assist the chair. In the event a General Superintendent is unable to be present at a district conference, the district superintendent shall preside as chair, unless another representative appointed by the General Superintendent is present.

(4) Further duties of the General Superintendent(s) shall be defined by the General Conference.

**Article 9. Powers and Restrictions
of the General Conference**

360. The General Conference shall have full power:

(1) To designate a criterion for parliamentary procedure for itself and for the other bodies of The Wesleyan Church.

(2) To elect such officers as it shall choose and to define their duties and responsibilities.

(3) To make and administer rules and regulations for The Wesleyan Church subject to the Constitution and the following restrictions:

(a) It shall not have power to revoke, alter or change our Articles of Religion, Elementary Principles or any Membership Commitment, or the conditions of membership, or to establish any standards of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

(b) It shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to destroy the principle of equal representation of ministers and lay members in the representative bodies of the Church; or to do away with the right of each General Conference to elect its own officers, or the maintenance of an itinerant ministry.

(c) It shall make no rule, except as provided in 365, that shall deny any church the right to receive, discontinue or expel its own

members subject to their right of appeal; or to elect and remove its own officers; or that shall deny to the district conference the final disposition of all pastoral arrangements, except those districts in which the General Conference or the General Board has transferred the supervision to a General Superintendent or other related general official, or that shall deny to preachers and churches initial negotiations concerning the same.

(d) It shall make no rule, except as provided in 365, that will discriminate against any member or minister on account of ancestry, color or sex.

(e) It shall make no rule that will interfere with the supervision of established districts (in distinction from provisional districts) over the ministers and churches within their bounds, unless said district (or districts) is under discipline.

(f) It shall not have the power to deprive any member or minister of the right of hearing by an impartial committee, or of the right of appeal.

Article 10. Coordination of Local, District and General Discipline

365. Paragraphs 315:1 and 360:3c (stating the local church's authority over local church membership); 315:3,5 and 360:3c (stating the local church's authority over local licentiates and church officers); 323:1 and 360:3c, e (stating the district's authority over ministers and churches); and 323:1 (stating the district's authority over ministers and churches and the General Church's authority over certain officials) are not intended to require multiple hearings and appeals dealing with the same person with amenability on more than one level. Further, these paragraphs do not deal with the potential of a lay person committing offenses with effects beyond the local church or of a minister or local church committing offenses with effects beyond the district of which they are a part. Therefore, the General Conference shall enact legislation to deal properly with such cases.

Article 11. The Supreme Judiciary

370. There shall be a judicial council to be known as the Board of Review whose number of members, qualifications, terms of office, and method of election shall be determined by the General Conference.

375. The Board of Review shall have authority:

(1) To determine the constitutionality of any act of the General Conference upon appeal of the General Superintendent(s), or one-fifth of the members of the General Conference.

(2) To hear and determine any appeal from the decisions of the General Superintendent(s) as to the constitutionality of an action by a district or upon a point of Church law.

(3) To hear and determine the legality of any action by any General Church board upon appeal of one-third the members thereof, or by request of the General Superintendent(s).

(4) To settle questions in dispute between districts upon appeal by a two-thirds vote of a district that claims it has a grievance against another district.

(5) To determine the validity of any complaints against books used in the course of study or in our schools.

(6) To settle and determine the legality of issues arising between a district and the General Conference.

380. A decision of the Board of Review shall be final unless the General Conference votes to overrule the same by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting.

Article 12. Amendments to the Constitution

385. Upon the recommendation of a two-thirds vote of all members of the several district conferences who are present and vote on a proposed change of any matter involving the Constitution, the next ensuing General Conference may by a two-thirds vote ratify the same and it shall become constitutional law. Also, when the General Conference shall originate and recommend by a two-thirds vote any such change, as soon as all members of the several district conferences present and voting shall have concurred by a two-thirds aggregate vote, the same shall be declared constitutional law.

