

THE UNITED METHODIST SOCIAL PRINCIPLES
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CHURCH & SOCIETY

The United Methodist Church

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

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The Community of All Creation

Preface

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; ... God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.” (Genesis 1:1-4a, 31)

All creation is God’s. Creation is an expression of God’s grace, and God’s creation is very good. All people are members of the community of all creation, and the flourishing depends on the care of *all* God’s creation.

A. Creation

To be responsible stewards begins with appreciation of God’s creation and the covenantal relationship between God and everything that God has created. John Wesley proclaimed:

The great lesson which our blessed Lord inculcates is, that God is in all things, and that we are to see the Creator in the glass of every creature; that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God, which indeed is a kind of practical atheism; but, with a true magnificence of thought, survey heaven and earth, and all that is therein, as contained by God in the hollow of [God’s] hand, who by intimate presence holds them all in being, who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of universe. (Sermon 23, “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, III” I.11, 1748)

As Christians and as Wesleyan Christians, we are called to be responsible and caring stewards of all creation (cf. Genesis 1:28, 2:15, 9:9, NRSV). We affirm the inherent worth of creation, whose ultimate value is measured beyond its utility to humanity (cf. Genesis 1:31, NRSV). And yet, we lament that our current social, economic and political systems are no longer ecologically sustainable. We confess that these systems contribute to a misuse of God’s good creation by contributing to over-consumption, climate change, degradation of ecosystems, extinction of species, and a breakdown of the community of all life. We recognize that communities least responsible for this misuse of God’s creation, especially indigenous and other traditional communities, are most vulnerable to the harm inflicted upon God’s earth.

We are committed to learn from creation’s interdependent relationships and cycles of life and death and giving and receiving. We are committed to acts of care and solidarity as we pursue a more just and sustainable world, so that the whole community of creation can flourish.

B. Ecosystems: Air, Water, Land, and Plant and Animal Life

We affirm the goodness, relationality and mutuality of all creation (Genesis 1, NRSV), celebrate earth's abundance and diversity, and "praise God together with all creation" (Psalm 148, NRSV). We are members of ecosystems and belong to communities of animals, plants, fungi, and single-celled organisms. We are interconnected and interdependent with our physical environments. Ecosystems are not intended solely to benefit humanity, but are valued by God, and are of intrinsic worth.

In Ezekiel, God asks, "Is feeding in good pasture or drinking clear water such a trivial thing that you should trample and muddy what is left with your feet? But now my flock must feed on what your feet have trampled and drink water that your feet have muddied" (Ezekiel 34:18-19, NRSV). Industrial and technological advancement lead to many worthwhile goods and services, but they have also led to pollution and a misuse of creation. Entire ecosystems and human communities, especially those of indigenous peoples, are treated as sacrifice zones where industrial practices extract natural resources and dispose of waste in vulnerable areas.

John Wesley affirms that faith, "leads us beyond an exclusive concern for human well-beings to the broader concern for all members of the community of life, including the birds in our backyards, the fish in our rivers, and every living creature on the face of the earth" (*Letters*, June 11, 1747). We believe Christ came to restore all of creation and call on Church and society to lead lives that demonstrate a love for God, one another, and all the earth. Therefore, we support measures designed to restore and protect natural ecosystems that care for air, water, land, plants, and animals.

Air is essential to life. Air pollution damages the health of God's creation. We advocate for the adoption, implementation, and enforcement of air quality standards that protect human health and the whole community of life.

Water is a sacred gift from God. It is through water that we are baptized and incorporated into God's new creation. We urge communities, governments, and businesses to ensure access to safe water for all people and ecosystems. We support environmental regulations that prevent release of harmful waste into aquatic ecosystems. We reject the privatization, commodification and commercialization of water.

God separated the land from water and declared it good. We encourage the preservation and expansion of plant life that grows on the land. We respect the rights of indigenous peoples to manage regions of land they have traditionally occupied and cared for.

God created animals of every kind to flourish. Commercial, illegal, or unsustainable trafficking harms wildlife. We support regulations that protect and conserve the life and health of animals, including the humane treatment of pets, domesticated animals, and animals used in research. We support guidelines and regulations that protect habitats and conserve animal species, particularly those threatened with extinction.

C. Wisdom, Science, and Technology

We affirm that, “wisdom emanates from God,” (Job 12:13, NRSV) and is fully received when we respond to God’s good gift of life. We respect the wisdom and ways of knowing, practiced by indigenous peoples. These worldviews perceive existence as interconnected and cosmocentric. Humans are not the center, but rather, we are one part of the web of life. We acknowledge, indigenous knowledge in relationship to the natural world and respect indigenous rituals, traditions, and ways of life.

We celebrate the contributions of science and technology. We recognize science as a legitimate means to seek knowledge regarding creation. We affirm the validity of the scientific method, which relies on an evidence-based approach to interpret creation.

We understand that the mysteries of God’s creation continue to emerge and adapt. In cases where technology does not harm creation, we recognize it as a legitimate tool to enhance the quality of human life. We support the use of *the precautionary principle*, a strategy to prevent the manufacture and use of potentially dangerous technologies, processes, or chemicals.

We believe that science and theology enrich one another. We encourage scientific and theological communities to work together, to enable all species to sustain life on earth and by God’s grace, to increase the quality of our common lives.

D. Climate Change

We lament humanity’s disregard for God’s beloved creation, which has a global impact, especially in the progression of climate change. Human actions have always had consequences in the creation, as we hear in Hosea:

“Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel; for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing, lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore, the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.” (Hosea 4:1-3, NRSV).

Human activity, including rampant industrialization and the overuse of fossil fuels, lead to a buildup of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth’s atmosphere. These pollutants alter the earth’s climate, raise average global temperatures, cause ocean acidification, damage ecosystems, hasten the rate of species extinction, and contribute to extreme weather events. Global fossil-fuel intensive systems, such as mechanized production, and industrialized agriculture and transportation systems, contribute to growing emissions. Deforestation and the destruction of natural ecosystems, reduce natural carbon sequestration.

The Church, therefore, advocates for policies and practices in industry and government that reduce the emission of greenhouse gases and seek to restore balance. We support conservation of fossil fuels and their rapid replacement with clean and renewable energy. We call for an end to investment in technologies and infrastructures that continue humanity's dependence on fossil fuels for present and future generations. We urge governments to require mandatory reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, to support programs for conservation and renewable energy, and to move toward a 100% renewable economy.

We also support development of renewable sources of power. Nuclear power is not a just solution to avoid carbon dioxide emissions because the permanent storage and containment of nuclear waste pose grave and irreversible risks to communities, ecosystems, and all forms of life.

We urge precaution in employing geoengineering to mitigate the effects of climate change by altering the earth's biosphere in ways that may have unintended and irreversible effects. Instead, we promote widespread cooperation with the earth's natural healing processes through the restoration of ecosystems. We call on Church and society, industries and governments, to respond proportionally to the magnitude of the climate crisis, through changes in personal practices and public policies that reflect care for creation.

E. Sustainability

Ecologically sustainability demands a commitment to a healthy environment and economic sufficiency. Sustainable ecological resources and policies of human production must be justly distributed.

We urge Church and society to evaluate personal behavior based on overconsumption and to devise ways to conserve resources and promote practices of living simply in a closer relationship with the earth. We call on governments to enact policies that reduce extraction, consumption, and waste while enforcing environmental, health, and safety protections. We advocate for environmentally sound corporate practices that protect the health of their employees and the communities where they are located.

Additionally, indigenous lands and peoples must be protected from overly-aggressive development. We support the protection of vulnerable peoples and their own efforts to protect the land and their well-being. Public policies must move toward the elimination of poverty and toward an equitable redistribution of resources and in so doing, involve indigenous communities in their decision-making.

Global demand for extractive industries, including oil, disproportionately benefits developing nations. This income can be used to provide basic services to all people of a region and, if used responsibly and distributed equitably, can serve to lift communities out of poverty. However, far too often, extractive industries have led to public corruption and environmental degradation.

In solidarity with impoverished communities who are rich in natural resources, the Church supports broad community participation in decision-making policies that promote long-term development and ecological sustainability.

