

UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

AS ADOPTED BY GENERAL CONFERENCE CHARLOTTE, 2024

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What are the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church?

- The Social Principles are social teachings of the Church as part of the Methodist tradition of addressing complex social issues of the day.
- This document stands in the Wesleyan method of theological development based on Scripture, along with tradition, reason and Christian experience to live out the Gospel in every arena of life (the Wesleyan Quadrilateral).
- The Social Principles challenge all members of The United Methodist Church to engage in reflection and to encourage dialogue between faith and practice of ministry and mission.

2. Are the Social Principles part of United Methodist Church law?

- The Social Principles are the product of more than a century of legislative decisions made by lay and clergy members of the United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations.
- Although, they are not Church Law (BOD ¶ 509), they are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of many General Conferences to adopt social teachings that express the United Methodist's official positions on complex society issues.
- Legislated statements approved by the General Conference, included in the *Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* and the *Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church* are anchored in the Social Principles.
- Only the General Conference, the church's highest policy-making body, has the authority to change the language in the Social Principles.

3. When was the first United Methodist Social Principles adopted and how many times have they been revised?

- The first Social Principles document was adopted by The General Conference 1972 of the United Methodist Church and amended by The General Conferences 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016.

Continued on back



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4. Who is responsible to ensure the Social Principles remain relevant for today?

- The General Conference of the United Methodist Church is responsible for mandating the revision process and adopting the Social Principles after the process is complete.
- The General Conferences 2012 and 2016 called on the United Methodist Agency, The General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) to convene for the first time a revision process of the Social Principles in its entirety, nearly 50 years after the first Social Principles document was created and adopted.
- An eight-year process stewarded by GBCS began in 2012, engaging laity and clergy from across the globe with diverse perspectives, common faith and identity as United Methodists with the development of the Revised Social Principles document, reaffirming the church's tradition of social holiness and call to witness for justice and peace.

5. What was the process to update the United Methodist Revised Social Principles?

- The experience of the revision process exemplified Methodist values of conferencing, connection, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.
- After thousands of hours of interviews and input, a vast network of United Methodist leaders crafted multiple document drafts together.
- There were 52 writing team members 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, and all five U.S. Jurisdictions.
- Over 4,000 United Methodists read, reviewed and commented on multiple Revised Social Principles drafts.
- The final draft was approved by the Board of the General Board of Church and Society and is submitted to General Conference for adoption.

6. How many people participated in the Social Principles revision process?

- Over 50 participants served on the writing teams to revise the Social Principles. Members came from the five U.S. Jurisdictions and six Central Conferences.
- Over 4,000 United Methodists offered feedback on preliminary drafts. The team received over 2,500 online responses, and over 2,000 people participated in the public conversations convened across the global connection in an eight-year span.
- At each phase, the documents were available in four different languages: English, French, Portuguese, and Swahili.

7. How are the Social Principles more succinct?

- The six sections were condensed into four. Previously, the World Community section isolated global issues into one section and United Methodists urged integrating the topics from this section into the others.
- The number of sections was reduced from 76 subsections to 51 subsections.

8. How are the Social Principles more theologically grounded?

- The new Preamble more clearly connects the Social Principles to the denomination's Doctrinal Heritage, including John Wesley's General Rules of "Do no harm, do good, and follow the ordinances of God." (BOD ¶106.)
- Each section connects Wesleyan history and theology by beginning with a relevant excerpt from John Wesley's writings. For example, the Political Community: Criminal Justice highlights Wesley's advocacy for prison reform.
- The revised Social Principles strive to align better with Scripture. For example, "Sabbath and Renewal Time" emphasizes how God rested on the seventh day of Creation as the foundation for the sabbath and a gift for all people.



9. How are the Social Principles more globally relevant?

- Public conversations with United Methodists repeatedly called for a document that addresses the concerns of United Methodists around the globe and is inclusive of all communities.
- In the **Community of Creation section**, the writing and editorial teams added language about indigenous peoples in the sections Environmental Racism, Food Justice, and Affirming Science and Traditional Wisdom.
- In the **Political Community section**, new language on extrajudicial killings was added because it speaks to contexts where political acts are practiced by governments, including but not limited to the Philippines. The writing team also added a new section called Colonialism, Neocolonialism and their Consequences based on conversations with Africa and the Philippines.
- In the **Economic Community section**, feedback from communities on the African continent, the Philippines and Eurasia urged adding new language in Poverty and Income Inequality that rejected the prosperity gospel teaching that the accumulation of wealth was a sign of God's favor.
- In the **Social Community section**, language was included on inheritance rights and widows as African United Methodists expressed concern about denying inheritance rights for vulnerable women, children, and grandchildren upon the death of the husband.

10. What Revised Social Principles Legislation Was Adopted By General Conference Charlotte, 2024?

After Church and Society Committee sessions at General Conference Charlotte, 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.

11. When Does The Adopted Legislation Go 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."

12. When Is The Official Social Principles Booklet Available From Cokesbury Publishing, The UMC Publishing House?

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.

13. As a United Methodist, what should I do with the Social Principles?

- The purpose of the Social Principles is to understand the United Methodist position to connect with human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation.
- The Social Principles were designed, developed and written as a teachable document allowing instruction for all United Methodists challenging us to consider our attitudes and actions faithfully and critically.
- As United Methodists, pray, study, discuss and put into practice the Social Principles allowing meaningful reflection and dialogue with your family, your friends, your communities, your church and God to grow spiritually, live faithfully, pursue peace and seek justice.