Chapter 5

SPECIAL DIRECTIONS

400. The special directions are expressions by which The Wesleyan Church seeks to bear witness to contemporary society concerning the Christian life and character required by its Articles of Religion and Membership Commitments. While they may or may not be membership commitments, they are official admonitions to the members, ministers and officials of The Wesleyan Church, and provide guidelines for bearing public testimony on the issues discussed.

The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and guidance to believers as they seek to discern personal boundaries for holy living. The Scriptures illustrate that personal conscience varies among individuals on matters for which direct commands of God are not given and that what God requires as a matter of obedience for one person He may not require of all. Therefore, relying on His help through prayer, Bible study, godly counsel, and thoughtful reflection, all believers should develop “personal convictions” to aid them in conforming to God’s will as they relate to and involve themselves in their culture as witnesses for Christ. Such private opinions apply only to one’s own conduct. Legalism is the attempt to impose one’s personal convictions upon others as if they are conditions for salvation or universal standards for holiness.

Issues arise periodically that require serious deliberation by the Church as a community of believers regarding its collective witness for Christ in society. Just as He does for individuals, the Holy Spirit also instructs the Church in discerning and applying biblical principles to its corporate response to current culture. Out of these prayerful deliberations, “collective conscience” statements are born. These statements are believed to be important enough that they should be a part of the identity of the Church and should characterize the lifestyle of those who are a part of our specific “family” within the larger Body of Christ. These statements are not implied to be conditions for salvation, and as such become legalistic and judgmental. Rather they reflect commonly held values of our Church that are voluntarily accepted in order to make a positive statement to society; to protect the wellbeing and integrity of each person; to bring transformation to culture; and to be a safe haven for those seeking refuge from the damages inflicted upon them by an abusive and godless society. By speaking collectively, the Church also seeks to provide examples for and encourage young disciples, recent converts, new members, and its friends in

conforming to Christ's likeness in areas of personal conscience not yet informed by personal study and understanding of biblical principles.

These statements of collective conscience do not speak to every issue and must periodically be amended to speak redemptively to important emerging issues affecting the church and society.

A. Christian Social Concern

410. The Wesleyan Church seeks recognition by the society which surrounds it of the authority of Almighty God, and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, in civil, political, and temporal as well as spiritual matters, and the transformation of that society into the image of Christ insofar as is possible in this present age. It believes that such a transformation of society shall primarily be accomplished by the divine transformation through faith in Christ of the individuals who compose society, but that Christians ought also to manifest social concern in every manner that is in keeping with their Christian testimony. To this end:

(1) **Equal Rights.** The Wesleyan Church upholds the right of all individuals to equal opportunity politically, economically, and religiously, and pledges itself to an active effort to bring about the possession of dignity and happiness by all people everywhere (cf. 220; 265:11–13; 360:3d).

(2) **Peace.** The Wesleyan Church, knowing that war results in great suffering for the bodies, minds, and souls of men and women, staggering economic loss with its legacy of debt for future generations, and the unleashing of the baser passions of life, urges that persons and nations seek by every legitimate means to avoid armed conflict among the peoples and nations of the world. The Wesleyan Church also urges that holy people everywhere pray earnestly for those in authority, so that peace may prevail (1 Tim. 2:2), and for the quick return of the Prince of Peace.

(3) **Military Service.** The Wesleyan Church teaches respect for properly constituted civil authority and the proper loyalty to one's country. It recognizes the responsibility of the individual to answer the call of government and to enter into military service. However, there are those within the fellowship of The Wesleyan Church who believe that military service is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and that their consciences are violated by being compelled to take part in such. The Wesleyan Church will therefore lend moral support to any member who asks and claims exemption by legal processes from military service as a sincere conscientious objector and who asks to serve one's country as a noncombatant.