F. Environmental Justice

John Wesley said, “Love for God and neighbor extends to all creation.” We must respect and protect creation for God makes it, loves it, and says it is good. We recognize that the health of our neighbors depends on the health of natural systems. Environmental justice must especially extend to those who are most vulnerable. We also recognize that our neighbors include the whole created community and we need to support justice in the whole ecosystem.

Marginalized communities suffer from practices of discrimination based on gender, age, race, ability, ethnicity, religion, language, and disparate socio-economic class structure. Local communities play a primary role in determining the regulations and needs of a community. As a Church, we stand and work with communities that are disproportionately harmed by environmental neglect and destruction.

We recognize that misuse and mismanagement of environmental practices impact marginalized peoples, and we advocate for policies based on the *precautionary principle*. Church and society honors God by supporting ecological policies that restore and rebuild urban and rural areas in balance with nature, and respect the cultural integrity of communities.

We support the *polluter pays principle* that requires corporations and governments to provide reparations to communities for harm done to their environment. We urge governments to enact participatory and just policies that consult with communities whose livelihoods depend on the health of creation.

G. Food Systems

God calls us to live in faithfulness to the land so that it, “will yield fruits and you will eat your fill and live securely on the land” (Leviticus 25:18-19, NRSV). Care of creation and concern for food, are mutually intertwined. We affirm food systems that are ecologically-sustainable, locally-oriented, accessible and fairly distributed, healthy, humane, and just.

The production, harvesting and distribution of foods, including plants, livestock, seafood, and poultry, should be modeled on natural ecological cycles, which would adapt to regional conditions and food structures, conserve energy, and reduce chemical inputs and waste.

We support government and commercial policies and trade agreements that promote local, sustainable, and organic agriculture and production systems, which maintains the natural fertility of the soil and waters, and the diversity of seeds, plants, and animals. The land, food, and the water rights of all people, and the food cultures that rely on knowledge of the

medicinal properties of plants, must be respected. Food security requires just patterns of land and water use – justice for the land, water, and humans.

We oppose the patenting of organisms and local seed varieties and the weakening of standards for organic foods. Food-safety policies must protect food supplies, ensure inspection of goods, prevent the sale and irresponsible disposal of expired or spoiled foods, and promote the public's right to know the content of the foods they are eating.

We call for policies that reduce carbon intensive agriculture methods that increase climate change. Producers must be responsible for their adverse impact on food packaging, distribution, and transport, and seek the safety and well-being of agricultural and food-processing workers.

Accordingly, to ensure the common good, the Church supports food policies that promote food sovereignty through participatory decision-making in the production process.

H. Space

The whole cosmos is God's creation and is due our respect and care. We reject the exploitation and commodification of space. We reject the militarization of space and urge an exploration of space in peaceful and collaborative ways that consider the consequences of our actions for future generations. We affirm the inherent worth and integrity of all life beyond earth and commit ourselves to its respect and care.

In light of God's creative acts and God's ongoing relationship with creation, we recognize God as the "soul of the universe" (Wesley, as quoted above). We recognize further that we live in relationship with all of God's creation. Every creature and part of creation has an important role to play, and human beings are called to be responsible stewards in all that we do.

The Nurturing Community

Preface

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV)

Each person is formed in the image of God and endowed by God with intrinsic worth. Embraced by God’s love and blessed by God’s grace, all are invited to participate in a process of growth in community. Through nurturing communities, we participate in relationships where all are able to flourish in healthy and positive ways. We, therefore, aspire to create nurturing environments within and beyond the church, and seek, as our highest value, the well-being and belonging of all.

A. Culture and Identity

Our primary identity is as children of God. We recognize that cultures cultivate change and, as a result, they transform Church and society. Our collective lives are a testimony to emerging and evolving histories, traditions, and experiences. The Church is called to challenge and recreate cultural norms within the Church itself and in any social context where dominant norms are used to legitimate the superiority of one culture over another. We seek to guard the unity of humanity, while honoring God’s gift of diversity (I Cor. 9:17; 12:7, NRSV). We recognize the many gifts represented in the Body of Christ and the mutual care that binds the community together (I Cor. 12:4-26, NRSV).

Accordingly, we invite cultures to embrace their differences and to accept both diversities and similarities with a generous attitude of respect for the dignity of all, curiosity and openness, love and grace, as we share our variety of perspectives, and manifest a new Pentecost in which people, filled with the Holy Spirit, speak in different languages and yet understand one another (Acts 2:1-13, NRSV).

B. Family

Whether we are single, married, adopted, orphaned, divorced, or widowed, all persons are welcome to receive and enjoy God’s grace within the human family. Isaiah 1:17 (NRSV) says, “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.” Elsewhere the emphasis is on love and respect between parents and children and in all of family life.

We believe the family should be the basic human community of mutual love, responsibility, and dignity, through which persons are nurtured. We acknowledge that the creation of

families comes in many different sizes and configurations, each unique, and none being more significant than another.

We affirm the importance of loving parents and caregivers. God loves all children and therefore, the dignity of all children is to be protected and valued. We believe that loving caregivers are essential to a nurturing community. Recognizing this, we affirm that all persons are adopted into the family of God, and we commend birth parents, adoptive parents, caregivers, siblings, and children to the care of the Church and society, that each person may share their joys and challenges and be nurtured in a community bound by love.

We affirm the integrity of single persons as vital members of human families and the Church community, and we reject all social norms, practices, and attitudes that discriminate against persons because they are single. This includes single parents, recognizing their extra responsibilities. The Church community also includes widow(er)s and orphans, both as part of the Body of Christ and as people for whom to care (cf. James 1:27, NRSV). We encourage all people to develop, sustain, and strengthen relationships to live life in all its abundance.

C. Full Inclusion of Differently-Abled Persons

Scripture says, God looked out over creation and God declared that it was “very good.” We affirm that all persons are created in the image of God with the uniqueness of their distinctive mental, physical, developmental, or psychological abilities. These differences should not impede full inclusion in the family of God. Too often the contributions of differently-abled persons are dismissed or undervalued, both in Church and society; yet, persons with diverse abilities are uniquely gifted members of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:4-26). We commit ourselves to listening to, learning from, partnering with and advocating for differently-abled persons, in order that the full blessing God intends for the world through them, might be received.

D. Gender Equality

The Church is called to lead the way to achieve gender equality, both in its visible leadership and in its support of gender equity in all aspects of society. Together, male and female are made in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:26-27, NRSV). We believe that in Christ the Spirit moves among us to bring unity in the midst of our diversity (cf. Gal. 3:28, NRSV).

We affirm gender diversity as a gift from God, intended to add to the rich variety of human experience and perspective. We welcome the Spirit of God, which is poured out on all of humanity. As Joel prophesied and Peter proclaimed, all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV) and the Spirit enables and empowers all people to bear witness to God (Acts 2:16-18, NRSV). As followers of Jesus Christ, we need to guard against attitudes and practices that ascribe one gender as superior or inferior to another or deny the call of any person. Gender diversity is cause for mutual blessing, not a justification for strife, domination, or oppression. Discrimination based on gender identity is a sin.

E. Marriage and Divorce

God created humanity to live in community and in mutual relationship with one another, thus creating communities of support. The ways we relate to and interact with one another are to honor Christ who lives among us. Ephesians 4:2-3 (NRSV) urges Christians to relate “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Relationships are expressed through love, trust, personal commitment, mutual support, and shared fidelity. This is true of every relationship, including those formed through the bond and covenant of marriage. And yet, through exploitation, oppression, and selfishness, and in the way we relate to and interact with one another, we crucify Christ who lives among us.

Our fidelity to the marital covenant must never allow for abuse or exploitation. When abuse occurs, the safety of persons who are at risk, is our priority. As a Church, we offer our support to survivors of abuse and seek to provide all persons with the necessary resources for healing. We call on society in situations of violence, to ensure the safety of children when determining custodial responsibility.

When conflict arises in any relationship, reconciliation is the first goal. However, when a married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel, divorce is a regrettable alternative in the midst of brokenness. We grieve over the devastating emotional, spiritual, and economic consequences of divorce for all involved, understanding that often women and especially children are disproportionately affected by such burdens.

