

UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

AS ADOPTED BY GENERAL CONFERENCE CHARLOTTE, 2024

The story of how the Social Principles were established, introduced to the Church and revised through a worldwide, inclusive process.

The Wesleyan Tradition of Social Holiness

Since the beginning of the Methodist movement over 275 years ago, Methodists took a stance on the social ills of their day. Church of England priest John Wesley and founder of the Methodist movement in Britain and colonial America, advocated for prison reform, the abolition of slavery, ending hunger and poverty, and the elimination of child labor back in the early 1730's.

In 1908, Methodists enshrined the Wesleyan commitment to social holiness, forthright moral witness and ethical action by adopting the church's first Social Creed.

When the new United Methodist denomination was established in 1968, the General Conference authorized a commission to draft a statement of the church's Social Principles. Blending perspectives from the Evangelical United Brethren, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the formerly segregated Central Jurisdiction, the commission thoughtfully and faithfully, deliberated for four years over the creation of a comprehensive, useable document of statements defining the Church's position on social issues.

In 1972, the commission unveiled the new Social Principles. The General Conference wholeheartedly embraced the new document. While not church law, the Social Principles are a set of public United Methodist statements that address what United Methodists have agreed for the most pressing social concerns in the world today.

Over five decades, the Social Principles have been vital for United Methodist witness across the globe. Every four years, individual Social Principles are added, amended and updated.

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CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

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

2012 General Conference Calls to Revise Social Principles

An Eight-Year Journey: General Conference Calls for Whole Review and Revisions

Recognizing changing social issues and concerns, since the Church's 1972 inception of the Social Principles, The General Conference 2012 called the General Board of Church and Society to engage in a process to revise them "with the goal of making them more succinct, theologically founded, and globally relevant." The General Conference's direction was to review and edit the whole document to fully live into our identity as a global church.

Heeding General Conference's call, Church and Society spent the 2012-2016 quadrennium hosting a series of conversations to learn how the church used the Social Principles all over the world. United Methodists crossed borders and oceans to come together to listen to and dialogue about the Social Principles. Based on this time of deep listening, The General Conference 2016 called Church and Society to steward a whole revision of the Social Principles.

Listening sessions with thousands of United Methodists in Africa, Philippines, Europe and the U.S. revealed:

- a deep appreciation for the Social Principles as a resource for mission and ministry
- a desire to clarify the worldwide relevance of the Social Principles
- a need to articulate a theological grounding of the principles

Revised Social Principles Completed in 2020; Adopted in 2024

Church and Society: Stewarded the Process for The General Conference 2020

Faithfully fulfilling the mandate from The General Conference 2016, the Board of Church and Society's board of directors in Spring 2019 endorsed the work of eight years and affirmed voices of thousands of United

Methodists across the globe. Though not all board members agreed with every principle, they embraced the new document's succinct structure and sound theological grounding. The board overwhelmingly approved the document for adoption by The General Conference 2020. With the postponement of The General Conference 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 Revised Social Principles document was presented for adoption at The General Conference 2024.

Leading up to General Conference, delegates reviewed the legislation submitted by Church and Society, which included the Revised Social Principles legislation.

After Church and Society Committee sessions at General Conference, the legislation was overwhelmingly adopted by the General Conference. All sections of the Revised Social Principles passed on consent calendar, except for the Social Community, which had one amendment to the sub-paragraph on "marriage" on the plenary floor.

Referring to the paragraphs found in the *Book of Discipline*, the results of the legislation can be summarized as the following:

- Replace current Preface and Preamble with Revised Preface and Preamble.
- Replace ¶160 with Community of All Creation as submitted.
- Replace ¶161 and ¶162 with RSP Social Community with one amendment to the sub-paragraph on Marriage.

Amended 161.D "Marriage," paragraph to read:

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

- Replace ¶163 with RSP Economic Community as submitted.
- Replace ¶164 and ¶165 with RSP Political Community as submitted.



A Globally Relevant Document with Strong Theological and Biblical Grounding

The revision process produced a written version of the Revised Social Principles that has a strong theological grounding in a more focused, succinct, and globally meaningful form.

Two major themes emerged from feedback during the revision experience. First, the topics included under the current Revised Social Principles' Nurturing Community are incorporated into the Social Community. Second, the topics found in the current Revised Social Principles' World Community are more integrated across the whole document.

The Revision: A United Methodist Experience

Rooted in the Wesleyan means of grace, the document revision process was a deeply United Methodist experience. A global and diverse writing team shepherded the revision experience. Guided by the leadership of the Rev. Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore, dean of the Boston University School of Theology, six conveners led teams to produce a first draft of the document.

Writing teams came together to develop a first draft of a Revised Social Principles. The 52 writing team members were from:

- Philippines Central Conference
- Africa Central Conference
- Congo Central Conference
- West Africa Central Conference
- Central and Southern Europe Central Conference
- Northern Europe and Eurasia Central Conference
- The five U.S. Jurisdictions

Over a period of many months, laity, clergy, young adults and ethnic caucus members forged common understanding to craft a first draft of the Revised Social Principles.

Upon review by the Revised Social Principles Task Force of the board of directors from the General Board of Church and Society, over 4,000 United Methodists read, reviewed

and commented on the first draft. Thousands of United Methodists across the globe read the draft document in French, Swahili, English, and Portuguese.

Many groups in the Central Conferences and across the U.S. met for public conversations to discuss what they read. People from different global perspectives sat at the same table and celebrated their common faith and identity as United Methodists. This United Methodist experience reaffirmed the church's tradition of social holiness and reminded the church of its call to witness for justice and peace in today's global environment.

When the Adopted Legislation Goes into Effect

Legislation adopted by the General Conference does not go into effect until the *beginning of the following year*. So, for 2020 postponed General Conference, all legislation including the adopted Revised Social Principles are in effect as of January 1, 2025.

The General Conferences adopt legislation a little later. According to the *Book of Discipline*, in any central conference "using a language other than English, legislation passed by a General Conference shall not take effect until 18 months after the close of that General Conference."

In English-speaking central conferences, "legislation does not take effect until the central conference convenes and publishes their decisions on rejecting, adopting, or amending any General Conference actions they are allowed to adapt."

Next Steps for The Adopted Social Principles General Conference Charlotte, 2024

Revising all references to the *Book of Discipline* and *Book of Resolutions* will be conducted by the editors from Cokesbury, The United Methodist Publishing House, during the remainder of this year, with an effective publishing date set for the beginning of 2025. Once that work is completed, the Revised Social Principles will be published as the official United Methodist Social Principles.



Social Justice Resources for United Methodist Mission and Ministry

The document's global perspective is a resource for mission and ministry, equipping churches to engage in ministry in their local contexts. United Methodists are passionate about the Social Principles. From Manila, Philippines to Washington DC to Harare, Zimbabwe, thousands of United Methodists shared stories of how the Social Principles impact their daily lives and ministry.

In sermons, Bible studies, in meeting rooms with public decision makers, United Methodists are bringing good news for the transformation of the world.

The Revised Social Principles editorial and writing teams were inspired to produce a teachable document that is usable for all United Methodists. It can be discussed in Sunday school classes, preached from the pulpit, and taught in seminary classes.

