PREFACE: The United Methodist Church has a long history of concern for social justice. Its members have often taken forthright positions on controversial issues involving Christian principles. Early Methodists expressed their opposition to the slave trade, to smuggling, and to the cruel treatment of prisoners.

A social creed was adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) in 1908. Within the next decade similar statements were adopted by The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and by The Methodist Protestant Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church adopted a statement of social principles in 1946 at the time of the uniting of the United Brethren and The Evangelical Church. In 1972, four years after the uniting in 1968 of The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church, the General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a new statement of Social Principles, which was revised in 1976 (and by each successive General Conference).

The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.

PREAMBLE: We, the people called United Methodists, affirm our faith in God our Creator and Father, in Jesus Christ our Savior, and in the Holy Spirit, our Guide and Guard. We acknowledge our complete dependence upon God in birth, in life, in death, and in life eternal. Secure in God’s love, we affirm the goodness of life and confess our many sins against God’s will for us as we find it in Jesus Christ. We have not always been faithful stewards of all that has been committed to us by God the Creator. We have been reluctant followers of Jesus Christ in his mission to bring all persons into a community of love. Though called by the Holy Spirit to become new creatures in Christ, we have resisted the further call to become the people of God in our dealings with each other and the earth on which we live. We affirm our unity in Jesus Christ while acknowledging differences in applying our faith in different cultural contexts as we live out the gospel. Grateful for God’s forgiving love, in which we live and by which we are judged, and affirming our belief in the inestimable worth of each individual, we
renew our commitment to become faithful witnesses to the gospel, not alone to the ends of earth, but also to the depths of our common life and work. We acknowledge that, because it is a living body of believers, gathered together by God from many diverse segments of the human community, unanimity of belief, opinion, practice has never been characteristic of the Church from the beginning to this day. From its earliest time, as evidenced in the letters of Paul, the witness of the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and other New Testament texts, diversity of understanding and controversy with regard to many matters has been the reality. Therefore, whenever significant differences of opinion among faithful Christians occur, some of which continue to divide the church deeply today, neither surprise nor dismay should be allowed to separate the members of the Body from one another; nor should those differences be covered over with false claims of consensus or unanimity. To the contrary, such conflict must be embraced with courage and perseverance as all together continue to seek to discern God’s will. In that understanding and commitment, we pledge ourselves to acknowledge and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arise among us, accepting them as evidence that God is not yet finished in sculpting us to be God’s people. We commit ourselves to stand united in declaring our faith that God’s grace is available to all, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. In that confidence, we pledge to continue to be in respectful dialogue with those with whom we disagree, to explore the sources of our differences, to honor the sacred worth of all persons, and to tell the truth about our divisions as we continue to seek the mind of Christ and to do the will of God in all things.

I. THE NURTURING COMMUNITY
All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God’s creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect. Economic, political, social, and technological developments have increased our human numbers, and lengthened and enriched our lives. However, these developments have led to regional defoliation, dramatic extinction of species, massive human suffering, overpopulation, and misuse and overconsumption of natural and nonrenewable resources, particularly by industrialized societies. This continued course of action jeopardizes the natural heritage that God has entrusted to all generations. Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyles to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading
to a higher quality of life for all of God’s creation.

- **Water, Air, Soil, Minerals, Plants**
  We support and encourage social policies that serve to reduce and control the creation of industrial byproducts and waste; facilitate the safe processing and disposal of toxic and nuclear waste and move toward the elimination of both; encourage reduction of municipal waste; provide for appropriate recycling and disposal of municipal waste; and assist the cleanup of polluted air, water, and soil.

- **Energy Resources Utilization**
  Affirming the inherent value of nonhuman creation, we support and encourage social policies that are directed toward rational and restrained transformation of parts of the nonhuman world into energy for human usage and that de-emphasize or eliminate energy-producing technologies that endanger the health, the safety, and even the existence of the present and future human and nonhuman creation.

- **Animal Life**
  We support regulations that protect the life and health of animals, including those ensuring the humane treatment of pets and other domestic animals, animals used in research, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish, and fowl. We encourage the preservation of all animal species including those threatened with extinction.

- **Global Climate Stewardship**
  We acknowledge the global impact of humanity’s disregard for God’s creation. Rampant industrialization and the corresponding increase in the use of fossil fuels have led to a buildup of pollutants in the earth’s atmosphere.