(4) **Care of the Body and Substance Abuse.** The Bible teaches the sanctity of the human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Christians should avoid the use of anything which would damage the body, destroy the family, harm society (1 Corinthians 10:23–24), undermine the fellowship of the church, hinder reaching full potential in Christ, enslave the will (1 Corinthians 6:12), inhibit evangelism (1 Corinthians 9:19–23), breach the Lord's command to love God supremely and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37–39), or become a stumbling block to the young in age or faith (Matthew 18:6; 1 Corinthians 8:9, 13; 10:32–33). The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to practice self-discipline and temperance in matters of proper eating, exercise, and rest. We oppose the production, sale, purchase and use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, narcotics, and other harmful drugs, unless for mechanical, chemical, or medicinal purposes (cf. 265:4). The unprescribed use of hallucinogens, stimulants, and depressants, and the misuse and abuse of regularly prescribed medicines should be prohibited; only on competent medical advice and under medical supervision should such drugs be used. The consequences to society stemming from substance abuse are of major concern because of their unarguably negative impact on the spiritual character and nature of individuals and the welfare of society. These include the creation of barriers to conversion, family dysfunction and breakdown, poverty, disease and death, increased violence and crime, the incalculable loss to national economies, and the destruction of the individual caught by the power of addiction. In light of the overwhelming evidence of damage to society and the spiritual health of the individual by the abuse of such substances, we believe that even where their use may be legalized, we choose total abstinence as our appropriate response (i.e., voluntarily refraining from and totally avoiding the use of something in all unnecessary circumstances as determined by the individual Christian's conscience in submission to the lordship of Christ and the admonitions of the Church). Such abstinence is a willing act of self-discipline, an acceptance of group accountability, and never a test of salvation or an evidence of superior spirituality.

(5) **Human Sexuality.** The Wesleyan Church maintains a biblical view of human sexuality which makes the sexual experience, within the framework of marriage, a gift of God to be enjoyed as communion of a man and woman, as well as for the purpose of procreation. Sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. Yet we believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome both the practice of such activity and the inclination leading to its practice.

(6) **Divorce and Remarriage.** On the basis of a careful study of the Scriptures, and in keeping with its Membership Commitments (265:6), The Wesleyan Church teaches the following with reference to divorce and remarriage after divorce:

(a) To obtain a divorce on other than scriptural grounds is a sin against God and humanity. Such putting asunder of what God has joined is a direct and deliberate act of disobedience against both the Law and the Gospel. It separates one from God and may subject a member to Church discipline (222).

(b) However, recognizing the fallen state of humanity, divorce has been recognized in the Scriptures as a valid and permanent dissolution of marriage with all its rights and responsibilities. Divorce is not reversible. There is no way to “restore” a dissolved marriage. The divorced (unmarried) status can be changed only by a new marriage to the same person or another person. No divorced and remarried person has two spouses, only a former spouse and a present spouse, as in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 7.

(c) Divorce, however sinful the act and however serious the consequences, is not “unpardonable.” A redeemed sinner or reclaimed backslider is “free” to marry “in the Lord” or to remain unmarried, a eunuch for the kingdom of God’s sake. The one exception to this freedom of choice is mentioned by the Apostle Paul. It is a believer who disobeys the commandment of God and puts away a believing spouse. That person must remain unmarried to leave room for reconciliation to the spouse (1 Corinthians 7).

(d) The right to remarry in no way excuses the sin of divorce. It only implies that the Church must forgive and restore those whom the Lord forgives and restores. Neither penance nor penalty remain to the truly penitent and restored sinner, or backslider, whatever the traumatic consequences of the sin may be.

(7) **The Lord’s Day.** God prescribed that one day a week be set aside for the spiritual, mental, and physical well being of humankind (Genesis 2:2–3; Deuteronomy 5:12–14). The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to observe the Lord’s Day in an appropriate manner (Romans 14:4–6; cf. 265:1).