We believe that divorce does not preclude entering into a new marital covenant. We commit to provide necessary aid and care to all members of a family experiencing a divorce. The Church’s role is to provide, or help people access emotional, civil, and financial resources during this life transition.

We also urge respect for childhood and believe that childhood marriage interrupts girls’ social, emotional and intellectual development and impedes their long-term health and economic opportunities. As a Church, we support laws that prohibit the marriage of children under 18 years of age.

Women and girls often encounter shame and stigma as a result of infertility or unplanned pregnancies, and consequently are ostracized by communities. We must teach, preach and model that all girls and women are made in God’s image, endowed with sacred worth, and should not be defined solely by their role as mothers or wives.

The Church commits to surrounding all relationships with a community through which Christ’s grace, personal commitment, mutual support, and shared fidelity can grow and blossom.

F. Human Sexuality

This section will be drafted after the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference.

G. Sexual Exploitation and Violence

All people are created with sacred worth, formed in God's image and, as such, must be free from sexual exploitation and violence. The Church does not condone the systemic exploitation of sex including, but not limited to, global commercialization (buying and selling) of sex, sex trafficking, unwanted or coercive sexual comment, advance, demand, contact, rape, or abusive pornography that depicts and objectifies children or adults. We are committed to addressing the root causes of sexual violence and all forms of exploitation, even when the church has been complicit in condoning or ignoring the violence and exploitation.

We commit to provide care for all persons who experience sexual violence and exploitation. We must exemplify safe environments by creating, implementing and enforcing policies that ensure children, women, and men will be free from all forms of sexual violence and exploitation.

H. Bullying

Jesus cared for persons who were bullied (cf. John 4.1-26, Luke 19.1-10, NRSV). We affirm the right of all people to be free from harmful and demeaning acts of aggression and control. Bullying has severe consequences to the flourishing of life. As a result of physical, verbal, and emotional bullying, schools, workplaces, online networks and communities become dangerous environments. We thus decry bullying in all its forms.

We urge congregations, school systems, and other social organizations to educate themselves and respond to those who have been bullied, those who have ignored or tolerated bullying, and those who have bullied others. We implore persons in positions to intervene to take actions that protect those who are bullied and address the root causes of bullying. We are also called to create cultures in our churches and communities that value everyone and do not tolerate bullying.

I. Reproductive Health

Reproduction and the continuity of care for children is a gift to humanity (Gen. 1.27-28, NRSV). We affirm the complexity that surrounds reproduction and birth. We recognize the grief and shame that may accompany an inability to conceive and the decisions that are made concerning intended and unplanned pregnancies. Reproductive health care is essential to the wellbeing of families and communities. Comprehensive age-appropriate sex education is crucial to addressing healthy attitudes and behaviors.

We believe in the gift of life. Choosing to have an abortion is a difficult and complex decision, often complicated by social realities such as poverty, sexual violence, lack of

education or access to health care. Church and society must focus on preventing unintended pregnancies and address the causes that lead to unintended pregnancies.

We support legal access to abortion, contraceptives, and infertility treatment. The Church is deeply concerned with prevention of maternal and infant mortality and treatment of diseases associated with pregnancy, birth, and abortion. We believe that life is embraced by the love and grace of God (cf. Ps. 139, NRSV). We, therefore, urge the Church to provide nurturing ministries to persons who experience a miscarriage, terminate a pregnancy, give birth and raise a child, or give birth and present a child for adoption.

We support parents, guardians, and other adult caregivers in preparation for birth, and urge Church and society to teach and model the role of all parents in family planning and faithful nurture.

J. Death and Dying

We recognize that each mortal life will eventually end in death (cf. Eccl. 3:2, NRSV), and we affirm that God is present in the beginning and end of mortal life, and in all circumstances of life and death. The Church is called to support all persons who face the end of their mortal life and claim the gift of eternal life, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

a. Faithful Care for Dying Persons

We are called to care for dying persons throughout their journeys toward death. We applaud medical science and technologies for their effort to prevent and cure illness and to enable and enhance our quality of life. We also encourage the compassionate use of available technologies to provide palliative care at the end of life.

We recognize the potentially agonizing personal and moral decisions faced by the dying, their health care providers, families, friends, and faith community. Care for persons in the process of dying reflects our stewardship of the divine gift of life. We recognize conflicting values in making decisions regarding life-sustaining medical treatments, and affirm that there is no moral or religious obligation to use life-sustaining medical treatments when they extend the process of a person's suffering. Dying persons and their families may discontinue clinical treatment when it ceases to be of benefit. We reject euthanasia and any pressure upon the dying to end their lives, and we affirm laws and policies in society that protect the rights and dignity of the dying while also providing for palliative care.

Church and society must provide faithful care, including pain relief, companionship, support and spiritual nurture, in the difficult work of preparing to die. At the end of life, we encourage hospice care be made available and affordable to all persons. Faithful care does not end at death, but continues with those who continue to grieve the loss of their loved one and reshape their lives after the loss. We recognize that God's love,

grace, and purpose continues for all persons beyond this life (I Corinthians 15:54-55; Ecclesiastes 3:1-2).

b. Suicide, Death and Dying

Nothing, including suicide, “separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:38-39, NRSV). We now know that for many chronic mental health conditions are not a failure of the will, but a tragic illness that, if left untreated, may result in self-harm. Persons who complete suicide should not be condemned. We urge congregations and local communities to remove harmful stigmas surrounding suicide. Appropriate pastoral care must be grounded in compassion and love, not judgment and finding fault.

We encourage increased education in the Church, regarding the theological and ethical issues related to suicide, death and dying. The Church must ensure that all persons have access to pastoral care or therapy when circumstances have led to a loss of self-worth. Through preaching, teaching, and lived practice, we proclaim the Good News that every person is made in the image of God, touched by God’s grace, and fiercely loved by God from birth, throughout life, in death and beyond death. We believe that love is as strong as death (cf. Song of Solomon 8:6).

The Social Community

Preface

Our belief in the inherent worth of all persons, leads us as a Church to call for the recognition, protection, and implementation of the principles of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in order that communities and individuals may claim and enjoy their dignity as children of God.

Therefore, we support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to clean water, food, housing, education, medical care, communication, employment, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection, and are committed to increasing the social capital of those who are most vulnerable in society.

We deplore acts of hate or violence against persons or groups, based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation.

A. Right to Healthcare

Healthcare is a basic human right. Health is a condition of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. Jesus proclaims: "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b, NRSV). Methodism's support of hospitals, physicians, and other health care providers evidences its longstanding commitment to health and wholeness as an essential ministry for all of God's people. As John Wesley writes: "It will be a double blessing if you give yourself up to the Great Physician, that He may heal the soul and body together. And unquestionably this is His design. He wants to give you...both inward and outward health." John and Charles Wesley encouraged pastors and lay leaders to attend to the physical, spiritual, and emotional health of those in the community.

Creating the personal, environmental and social conditions where health thrives is a responsibility shared among individuals, governments and society. We encourage all persons to pursue healthy practices.

We affirm the importance of preventive healthcare, good nutrition, health education, secure housing, and occupational safety as contributions to good health.

Healthcare, as a basic human right, includes care for persons with neurological conditions, and physical disabilities. Persons living with these challenges must be afforded the same access to healthcare as all other persons in our communities.

We believe it is unjust to construct and perpetuate barriers to physical or mental wholeness and full participation in community. We therefore believe, it is the responsibility of governments and society to ensure accessible and affordable healthcare is available to all.

Ezekiel challenges leaders in society by saying, “You do not strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strays, or seek out the lost” (Ez. 34:4a, NRSV). Providing the care needed to maintain health, prevent disease, and restore health following injury or illness, is a responsibility that governments and society ignore at their peril. We call on the Church and society to promote policies that ensure access to healthcare for all, to minister to the sick, and to work toward healthy societies for wholeness of life.

B. Addictions and Substance Abuse

Jesus said, “I have come to give life abundantly” (John 10:10, NRSV). Persons with addictions and their loved ones are of infinite worth and deserve treatment, counseling, rehabilitation, and equitable access to opportunities for sustained recovery.

We recognize that families, communities and individuals, are often decimated by the disease of addiction and substance abuse. Church, society and governments are called to meet the needs of persons living with chronic addiction. We commit ourselves to assist people toward freedom and healing from addictions and substance.

