



SQB

Social Questions Bulletin

December 2024

THE NEW SOCIAL PRINCIPLES OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

WHAT ARE THE NEW SOCIAL PRINCIPLES?

- A United Methodist Global Call to Social Action
- A Response to today's most pressing social issues
- A Statement Adopted by the 2024 General Conference of the United Methodist Church
- A Call to "faithfulness and to social engagement and intended to be instructive . . . in the best of the prophetic spirit"
- A part of a long history of Methodist concern for social justice

A CONDENSED REVIEW OF OUR LONG HISTORY

- Methodism's founder, John Wesley, spoke out against abuse of animals, exploitation of poor people, the treatment of human beings as chattel, the slave trade in 19th century Great Britain, child labor and the lack of education for poor children, smuggling, and the cruel treatment of prisoners.
- In 1908, The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) adopted a Social Creed which called for "equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life" and listed the following stands:

1. Arbitration in industrial dissensions
2. Protection of workers from injuries
3. Abolition of child labor
4. Regulation of conditions of women's labor
5. Suppression of the "sweating system"
6. Reduction of labor hours
7. Release from employment one day in seven
8. A Living Wage in every industry
9. Highest wage that each industry can afford.
10. The Recognition of the Golden Rule and the mind of Christ as the supreme law of society.





History Continued

In 1972 a Social Principles was adopted by the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopting the resolve of Bishop James S. Thomas that: "The world is literally hanging under the threat of extinction. Indeed, a sense of impending doom seems almost prerequisite to an ecclesial statement of social witness, many of which are born of a sense of crisis. (Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, 2017-2020, Introduction, page 10) The 1972 Social Principles were divided into six major sections and included a new Social Creed. The six sections were: The Natural World; The Nurturing Community; The Social Community; The Economic Community; The Political Community; The World Community.

In 2024 the New Social Principles of the United Methodist Church was adopted in May. These were the new social principles. Briefly, over eight years a team of the General Board of Church and Society conducted listening sessions through the church's worldwide connections, followed by 52 writing teams consisting of lay and clergy and representing Africa, Europe, the Philippines and the United States compiling a first draft. Then it was reviewed by 4,000 United Methodists and revised. It is shorter than the 1972 version, (20 fewer pages), and addressed concerns for United Methodists from around the world, being careful to be inclusive. It is categorized into four sections: community of creation, political community, economic community, and social community. New additions include concerns of indigenous peoples, new language on extrajudicial killings, and sections titled "colonialism, neocolonialism and their consequences". Language on poverty and income inequality was added that rejected the prosperity gospel. Inheritance rights and widows was added by the African representatives.

Why Do the New Social Principles Matter?

If these principles are only read and left on a shelf, they are good for nothing.

If they are used as a weapon in debates, they may do more harm than good.

But if they are read, studied, and applied, they can inspire meaningful action. They help us:

1. Respond to disagreements with grace and understanding.
2. Advocate for justice and fairness in society.
3. See the world and our neighbors through God's eyes.

PRAYERFULLY CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING CONCERNS

- Which is most important to you?
- Is there anything you or your church could do to respond to the concern expressed?
- How could you learn more? Who could you talk to? Are there others already responding to this concern?
- What does scripture or other church teachings have to teach us?



United Methodist 2024 New Social Principles

Creation

The New Social Principles address critical issues related to our natural world, emphasizing care for creation and sustainable practices:

- Destruction of Ecosystems
- Global Warming and Climate Change
- Dependence on Fossil Fuels
- Environmental Racism
- Sustainable Policies and Practices
- Food Justice
- Caring for All Creatures
- Protecting Space
- Affirming Science & Traditional Wisdom

The Social Community

Focused on nurturing individuals, families, and communities while addressing systemic social challenges:

- The Nurturing Community
 - The Family
 - Single People
 - Human Sexuality
 - Marriage: Child Marriage, Polygamy, Divorce
- Other Social Issues
 - Substance Abuse, Alcohol, and Tobacco
 - Bullying and Other Forms of Violence
 - Colonialism, Neocolonialism, and Their Consequences
 - Death with Dignity:
 - i. Faithful Care of Dying People
 - ii. Euthanasia and Suicide
 - Gambling
 - Gender Equality and Diversity
 - Pornography
 - Media and Communication Technologies
 - Medical Experimentation and Research
 - Organ Donation and Transplantation
 - Reproductive Health and Abortion
 - Racism, Ethnocentrism, and Tribalism
 - Sexual Harassment, Abuse, and Assault

The Political Community

Calling for justice, freedom, and advocacy in governance and society:

- Government Responsibilities
 - Church and Governments
 - Civil Disobedience
 - Restorative Justice
- The Death Penalty
- Criminal Justice
- War and Military Service

Basic Rights and Freedoms:

- Health Care
- Children and Young People
- Elders and Aging
- Women and Girls
- Men and Boys
- Indigenous, Native, and Aboriginal Communities
- Migrants, Immigrants, and Refugees
- People with Disabilities
- Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities
- Religious Minorities

The Economic Community

Addressing economic justice and fairness in global and local contexts:

- Globalization
- Poverty and Income Inequality
- Human Trafficking and Slavery
- Graft, Bribery, and Corruption
- Responsible Consumerism
- Farm and Agricultural Production
- The Dignity of Work
- Sabbath and Renewal Time
- Corporate Responsibility

How to Read the New Social Principles (2024)

Avoid treating the Social Principles like a dictionary or quick reference guide. Instead, recognize these key truths:

1. They Are Connected: Reading one principle in isolation may limit understanding. Each principle impacts and informs the others.
2. They Are Intersectional: For example, the Community of All Creation relates to the Economic Community, and the Nurturing Community is influenced by Basic Rights and Freedoms within the Political Community.
3. They Require Familiarity: Understanding how one principle affects another, whether positively or negatively, is essential for meaningful application.

The goal is to make informed, Christ-centered decisions that reflect God's will for the Common Good and help build a loving, inclusive Beloved Community.

Additionally, as a faith community, seek Biblical foundations to explore how scripture aligns—or challenges—the guidance provided by these principles.

Reflecting on the Recent Elections: A Call to Action for Progressive Christians

As we consider the outcomes of the recent elections, it may be helpful to reflect on the PREFACE to The Political Community: "Our involvement in political systems is rooted in the Gospel imperative to love our neighbors, to do justice, and to care for the vulnerable. As United Methodists, we acknowledge that love requires responsible political action and engagement aimed at the betterment of society and the promotion of the common good."

Additionally, under the section titled Church and Governments, we are reminded: "We affirm that both church and state have vital and distinct roles to play in relation to the larger society. We generally affirm the independence and integrity of both institutions, and we advocate for a relationship of mutual respect in which neither institution seeks to dominate or unduly influence the other."

In light of these principles, the movement known as "Christian Nationalism" raises significant concerns. Its efforts to dominate one of our political parties—and consequently our government—stand in direct opposition to the foundational principles of mutual respect and independence between church and state. For progressive Christians who value the separation of church and state and reject the fusion of government and Christianity, examining the influence of "Christian Nationalism" on the recent election is both timely and crucial.

Written by Rev. Brian E. Carter, Retired Elder in the Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Edited by Kade Rogers

Contact: briancar67@gmail.com

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Iowa Methodist Federation for Social Action (MFSA) has played a pivotal role in the fight for social justice in our communities since 1976. The organization relies on the generosity of individuals and organizations to make a lasting impact on the lives of those affected by injustice. By giving to the Iowa MFSA, we are investing in a more equitable, compassionate, and inclusive future for all. It is through these contributions that we can join the movement for social justice, making a real difference in the lives of those who need it most.