(8) **Religion in Public Life.** The Wesleyan Church, believing that it is possible to allow recognition of God and the invoking of His aid in public functions without violating the personal rights and freedoms granted in many nations, advocates the enactment of suitable legislation by legislative bodies at all levels of government which will strengthen provision for the free exercise

of religion in public life and allow reference to, or the invoking of the aid of God by individuals serving, writing, speaking, leading or contributing to any public function. The Wesleyan Church further affirms its belief in the public school's duty to recognize the historical and ongoing contribution of the Judeo-Christian tradition to world cultures and modern life. The Wesleyan Church verifies the Bible is an appropriate book for reading in public schools and the right of students to pray as desired.

(9) **Public School.** The Wesleyan Church supports the right and responsibility of parents to determine what is appropriate education for their children, testing the education their children are receiving in accordance with biblical principles and striving for excellence in the education provided for all children. We maintain the right of our members to seek exemption from participation by their children in all matters that are contrary to scriptural doctrines and principles as expressed in the Articles of Religion, Membership Commitments, Elementary Principles or Special Directions of our Church, without prejudice to academic standing.

(10) **Judicial Oaths.** The Wesleyan Church reserves for its members the right to affirm the truth in testimony before the civil and criminal courts rather than to engage in a judicial oath.

(11) **Abortion.** The Wesleyan Church seeks to recognize and preserve the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and, thus, is opposed to the use of induced abortion. However, it recognizes that there may be rare pregnancies where there are grave medical conditions threatening the life of the mother, which could raise a serious question about taking the life of the unborn child. In such a case, a decision should be made only after very prayerful consideration following medical and spiritual counseling. The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to become informed about the abortion issue and to become actively involved locally and nationally in the preparation and passage of appropriate legislation guaranteeing protection of life under law to unborn children.

(12) **Use of Time and Entertainments.** The Wesleyan Church believes that its members should exercise responsible stewardship of their time for worship, work, rest, personal leisure, and service to others. Special care should be given to honoring Christ in one's choices and pursuit of entertainments. This will include refusing to patronize and to carefully regulate the use in the home of activities, media, and communication where they feature the cheapening of human life, the gratuitously violent, the use of immoral or profane language, and the sexually explicit and pornographic. Members should avoid involvement with activities that tend to be addictive

or conducive to gambling (i.e., risking one's assets or property on the outcome of legal or illegal games of chance, including government-sponsored lotteries). We believe gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship (i.e., trusting God's provision for us, as exemplified in Matthew 6:25–34) and the tenth commandment which forbids coveting (Deuteronomy 5:21); is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive; can be a poor example to others of how to manage the resources of God or trust in God's provision; appeals to greed; endangers families; lowers socio-economic standards and self esteem; engenders false hope; and is exploitative in that it takes advantage of the misplaced hopes, compulsions or poor judgment of others. We believe that total abstinence is the best Christian response to gambling in all its forms.

(13) **Modesty in Attire.** The Wesleyan Church believes that our people should provide clear testimony to Christian purity and modesty by properly clothing the body and by dressing with Christian simplicity.

B. Christian Worship and Fellowship

420. Rites and Ceremonies of Churches. True religion does not consist in any ritual observances such as forms or ceremonies, even of the most excellent kind, be they ever so decent and significant, ever so expressive of inward things. The religion of Christ rises infinitely higher and lies infinitely deeper than all these. Let no one conceive that rites and ceremonies have any intrinsic worth, or that true worship cannot subsist without them. Therefore, it is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same or exactly alike, for they have always been different and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and customs, provided that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Acts 15:10, 28–29; Rom. 14:2–6, 15, 17, 21; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:25; 14:26; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:1, 13; Col. 2:16–17; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; 1 Tim. 1:4, 6; 1 Peter 2:16.

430. Healing. The truth that Jesus is both able and willing to heal the body as well as the human soul, whenever such healing is for His glory, is clearly set forth in God's Word and attested by the experience of many of His people at the present day. Prayer for healing according to the pattern set forth in the Scriptures shall be encouraged.