Because of the traumatic effect of drug addiction and substance abuse on personal and public health, we support total abstinence from the use of tobacco and the misuse of other drugs. With regard to those who choose to consume alcoholic beverages, we encourage judicious use and deliberate and intentional restraint.

C. Organ Transplantation and Donation

We believe that organ transplants and organ donation are acts of charity, love, and self-sacrifice. Lacking access to the life-giving benefits of organ and other tissue donation, places the lives of people across the world at risk. We believe that transplants should be conducted in an environment of respect and confidentiality for the recipient and the donor. We understand the buying and selling of organs to be a violation of the dignity of human life. Our belief in the sanctity of a person’s life and death, requires that we support protocols to prevent abuse to donors and their families. We recognize the life-giving benefits of organ and tissue donation and encourage all people of faith to become organ and tissue donors as a part of their love and ministry to others in need.

D. Medical and Genetic Experimentation

As stewards of God’s creation, we are to act in conscientious, careful, and responsible ways regarding medical experimentation and the application of emerging knowledge in the genetic sciences. We welcome medical benefits that lead to improved physical and mental health.

At the same time, meticulous ethical oversight of experimentation is required. It is imperative that governments, corporate research bodies, and the medical profession enforce prevailing medical research standards and maintain rigid controls in testing and

applying these technologies. Special attention should be given so that persons living in less affluent societies are not subject to dilatory effects of such experimentation and, conversely, are among those who are fully included as those who benefit from such technological and medical advances.

The testing of new drugs, genetically modified organisms and innovations involving genetic procedures, must be accompanied by ethically oriented measures of testing and approval. Such technological innovations should never use persons as research subjects, without obtaining their full, rational and non-coerced, prior consent. It is also clear that such experimentation must be clearly monitored and regulated. Because of the effects of these technologies on all of life (human and all other species), we call for effective guidelines and public accountability to safeguard against any action that might lead to abuse, including political or military ends.

E. Persons with Disabilities

We recognize and affirm the full humanity and personhood of all individuals with mental, physical, developmental, neurological, and psychological conditions or disabilities as full members of the family of God. We urge the Church and society to recognize and receive the gifts of person with disabilities as full participants in the life of the church and communities.

We call for the protection of the rights of all persons with disabilities including healthcare, employment, education, housing, and transportation and freedom from discrimination.

F. Rights of Migrants, Immigrants and Refugees

Scripture tells us, “the stranger that resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the stranger as yourself” (Lev. 19:34, NRSV). Christians are called to extend welcome and radical hospitality to those who are the strangers in our midst. This includes migrants, immigrants, and refugees.

The Church recognizes, embraces and affirms the dignity and right of all persons, including migrants, immigrants or refugees, to equal opportunities in employment and access to housing, healthcare, education, and freedom from discrimination. We oppose any policies that deny these rights to migrants, immigrants or refugees. We also oppose detention policies that separate immigrant, migrant, and refugee family members from each other or include detention of families with children.

Communities are called by Scripture to provide hospitality and justice to strangers and sojourners. Therefore, we urge Church, governments, and civil society to affirm their gifts, contributions, and struggles.

G. Rights of Religious Minorities

John Wesley said, “But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works. (“On a Catholic Spirit” 1771).

Religious persecution, which has been practiced throughout the history of humanity, is antithetical to Christ’s command to love and care for our neighbor. Freedom of religion requires freedom of choice. All forms of religious discrimination and intolerance, including inaccurate and irresponsible media stereotyping, undermine freedom of conscience and must be condemned by Church and society. Every religious group has a right to exercise its faith free from legal, political or economic restrictions. Likewise, no religious group has a right to impose its religious beliefs on others. All covert and overt forms of religious discrimination and intolerance, including inaccurate and irresponsible media stereotyping, undermine freedom of conscience and must be condemned by Church and society.

We call on Church and society to advocate for the protection of all religions to practice and establish their religion free from discrimination.

H. Rights of Racial and Ethnic Communities

Christ’s work and ministry proclaims the reign of God as one of justice, love, and reconciliation with and among all peoples and nations. As John’s vision of the coming kingdom describes: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothing in white robes, with palm branches in their hands.” (Rev. 7:9, NRSV). The promise of God’s kingdom is made visible when racial diversity is celebrated. We recognize that ethnocentrism, tribalism, racism, and caste systems are harmful expressions of social dominance that do not affirm the sacred worth of all persons.

The dominance of one racial or ethnic community over another, corrupts societies and threatens our ability to live as a united people. We lament acts of discrimination, oppression, prejudice and bias, which destroy members of our society and diminish our common good.

We call the Church to repentance for its participation in discriminatory systems. Racial discrimination is the disparate treatment of persons based on their ethnicity and result in denying persons full and equitable access to resources, opportunities, and participation in Church and society. We oppose the creation of a racial hierarchy in any culture and commit ourselves to challenge and dismantle unjust systems of power, privilege and class, as they impact race and ethnicity.

We encourage the church to advocate and work for social structures and compensatory programs to redress long-standing, systemic social inequities. We affirm the right of persons in members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic communities' access to equal and equitable opportunities.

I. Rights of Children and Young People

All children and young people have a right to food, shelter, clothing, health care, protection and emotional well-being. In Luke 18:16 (NRSV), Jesus welcomes children and calls us to uphold their dignity and human rights. The Apostle Paul reminds Timothy, not to let his young age be the reason others look down on him (cf. I Tim. 4:12-14, NRSV). Young people offer unique perspectives and experiences that must be considered by all. All children have a right to food, shelter, clothing, health care, protection and emotional well-being. Children deserve a safe, nurturing community and a secure physical environment that provides them with opportunities to flourish and reach their full potential.

Young people continue to be marginalized by Church and society in their exercise of decision-making processes and participation. We urge persons in positions of authority and power, to support young people in matters of decision-making at all levels of Church and society.

Too often, Church and society have remained silent, while children and young people suffer. We condemn the neglect, abuse, abduction, exploitation, human trafficking, and imprisonment of any child or young person, regardless of gender, ethnicity, race, economic status, or national origin and we hold perpetrators in positions of power accountable for their actions. We call on Church and society to advocate for the protection and the well-being of all children and young people.

J. Rights of The Aging

In the witness of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Noah, Jacob, and many other ancestors, we recognize the blessing and dignity of growing older. As Proverbs 16:31 declares: "A gray head is a crown of glory; It is found in the way of righteousness." The dignity and respect for the aging is essential to the integrity and welfare of Church and society.

We support social policies that integrate the aging into the life of the total community, including increased and nondiscriminatory employment opportunities, educational and service opportunities, and access to medical care and housing. We urge social policies and programs, particularly those in marginalized communities, which ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right as senior members of the human community. Further, we urge increased consideration for adequate protections for non-employed elders including provisions for spouses, if applicable.

K. Rights of Persons of All Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities

This section will be drafted after the 2019 Special Session of the General Conference.

L. Rights of Women and Girls

We affirm women as made in the image of God and in Christ all are one (Gal. 3:28). All women and girls have full dignity and rights endowed to all humankind. We celebrate women in the Bible such as Sarah, Ruth, Phoebe, Mary the mother of Jesus, and women unnamed, who embody hope, power and love of God in the midst of existing patriarchal structures. The importance of women in leadership positions at all levels of Church and society is essential to our common good.

All women have a right to equal opportunities in education, parental rights and responsibilities, employment, equitable compensation and promotion. Women must live free from harassment, discrimination, domestic abuse, and other forms of gender based violence. We implore Church and society to enact policies that promote and protect the status and role of women in all facets of life.

M. Rights of Men and Boys

Scripture and history depict men who have challenged unjust power and who have exemplified prophetic wisdom and grace. Recognizing systems of patriarchy that preference and privilege men over women, the Church commits to model healthy masculinity and equity between men and women. We support equal opportunities for all men in education, parental rights and responsibilities, employment, equitable compensation, and promotion.

We affirm the right of men to live free from harassment, discrimination, violence, domestic abuse and gender based violence, and implore Church and society to enact policies that protect men. We encourage communities to offer the same policies and protection to men as provided for women in similar social situations.

