

MFSA Plumbline

Revised Social Principles



Understanding the Issue

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

Methodist Federation for Social Action (then called Methodist Federation for Social Service) wrote the [first Social Creed for the Methodist Episcopal Church, North](#). Other Methodist bodies and other denominations soon followed. It was adopted by the 1908 General Conference. Thus, Methodists enshrined the Wesleyan commitment to social holiness, forthright moral witness, and ethical action. When the new United Methodist denomination was established in 1968, the General Conference authorized a commission to draft a statement of the church's Social Principles. Blending perspectives from the Evangelical United Brethren, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the formerly segregated Central Jurisdiction, the commission thoughtfully and faithfully deliberated for four years to create a comprehensive guiding document to define the Church's position on social issues.

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

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

To respond, the General Board of Church and Society conducted listening sessions with thousands of United Methodists in Africa, the Philippines, Europe, and the U.S. revealed:

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

The actual revision process included globally representative writing and editorial teams, which shared versions of the Revised Social Principles with the church, receiving more than 4000 responses, and then making further revisions. The result is a document with strong theological grounding in a more focused, succinct, and globally meaningful form.

Values Statement

The Social Principles is a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to articulate and adopt social teachings that express United Methodism's official positions on complex issues of the day. It is a product of more than a century of legislative decisions made by lay and clergy

members of the United Methodist Church and its predecessor bodies. This document is designed to be widely read, and discussed in Sunday school classes and bible studies, preached from pulpits, studied in seminary classes, and read for inspiration and guidance in public advocacy. The central purpose is to promote social holiness in the world, both in communal practice and public policy.

Legislative Overview

The Revised Social Principles document contains six main sections: (1) the preface, (2) the preamble, (3) the community of creation, (4) the social community, (5) the economic community and (6) the political community. In the preface, you will find the history of commitment to social principles in Methodist and predecessor bodies; the theological convictions of the church are found in the preamble.

The Revised Social Principles integrate Biblical and Wesleyan references throughout the text. They are written in a concise and clear way. The world-wide nature of the church is reflected in all aspects of the Revised Social Principles.

Analysis

Faith is a lived response to God's abundant grace and to God's high calling for Jesus' disciples to live lovingly in all that we do in our personal and communal practices and public policies. The *Revised Social Principles* inspires and challenges us as United Methodist Christians to follow a path of love and grace, embodied in prophetic action. The *Revised Social Principles* has been shaped by our worldwide UMC community and by theological and biblical analysis that calls us to public advocacy and work for justice in God's world. The Principles reflect long biblical traditions and the social values of John Wesley and early Methodists, as well as the ever evolving Christian church, and specifically the United Methodist Church. The Church's convictions are deep and broad, reflected in the four main sections: Community of All Creation; Social Community; Economic Community; and Political Community. The revision process and community focus have been shaped by the global church so we can offer an authentically Christian and global social witness.

Resources

- The General Board of Church and Society page on *The Revised Social Principles*: <https://www.umcjustice.org/who-we-are/proposed-revised-social-principles-for-general-conference-charlotte>
- UMC News article: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/revised-social-principles-offer-new-start>

Recommended Action

Vote YES on The Revised Social Principles, petition numbers:

20727-CA page 158 ADCA "Revised Social Principles-Preface"

20728-CA page 159 ADCA "Revised Social Principles-Preamble"

20729-CA page 160 ADCA "Revised Social Principles-160" (Community of All Creation)

20730-CB page 208 ADCA "Revised Social Principles-161 and 162" (The Social Community)

20731-CA page 166 ADCA "Revised Social Principles-163" (The Economic Community)

20732-CC page 263 ADCA "Revised Social Principles-164 and 165" (The Political Community)

This document was prepared in collaboration with the General Board of Church Society and members of the editorial team of the Revised Social Principles.