Matt. 10:8; Luke 9:2; 10:9; Acts 4:10, 14; 1 Cor. 12:9, 28; James 5:14–16.

440. Christian Liberty. Christ, through His death on the cross, has freed His followers from sin and from bondage to the law. Christians are “called unto liberty” (Gal. 5:13 KJV), and are not under the law as a means of salvation. They are rather exhorted, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1 KJV).

This liberty, however, is not to be construed as license (Gal. 5:13). Rather, love for Christ constrains the Christian to live a righteous and holy life as God demands. By the Spirit of God, His laws are written on the heart (Heb. 8:10). So Christians resist evil and cleave to the good, not in order to be saved, but because they have been saved.

Within the bounds of Christian liberty, there will be differences of opinion. In such cases, the believer seeks to avoid offending other believers. The stronger one is mindful of the opinions of the one with the weaker conscience (1 Cor. 8 and 10), and is careful not to put a stumbling block in another’s way (1 Cor. 10:24; Gal 5:13). On the other hand, the weak does not criticize the strong (1 Cor. 10:29–30), for the conscience of the weak may need instruction.

The recognition and exercise of that liberty which Christ affords will glorify God and promote the unity of the Church.

450. Christian Unity. The Wesleyan Church, having originated through merger between those of like precious faith, is fully committed to that true Christian unity which is based on scriptural truth and the fellowship of the Spirit, and deplors the separation or division of Christians over peripheral and nonessential matters. While The Wesleyan Church opposes the building of one all-inclusive ecclesiastical organization which regards neither scriptural doctrine nor practice, it welcomes fellowship with those who are committed to the same doctrines and standards of holy living, and cooperation across denominational lines with those who hold the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion revealed in the Bible.

C. Christian Stewardship

460. Meaning of Stewardship. The Scriptures teach that God is the owner of all persons and all things, that people are His stewards of both life and possessions, that God’s ownership and one’s stewardship ought to be

acknowledged, and that every person shall be held personally accountable to God for the exercise of their stewardship (cf. 265:3). God, as a God of system and order in all of His ways, has established a system of giving which acknowledges His ownership and humankind's stewardship. To this end, all His children should faithfully tithe and present offerings for the support of the gospel.

465. Storehouse Tithing. Storehouse tithing is a scriptural and practical performance of faithfully and regularly placing the tithe into that church to which the member belongs. Therefore, the financing of the church shall be based on the plan of storehouse tithing, and The Wesleyan Church shall be regarded by all its people as the storehouse. All who are a part of The Wesleyan Church are urged to contribute faithfully one-tenth of all their increase as a minimum financial obligation to the Lord and freewill offerings in addition as God has prospered them.

Gen. 14:20; 28:22; Lev. 27:30–32; Deut. 14:22; Prov. 3:9–10; 11:24–25; Mal. 3:10–11; Matt. 23:23; Acts 4:34–35; 6:1–3; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:13–14; Heb. 7:1–2, 6, 9.

470. Methods of Fund Raising. In the light of the scriptural teaching concerning the giving of tithes and offerings (cf. 465) for the support of the gospel, and for the erection of church buildings, no Wesleyan church should engage in any method of fund raising which would detract from these principles, hinder the gospel message, sully the name of the Church, discriminate against the poor, or misdirect the people's energies from promoting the gospel.

475. Wills, Bequests and Annuities. It is essential in the exercise of Christian stewardship that careful thought be given as to what shall be done with one's estate after death. Civil laws often do not provide for the distribution of an estate in such a way as to glorify God. Each Christian should give careful attention to the preparation of a last will and testament in a careful and legal manner, and The Wesleyan Church and its various ministries through the local church, the district, world missions, extension and evangelism, education, and benevolences are recommended for consideration. The General Superintendent's office is prepared to assist in these matters (4240; 4940).