N. Media and Communication Technology

Scripture offers this counsel, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8, NRSV). Because effective, personal communication empowers and affords members of society the privilege and responsibility to participate more fully, and because of the power afforded by information communication technologies to shape society, we believe that access to these technologies is a basic right. Technology should be open and accessible to all.

Technologies may be used to enhance the quality of life and provide a means for social interaction with governments, peoples, and cultures across the world. However,

technologies can also distort and damage relationships within communities and the larger society. The manipulation of media for false, illicit, or illegal means damages human and diminishes our common life together.

We support freedom of the press and universal, open access to technological communication and informational services.

We support the regulation and oversight of media communication technologies to ensure reliable and independent information sources are available to all.

Denying access of basic and accurate information, through communication technologies and their infrastructures, due to financial cost or availability, limits participation in government and society. We support the goal of universal and affordable technological communication and informational services.

WORKING DRAFT

The Political Community

Preface

While our allegiance to God takes precedence over our allegiance to any nation or state, we acknowledge the vital role of governments to order society in a manner that is consistent with the prophetic call to God's people, "to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God" (Micah 6:8, NRSV).

We affirm that governments at all levels have a crucial appointed role to play in the welfare of society, the protection of the weak and the powerless, and the fostering of systems that promote the common good.

A. Governments and the Church

As revealed both in God's Word and in God's world, "God alone reigns over the whole of creation" (Luke 12:22-32, NRSV). As Christians, we recognize the ultimate sovereignty of God, and yet are subject to human laws. Though the formal relationship between church and state may vary from nation to nation, the Church affirms the independence and integrity of both institutions as having utmost importance, with neither church nor state, attempting to control or dominate the other.

Remembering the biblical injunction to protect, "sojourners, widows and orphans" (cf. Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 10:18, NRSV), it is the obligation of governments and the Church to demonstrate care for those who are socially disadvantaged or who lack adequate access to resources needed to thrive, including those who are rendered stateless as a result of internal and external conflict or disaster.

As a Church, we are committed to respect and pray for those who bear a responsibility to govern, even as we exercise a public and prophetic role to challenge those who hold authority, and to advocate for those living in vulnerable and oppressed communities.

B. Basic Rights and Freedoms

Our affirmation of basic human and civil rights is founded on the conviction that every person bears the image of God and is endowed with inherent dignity and sacred worth. We affirm the responsibility of governments to guarantee basic rights and opportunities to every person, including freedoms of expression, assembly, and religion, as well as the right to political participation and to equal protection under the law.

Additionally, governments are charged to ensure that every person has access to clean water, adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, housing, healthcare and other necessities essential to human flourishing.

Education is a human right. Governments are responsible to ensure that all people have access to affordable education at every age level. Girls and women, in particular, are often denied educational opportunities. Accordingly, we call for full equality and equal access to schooling, which should not be denied or abridged due to age, gender, or economic status.

C. Government Responsibilities

The biblical witness calls on governments at all levels to act justly, to protect the weak, and to be wise stewards of the people, resources, and authority entrusted to them (cf. Exodus 18:19-23, NRSV). To foster and maintain public trust, elected and appointed leaders must act as public servants, practice high levels of accountability, and, whenever possible, conduct government transactions in an open, transparent environment, rather than in secret.

To promote justice and protect society's most vulnerable people, government bodies, including the courts, must be accessible to all. Government officials and employees are to observe the highest standards of ethical conduct and perform their duties and responsibilities in an impartial and equitable manner in full honesty and good faith.

The Church condemns any government actions that violate the fundamental dignity and basic human rights of individuals or communities or actions that cause unnecessary pain and suffering. We urge the Church to speak boldly to the government about violations to dignity and rights. We denounce any government's policies of detention, imprisonment or extra-judicial violence that threaten to silence civil or political opponents. Furthermore, we condemn the use of torture, genocide, crimes against humanity, or any other actions by government that violate basic human rights.

D. Civil Disobedience

In continuity with our tradition, we reserve the right to disobey civil laws considered unjust or in conflict with the demands of faith. Jesus practices civil disobedience when he heals on the Sabbath in violation of prevailing customs and laws (cf. Luke 13:10-17). In our baptismal vows we pledge, "To accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves." (UMH, 50)

Accordingly, we recognize the right of individuals, when acting under the constraints of conscience or religious conviction, to speak truthfully to those in positions of authority, by dissenting, resisting or disobeying laws deemed unjust or discriminatory. Because Jesus preached peace and urged his followers to "turn the other cheek" when confronted by the acts of evildoers, we further urge those who participate in acts of civil disobedience to do so nonviolently and to accept the legal consequences of their actions.

Therefore, we call on governments to exercise constraint and to protect the rights of those who engage in civil disobedience. We unequivocally oppose the mistreatment, unjust imprisonment, torture, or murder, of those engaged in non-violent protest. Additionally, we

call on Church and society to provide pastoral care and support to those engaged in civil disobedience and to their families and communities.

E. Restorative Justice

Restorative justice grows out of God's desire for right relationship with God, self, and community (Luke 11, 18). Jesus reached out to the tax collector Zacchaeus; the Good Samaritan took risks and made sacrifices in ministry to a victim of crime. When relationships are violated or broken through crime, God calls us toward restoration of right relationship.

In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole. Offenders are held accountable to victims and the community instead of receiving punishment. Restitution and compensation are the centerpieces of a restorative justice framework.

Retributive justice is a dominant form of justice in the world. Retributive justice systems profess to hold the offender accountable to the state and use punishment as the equalizing tool for accountability. In contrast, restorative justice seeks to hold the offender accountable to the victimized person, and to the disrupted community. Through God's transforming power, restorative justice seeks to repair the damage, right the wrong, and bring healing to all involved, including the victim, the offender, the families, and the community.

We support governmental measures designed to reduce and eliminate crime that are consistent with the basic freedom of persons. We reject any abuse of power by the government to abuse or wreak violence upon its citizens without due process of the law. Therefore, we reject forms of governmental enforced violence including extra-judicial killings as being outside the bounds of a justice system.

We also support measures designed to remove social conditions that lead to crime. Further, we condemn discriminatory enforcement for reasons of race, ethnicity, native language, country of origin, or economic disadvantages.

F. The Death Penalty

We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. We are deeply concerned about crime and all victims, both survivors and perpetrators of crime. We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. We, therefore, affirm and recognize that the death penalty as the ultimate punishment of a criminal justice system, is contrary to the will of God.

When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. We

believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

G. Military Service

The Church has historically struggled with the harsh realities of war and violent conflict. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God," (Matthew 5:9, NRSV). For individuals who are either enrolled in military service or choose to abstain from such service, the central role of any Christian in the face of conflict is to make peace, which requires that we remember the pathos of destructive force and we remember our calling to be peacemakers. We remember that Jesus weeps over the city of Jerusalem saying, "If you had recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" (Luke 19:42, NRSV).

Some understand that war and acts of violent conflict are never acceptable or justifiable, and therefore, choose the path of thoughtful, conscientious objection. Others, understand war as a tragic, but necessary evil and that when all peaceful, nonviolent alternatives have been exhausted, military action may be necessary to address unchecked acts of tyranny, aggression or genocide.

The Church affirms those who choose to serve in the military, as well as those whose conscience leads them to reject military service. We urge all who are struggling with decisions to participate in military service, to seek counsel from pastors and others within the Church. We commit ourselves to support all persons as they discern how best to model Christ's example of peace in light of their conscience.

THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

Preface

We affirm that alleviation of poverty and the pursuit of just and equitable economies stands at the very heart of Christian discipleship. From a biblical perspective, justice entails the restoration of right relationships with God, with other human beings, and with the whole of creation. More specifically, in relation to the economic community, we profess that justice entails addressing the brokenness and systemic inequities in every society, standing in solidarity with the poor and all those who suffer from financial exploitation, and promoting sustainable policies and practices that enable us to live in harmony and balance with the natural world.

A. Equity

We acknowledge that all people and nations are created to live together within the *Oikos* or household of God, “[the One] in whom we live and breathe and have our being.” (Acts 17:28). Membership in this global household means that every person is entitled to the economic means and material resources necessary for human life to flourish.

