

# RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

### What does the Bible say?

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." **(Galatians 5:13-14)**

As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. **(1 Peter 2:16)**

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. **(2 Corinthians 3:17)**



### What does The United Methodist Church say?

Religious persecution has been common in the history of civilization. We urge policies and practices that ensure the right of every religious group to exercise its faith free from legal, political, or economic restrictions. We condemn all overt and covert forms of religious intolerance, being especially sensitive to their express and media stereotyping. We assert the right of all religions and their adherents to freedom from legal, economic, and social discrimination. **(Social Principles ¶162.B)**

Religious liberty continues to be denied and violated in many parts of the world. Concerns about religious persecution have been raised by almost every religious group, especially in places where one particular religion or belief is in a minority position... The United Methodist Church must continue to foster further cooperation among spiritual, religious, and ecumenical bodies for the protection of religious freedom and belief. It must enter into healthy dialogues with peoples of differing faiths and ideologies, including Native and indigenous peoples, in the search for the shared spiritual, social, and ethical principles that engender peace and justice... United Methodists must urge their governments and encourage civil society to enter into dialogues about racism and discrimination and resolve to address especially those concerns that have institutionalized religious bases. **(2016 Book of Resolutions, #6025, "Globalization and Its Impact on Human Dignity and Human Rights")**



**CHURCH & SOCIETY**

The United Methodist Church

Living **FAITH** Seeking **JUSTICE** Pursuing **PEACE**

### What do the facts say?

- In 2019, 79 countries and territories out of the 198 studied around the world (40%) had laws or policies in 2019 banning blasphemy, which is defined as speech or actions considered to be contemptuous of God or of people or objects considered sacred (Pew Research Center).
- Social hostilities around the world involving religion declined in 2019 to the lowest level in five years, while government restrictions on religion remained at a peak. (Pew Research Center).
- In 2015, there were 257 hate crimes against Muslims and 307 in 2016. The number of incidents has declined since then through 2019, the latest year for which data is available (ABC News, 2021).
- Overall, hate crimes incidents increased by nearly 200 from 2018, with 7,314 total incidents reported, the highest number since 2008 (Department of Justice, 2019).



### What do you say?

Take **ACTION** for justice...

**Pray** for the persecuted and for the persecutors. Prayer is one of the most common requests made by Christians who are persecuted for their faith. God enjoins us to pray for our friends as well as our adversaries.

**Advocate** for laws that protect the freedom of religion for all. Encourage your lawmakers to speak out against religious persecution, intolerance, and discrimination not just when it affects the majority group, but also when it hurts others. Encourage your lawmakers to oppose false applications of religious freedom – cases where religious freedom is used as a pretext for discrimination against other social groups.

**Actively oppose** a social climate of fear, mistrust, and stereotyping, and **encourage** a climate of welcome, respect, and support. In addition to recognizing International Religious Freedom Day on October 27, you can do “small acts of great love” by challenging stereotypical jokes and assumptions.