We aspire as Church and society to continue Jesus’ ministry to transform unjust economic practices and eradicate both the effects and root causes of poverty (Matt 11:5; Luke 4:8). Particularly because of the continuing gap between the rich and the poor, as a Church we utterly reject the notion that material wealth is a sign of God’s blessing for individuals, peoples, and nations, and, conversely, that the lack of such wealth signals the absence of God’s favor.

We proclaim that all economic systems stand under the judgment of God, no less than other facets of the created order. Considering this, we believe that governments bear significant responsibilities for guaranteeing the economic well-being of their people and enabling wise stewardship of natural resources. Additionally, local, state, and national governments must enact just fiscal and monetary policies that hold public and private entities accountable and afford every person the opportunity to engage in full-time work and receive equitable compensation for their endeavors.

We further believe private and public economic enterprises must take responsibility for the private and social costs, i.e., the larger societal impacts, of doing business. We endorse efforts to develop more equitable tax structures and to eliminate government programs and measures that exacerbate the concentration of wealth in the hands of a relatively few wealthy individuals at the expense of the vast majority of other citizens.

B. Systems of Production

We profess that this is God's world and that all that our lives and all that we possess ultimately belong to God. Accordingly, rather than indulging in excessive accumulation and overconsumption, we are called to practice wise stewardship and active sharing of the material resources and wealth that has come into our hands. (Luke 12:13-21; Matthew 19:16-26)

With the goal of restoring right relationships, we affirm that systems of productions should serve the economic and social needs of the world's peoples rather than promoting unnecessary products and services that drive the pursuit of empty consumerism, exacerbate the widening gap between rich and poor, and spur on the depletion of natural resources. In this regard we call to mind Jesus' admonition not to "store up treasure on earth... but rather store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" by loving God and one's neighbor and engaging in acts of compassion and generosity. (Matthew 6:19-21).

We therefore call on individuals, families, and congregations to repent of and refrain from practices of overconsumption, driven by economic practices and systems that place profits before people. Instead, we affirm systems of production that promote sustainability, lift up the dignity of work, and promote the wellbeing of every member of the community.

C. Globalization

As members of God's *Oikos* or household, we embrace the prophetic vision of a world marked not by increasing economic tensions and hostilities or an ever-widening gap between wealthy and impoverished nations, but rather by a world-community that is imbued deeply with presence of God's *shalom* or peace. We affirm that it is through God's gift of *shalom* that right relationships are restored, structural inequities are redressed, and relationships are defined by increasing cooperation rather than aggression. (Isaiah 2:1-5, Rev. 9:1-17)

We acknowledge that this prophetic vision stands in sharp contrast to socio-economic conditions in many places around the world. While globalization, which is characterized by an increasingly integrated world economy, the expansion of free trade, and the pursuit of cheap sources of natural resources and labor, has undoubtedly benefited some, it has also created or exacerbated a significant set of challenges.

Within human communities, rapid fluctuations in financial capital and investment have increasingly created social divisions based on economic inequities. Additionally, the pursuit of increasingly cheaper sources of labor has undermined established wage standards and, in some countries, created working environments where women, men, and children labor long hours doing menial tasks for little or no compensation and work safety protocols either do not exist or go unenforced.

Globalization has also had a significant detrimental impact on the natural world. In many places, it has contributed to the weakening of environmental protections and, due to lax

governmental oversight, opened the way for overdevelopment and excessive industrial pollution. It has encouraged the proliferation of unsustainable practices for extracting natural resources and exacerbated the conditions leading to global climate change.

We urge Church and civil society to engage in careful study and conversation about the negative impact of globalization, particularly the harmful repercussions in developing countries. More specifically, we call on all international bodies responsible for developing and overseeing international trade agreements to adopt policies that require just and equitable compensation, defend the rights of indigenous communities, and promote the strongest environmental protections. We also demand that international trade bodies reform their own governing structures to foster greater transparency, encourage increased input and participation from affected communities, and allow for more democratic decision-making.

D. Trade and Investment

We acknowledge the importance of trade and investment for the continuing development of communities and call for the promotion of just and equitable policies and practices that protect the dignity and worth of human life, provide social benefits for entire communities, and protect the earth.

Growth at the corporate, national and global level is the driving force that enables people to secure jobs to meet basic needs. However, in many economic systems, producers are pushed to seek lower wages and to exploit land and resources. They also seek ways to produce on large scales, thereby diminishing the values of small-scale businesses and agriculture. Trade policies, through bilateral, regional, and global free trade agreements, weaken nations of the global south, and lead to dumping of goods and the demise of local producers, and increase a need for enforceable labor rights and environmental protections.

In some countries, we witness both governments and corporations, engaged in land and resource grabbing in the global south, causing violence, resource-wars and massive displacement. Many national trade policies invite the presence of transnational corporate investments, which increasingly influence political and economic policy-making. The quest for resources for production, degrades the environment and exacerbates climate change, leading to extreme weather displacement.

The Church urges support for trade policies that ensure just public budgets, robust public services, and fair wages and benefits. We further support policies that encourage the production of economically and environmentally sustainable products. Finally, we call for policies that affirm small-scale agricultural producers and respond to the displacement and forced migration of agricultural workers.

E. Agricultural Production

We affirm the importance of agricultural labor and production as a means for meeting the basic nutritional needs of individuals, families, and nations as well as its significance for continued social development.

In some nations, there has been an increased concentration of the ownership of farms in the hands of a relatively few large agribusinesses. While these so-called mega-farms have increased food global production, they have contributed to the growing shift from local food production to export crops. They have also added to environmental degradation, industrial pollution, unfair labor practices, and unsustainable uses of water and fertilizer.

We call upon the agribusiness sector to conduct itself with respect for human rights primarily in the responsible stewardship of daily bread for the world, and secondarily in responsible corporate citizenship that respects the rights of all farmers, small and large, to receive a fair return for honest labor. We advocate for the rights of people to possess property and to earn a living by tilling the soil.

We call upon governments to revise support programs that disproportionately benefit wealthier agricultural producers, so that more support can be given to programs that benefit medium and smaller sized farming operations, including programs that build rural processing, storage, distribution, and other agricultural infrastructure; which link local farmers to local schools; and which promote other community food security measures.

F. Labor and Employment

We affirm the dignity of work, not merely as a means of subsistence but as a way of living out one's vocation to be of service to God and neighbor. At its best, work provides a venue for fulfilling one's potential and contributing to the wellbeing of an entire community. Scripture affirms the dignity of work when it depicts God as a divine laborer, toiling to form humanity from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:4-8). Similarly, the gospels describe Jesus as a carpenter, who lived in solidarity with ordinary working people and repeatedly addressed just labor practices. (Matthew 20:1-6)

As part of our profession of the dignity of work, we affirm that every person has a right to a job that provides fair and equitable compensation. While just compensation is referenced in some countries as a *living wage*, we acknowledge that living wages establish a minimum standard and urge to employers to consider compensation levels that allow individuals and families to thrive.

While we believe that the ultimate value of people cannot be determined by their work, we nonetheless conclude that the dignity of work is best expressed through the fair treatment of employees. We, therefore, reject labor practices that treat the work of some as unworthy of just compensation.

Additionally, we support workers' freedom of association, including their rights to organize into unions for collective bargaining purposes and call strikes in protest of unsafe working conditions and unjust employment policies and practices. We reject efforts to permanently replace workers engaged in strikes or to make strikes illegal.

Finally, we believe that emerging technological developments and other recent changes in work environments call for a reconsideration of an equitable balance between work and other activities necessary for human flourishing. As a Church, we recognize the importance of engaging in meaningful activities outside of work, including time spent with family and friends, leisure periods, and times of worship and prayer. We uphold the biblical precedent of God's resting on the Sabbath as an important model for personal and communal renewal and for practicing love and care for others outside of our places of work.

G. Poverty

We affirm the calls to eradicate poverty and to stand with the poor and the marginalized as central themes of Jesus' teaching and preaching. The importance of these themes is underscored by Mary, who, upon receiving the news that she would give birth to the Messiah, envisions a radical revisioning of the current social structure: "God has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; God has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:52-53, NRSV).

We acknowledge that despite the general affluence of developed nations, the majority of persons in the world still live in poverty, particularly in the Global South. To meet basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, and other necessities, new strategies must be formulated that lead to a more equitable sharing of the resources of the world.

While natural disasters and the spread of disease play significant roles in the proliferation of poverty, to alleviate poverty Church and society must also address a variety of human-related factors. Climate change, driven by the increased use of fossil fuels and depletion of forests, is shifting rainfall patterns and putting ever-greater strains on global food-production.

Additionally, wars and other military conflicts around the world have led to forced migration and the displacement of millions. Even new technological advancements, which in the right hands might assist in formulating new strategies for alleviating poverty, holds the potential to lead to increased under- and unemployment when paired with unjust and shortsighted economic practices.

As a Church, we affirm that right of every human being to enjoy the basic necessities of life, including adequate food, clean air and water, adequate clothing and housing, satisfactory healthcare and education, work with just compensation, etc. We also support the development of public and private programs designed not only to supply these basic necessities, but also to provide those affected with authentic opportunities to make

meaningful life-choices and contributions, and, in so doing, improve their life-circumstances.

H. Human Trafficking

As a Church, we condemn all forms human trafficking as contrary to God's will, a violation of the inherent dignity and worth of human life, and in direct contradiction to Jesus's to offer of radical hospitality to the stranger in our midst and to all those in need. (Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

Often called contemporary slavery, human trafficking entails the buying and selling of human beings and/or the subjugation of men, women, and children for the purposes of sexual exploitation and/or forced labor. By holding individuals in captivity and treating human life as a commodity to be bought and sold, human trafficking infringes on the divine covenant that invests every human being with inherent dignity and worth.

Human trafficking is particularly abhorrent precisely because it targets the most vulnerable members of society, including underage children and teens who are often unable to protect themselves, undocumented immigrants who fear reporting their exploitation to government authorities, and women with diminished agency due to a variety of social and economic factors.

The Church commits to the abolition of human trafficking and the eradication of the social and economic circumstances that continue to place vulnerable individuals at risk. We also urge pastors and congregations to educate themselves about this issue so that they can not only provide appropriate counseling but also other assistance to help individuals freed from human trafficking rings to reclaim their lives and livelihoods.

I. Corruption, Graft and Bribery

We affirm the importance of honesty, integrity, and fair dealing, particularly by those afforded the responsibility and privilege of providing leadership, whether this be in public or private institutions. Nonetheless, Scripture provides ample testimony to the persistence of corruption, graft, and bribery throughout from the world-weary admonitions of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes (5:8-9) to Jesus' rebuke of the money-changers in the Temple (Matthew 21:12-13; John 2:13-17).

Corruption, graft and bribery represent dishonest and undue exploitation of power, resulting from an unfair or illegal means of acquiring money, gain, or advantage, especially by abusing one's position of privilege. Corruption especially, flourishes in situations of economic inequality. These practices transgress human dignity and rights, and place personal desire over the well-being of God's people.

Graft occurs on every level of society and often entails the use of influence to steal from public resources that are intended to meet critical community needs. Graft undermines the ability of governments to fulfill their economic and social obligations. In many

impoverished situations, people are pressured to pay bribes to access public services and as a result, graft prevents people from meeting their basic personal needs. The Church calls on society to eliminate corruption, graft and bribery at the local, national and global levels.

J. Corporate and Social Responsibility

We believe that all human institutions, including national, multinational, and transnational corporations, are charged with doing good, promoting justice, and making positive contributions to communal life. In the same Bible passage where Jesus warns against “storing up treasures on earth,” he also admonishes his followers that no person “can serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:19-24). Corporations, no less than individuals, are reminded that they find their ultimate purpose in helping to create and sustain communities characterized by justice and compassion.

We believe that multinational and transnational corporations are responsible not only to their stockholders but to the common good, including their workers, governments, and the communities and physical environments they shape.

We support responsible corporations who uphold transparent business practices and transactions based on compliance with laws that ensure just and ethical requirements in doing business. The Church commits to use its investments and financial leverage to hold corporations accountable for how they protect and promote economic, political, and human rights.

The Church affirms socially responsible investing as a strategy for assessing whether a specific corporation is having a positive impact on society and for actively evaluating our stewardship of individual, congregational, and other church-related funds, including endowments. We commit ourselves to using the full-range of faith-based strategies to insure corporations act fairly and justly, including engaging in dialogue, joining other people of goodwill in shareholder actions, and when other avenues of engagement have failed, encouraging boycotts and divestment. Church and society are urged to invest in worker cooperatives, community development projects and fair-trade initiatives, to promote just and responsible economic systems.

K. Gambling

As a Church, we decry the practice of gambling because of its heightened focus on the acquisition of money and material goods, often to exclusion of more beneficial pursuits. In keeping with teachings of John Wesley, we express our disapproval of the gaming industry because of its negative communal impact: “Gambling is contrary to the love of neighbor, because it is one of the instances by which some enrich themselves at the expense of others” (“The Use of Money”, 1).

Gambling often poses additional problems. For up to 5 percent of those involved, gambling becomes an addictive disease, with strong ties to alcoholism, substance abuse, and other

mental health problems. Additionally, low-wage labor, sexual exploitation and violence, and other forms of crime have often accompanied the gaming industry.

Gaming also disproportionately attracts and therefore has a far more negative influence on economically challenged families, who have less disposable income, experience fewer options for improving their financial situations, and are more likely to be victimized by the increased crime associated with gambling.

While gambling, including state run lotteries and revenues generated both brick-and-mortar and online casinos, is often touted as a means for raising public revenue, its disproportionate reliance on support from economically challenge communities, turns this source of revenue, in effect, into a regressive tax on the poor.

In the U.S. and other countries, some Native American and other indigenous communities have developed gaming institutions on tribal lands as a critical strategy for economic survival. Given the historic and ongoing violation of government treaties that guaranteed native sovereignty and the historic and continuing oppression of indigenous peoples, United Methodists fully commit ourselves to support native and other indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination as well as listening and learning about the role and impact of gaming institutions within native communities.

As a Church, we call on Church and society to provide increased education about the negative impacts of gambling, including its potentially addictive nature and its disproportionate impact on the poor. Additionally, we appeal to government policy makers to develop constructive and equitable strategies for financing basic public services that do not rely so heavily on revenues from the gaming industry. Finally, we appeal to both governmental and civil society institutions to give renewed effort to developing effective programs and strategies aimed at lifting individuals and families out of poverty.

THE WORLD COMMUNITY

Preface

The Church is committed to a world community where with humility, we model Christ's example and count others as more significant than ourselves (cf. Phil 2:3, NRSV). We seek to live responsibly in this global community, acknowledging that God's world is greater than any individual, corporation, nation or transnational institution.

Just as God's creation is diverse and varied, so are nations and peoples. Because we affirm that all nations and cultures are equally in need of God's redemption, we will work with all people to break the shackles of oppressive policies and practices in our world community. We aspire to contribute to the global common good, grateful for God's abundant grace and the abiding presence of the Spirit (cf. Matt. 29:19-20, Acts 2:5-6, Isaiah 65: 17, Peter 3: 15, Rev. 7:9, NRSV).

Together with the whole of humankind, we must confess that we are challenged and overwhelmed, by global developments; crushing social injustice, the immense wealth of the few and the inhumane poverty of the many, pandemic diseases, armed conflicts, terrorism, ethnic exploitation, forced migration, international ecological crises, the rise of nuclear and autonomous weapons systems, inequitable transnational businesses operating beyond the effective control of accountable governmental structures, and tyranny in all its forms.

Many of these challenges are the result of collective and personal global neglect, visible signs of our attempt to distance ourselves in relation to God. Our ability as a Church to flourish together for the good of this one world, is only possible as we join in solidarity across nation and culture, trusting in God's promises.

A. Human Dignity, Rights, and Responsibilities

God has created a world community, in which all creation has intrinsic worth, including a world community where every person reflects the dignity that comes with being formed in God's image (cf. Genesis 1:27, NRSV). Concurrently, it is the responsibility of every person to promote the flourishing of life, and to work for the glory of God by securing human rights for all.

We recognize the variety of ways people iterate their claim to rights in daily life (cf. Luke 10:7-8, NRSV), and, therefore, we acknowledge the plurality of religious, cultural, moral, legal, political and economic dimensions and rights, implicit in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Echoing John Wesley's desire that God's new creation calls the Church to witness to the Gospel in their whole lives, we also accept the responsibility to endorse national,

international and regional initiatives, institutions, and organizations such as the United Nations, as necessary to implement and protect these rights.

B. Nations and Cultures

While we recognize valid differences in culture and political ideologies, we advocate for national policies and practices that acknowledge the local and global, intercultural and transcultural, monolingual and polyphonic, characteristics of our global community.

We further affirm that no culture is normative or exclusive, absolutely just or undeniably impartial, in its treatment of its citizens and non-citizens. We recognize that within a plurality of cultures, multiple identities and shifting values, acts of aggression withhold justice to vulnerable citizens of a nation, as well as to immigrants and migrants within its borders.

The Church, therefore, holds all nations and leaders of governments, accountable for the unjust treatment of any group of people living within its national borders. The Church urges governments and society, to guarantee equal access to all including, cultural representation in the public and personal sphere, security of personhood, comprehensive health care, livable housing, education at all levels, and employment with fair wages, so that all may live fully as human beings.

C. National Power and Responsibility

Dynamics of social, political, economic, and military power vary greatly across the globe. Powerful nations hold great responsibility regarding how they will exercise their influence over other nations. National power must be exercised with care and restraint (cf. Isaiah 25:3).

We lament that more powerful nations dominate the resources of weaker nations and further recognize the right and duty of all nations to determine their own destiny without coercion. We urge political powers to use nonviolent power and influence, to maximize the political, social, and economic self-determination of weaker nations. The Church recognizes the right and responsibility of all nations to determine their own sovereignty (cf. 2 Chronicles 13:5; Proverbs. 31:8, NRSV).

D. Justice and Law

Through the life and ministry, and death and resurrection of Jesus, God's law for humankind has been fulfilled and God's reign made manifest. Christ's righteousness and grace, anchors human law in our pursuit of justice. We understand human law as an instrument of justice, fundamental to a right ordering of life. Peoples and nations are secure in a world community when law and order, as well as, human dignity and human rights, are duly respected and justice is upheld. We affirm a world community justly ordered in anticipation of God's promised reign.

The Church further affirms a historic concern for the “world as our parish,” where all peoples enjoy full and equal membership in a world community governed by law and justice. Since global justice requires the participation of all peoples and nations, we commend national, regional, and global efforts to pursue justice through law.

We endorse international development and cooperation, in regions of conflict and in international arbitration of disputes among nations and peoples. We support bilateral, multilateral, and global efforts enacted by the United Nations and other internationally recognized entities, dedicated to securing peace through the just enforcement of international law.

E. War and Peace

War contradicts the teachings and example of Christ, who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9, NRSV). Following Christ’s example, we are called to love our enemies, seek justice, and serve as reconcilers in the midst of conflict. The Church rejects war as an instrument of national foreign policy and opposes preemptive strike actions by any government or nation.

We insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to work together to resolve every dispute with peaceful means. We, therefore, advocate the extension of robust international treaties and institutions that provide a framework within the rule of law to respond to acts of aggression, terrorism, and genocide.

Though nations rage from age to age, the Church urges society to prioritize human values above military claims. We are convinced that the militarization of society must be challenged and halted. The manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be measurably reduced and controlled, and the production, possession, and use of nuclear weapons is to be condemned as an evil. The Church, consequently, endorses multilateral disarmament under strict and measurable international standards.

F. Peacebuilding

Peace is God’s will for the world. Scripture says, “The fruit of righteousness will be peace, and the outcome of righteousness, calm and security forever” (Isaiah 32:17, NRSV). Christ is our peace and, “Christ destroys the dividing wall of hostility” (Ephesians 2:14, NRSV). As Christ’s followers, we pray and work for peace.

In pursuing peace, love of God and love of neighbor are united. God’s intended peace is for the whole of creation, as expressed in our common social, political, economic, and religious life. We confess, however, that we have not always practiced peacebuilding and reconciliation, as evidenced in our continued divisions and conflicts within nations and societies.

The Church affirms that justice is an inseparable companion to peace. To conceive of peace apart from justice is to compromise both. The underlying causes of international conflicts must be addressed, recognizing that an enduring peace can only be built on sustained justice. The pursuit of peace, unites all people of good will across nations and religions to seek the common good. We affirm that peacemakers will be called the children of God.

G. Global Health

We affirm that global health cannot be constricted by national borders. Scripture asks, “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? Therefore, honor God with your bodies” (1 Cor. 6: 19-20, NRSV). Every person is created with sacred worth and deserving of access to public healthcare.

We oppose the global inequality in access to health treatment, clinical trials, and management of pandemics that do not benefit local populations. The Church must promote social and economic equity, as well as the reduction and elimination of global health disparities in its health research, prevention, and holistic care of all people.

H. Religious Freedom

The Church understands that freedom is a gift of prevenient grace and religious faith is the most profound expression of this freedom. As such, we presuppose the integrity of free human response. This conviction grounds our affirmation of religious freedom. We understand that religious freedom is a fundamental human right. Each person has the right to choose, change, or abandon religious affiliation, to assemble or organize in religious community, and to express religious beliefs and practices publicly.

We believe that since religious faith is a response to ultimacy, religious commitments are the source of all other commitments, personal, social, and political. We acknowledge that exercise of religious freedom may elicit prejudice, restriction, repression, and persecution, both in contexts of long standing and recent religious proximity. The dramatic increase in people’s movements both forced and voluntary, and religious propaganda, have led to greater governmental restrictions on religion.

The Church, therefore, affirms religious freedom and the integrity of religious choice, assembly, and expression as a right grounded in grace. We commit to holding ourselves, our ecumenical and religious neighbors, our societies and nations, as well as non-state actors and entities, accountable to the protection of religious freedom and support international instruments dedicated to upholding religious freedom, such as the United Nations, the World Council of Churches, the World Methodist Council, the Lausanne Movement, and interreligious bodies dedicated to peaceful coexistence and religious conflict transformation.

I. Global Migration

In the global society the movement of people is becoming increasingly restricted, leading to concentrations of impoverished peoples. While legal and physical walls seek to exclude flows of migrants across borders, there is a growing demand in wealthier nations for cheap labor.

Concurrently, nations in the global south have an interest in export labor, in a quest to increase national budgets. Nations in the global south are also losing skilled labor and young generations to other countries, undermining their society's ability to meet critical social needs.

We urge Church and society to address the rights of all migrant workers, including economic, social, and human rights, especially in their countries of origin, so that global migration is a choice, and not a necessity.

J. Global Communication

We believe that open, honest, effective, reciprocal, and meaningful communication is essential in a complex world community. It is imperative, that followers of Christ learn to “speak the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15a, NRSV) and to let our “yes be yes, and our no be no” (Matthew 5:37, NRSV), so that all might be understood and understand. We are convinced that communicating good news is at the heart of our global witness.

All forms of rhetoric, messaging, and communication possess the power to unite or divide, build up or tear down, empower or disempower. Communication may be visual, verbal, non-verbal, or symbolic. It is a critical function of stewardship that communication is used in ways that affirm the dignity of all persons, respect the differences within and between cultures, and maintain relationships grounded in justice, mercy, compassion and grace. Effective communication requires not only the creation and transmission of information, but reception, interpretation, understanding, and response as well.

The Church affirms all means and media of communication that are clear, concise, honest, respectful, direct, truthful, empathetic and ethical, while we oppose rhetoric and communication meant to mislead, obscure, complicate, discredit, abuse, attack, or otherwise cause harm. Governmental, economic, educational, religious, social, and media leaders in Church and society worldwide, must employ the highest ethical standards for open and honest communication. Exaggeration, insults, disparagement, fabrications, and lies undermine trust, respect and positive regard, and produce anxiety, fear, prejudice, uncertainty and suspicion. These same standards for clear and inclusive communication used in the Church are appropriate for the world community.

Therefore, effective global communication is imperative to bring cultures together, create harmony and unity, bridge differences and heal disagreements. Communication is the cornerstone upon which peace, safety, security, and justice is built. Effective communication is the responsibility of all people in Church and Society, to create a sustainable global future.