- **Space**
  The universe, known and unknown, is the creation of God and is due the respect we are called to give the earth.

- **Science and Technology**
  We recognize science as a legitimate interpretation of God’s natural world. We affirm the validity of the claims of science in describing the natural world and in determining what is scientific.

- **Food Safety**
  We support policies that protect the food supply and that ensure the public’s right to know the content of the foods they are eating. We call for rigorous inspections and controls on the biological safety of all foodstuffs intended for human consumption.

- **Food Justice**
  We support policies that increase access to quality food, particularly for those with the fewest resources.
II. THE NURTURING COMMUNITY

161. The community provides the potential for nurturing human beings into the fullness of their humanity. We believe we have a responsibility to innovate, sponsor, and evaluate new forms of community that will encourage development of the fullest potential in individuals. Primary for us is the gospel understanding that all persons are important—because they are human beings created by God and loved through and by Jesus Christ and not because they have merited significance. We therefore support social climates in which human communities are maintained and strengthened for the sake of all persons and their growth. We also encourage all individuals to be sensitive to others by using appropriate language when referring to all persons. Language of a derogatory nature (with regard to race, nationality, ethnic background, gender, sexuality, and physical differences) does not reflect value for one another and contradicts the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- The Family
  - We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity.
- Marriage
  - We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman.
- Divorce
  - God’s plan is for lifelong, faithful marriage. The church must be on the forefront of premarital, marital, and postmarital counseling in order to create and preserve strong marriages. 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.
- Single Persons
  - We affirm the integrity of single persons, and we reject all social practices that discriminate or social attitudes that are prejudicial against persons because they are single.
- Women and Men
  - We affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God.
- Human Sexuality
  - We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to responsible stewardship of this sacred gift.
- Family Violence and Abuse
  - We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms—verbal, psychological, physical, sexual—is detrimental to the covenant of the human...
community.

- **Sexual Abuse**
  - Violent, disrespectful, or abusive sexual expressions do not confirm sexuality as God’s good gift. We reject all sexual expressions that damage the humanity God has given us as birthright, and we affirm only that sexual expression that enhances that same humanity.

- **Sexual Harassment**
  - We believe human sexuality is God’s good gift. One abuse of this good gift is sexual harassment.

- **Abortion**
  - The beginning of life and the ending of life are the God-given boundaries of human existence.
  - **Ministry to Those Who Have Experienced an Abortion**
    - We urge local pastors to become informed about the symptoms and behaviors associated with post-abortion stress. We further encourage local churches to make available contact information for counseling agencies that offer programs to address post-abortion stress for all seeking help.

- **Adoption**
  - Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We recognize that some circumstances of birth make the rearing of a child difficult.

- **Faithful Care for Dying Persons**
  - While we applaud medical science for efforts to prevent disease and illness and for advances in treatment that extend the meaningful life of human beings, we recognize that every mortal life will ultimately end in death.

- **Suicide**
  - A Christian perspective on suicide begins with an affirmation of faith that nothing, including suicide, separates us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). Therefore, we deplore the condemnation of people who complete suicide, and we consider unjust the stigma that so often falls on surviving family and friends.

- **Sexual Assault**
  - Sexual assault is wrong. We affirm the right of all people to live free from such assaults.

### III. THE SOCIAL COMMUNITY

The rights and privileges a society bestows upon or withholds from those who comprise it indicate the relative esteem in which that society holds particular persons and groups of persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We therefore work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. We deplore
acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation. Our respect for the inherent dignity of all persons leads us to call for the recognition, protection, and implementation of the principles of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights so that communities and individuals may claim and enjoy their universal, indivisible, and inalienable rights.

- **Rights of Racial and Ethnic Groups**
  - We recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society.

- **Rights of Religious Minorities**
  - Religious persecution has been common in the history of civilization. We urge policies and practices that ensure the right of every religious group to exercise its faith free from legal, political, or economic restrictions.

- **Rights of Children**
  - Once considered the property of their parents, children are now acknowledged to be full human beings in their own right, but beings to whom adults and society in general have special obligations.

- **Rights of Young People**
  - We urge development of policies that encourage inclusion of young people in decision-making processes and that eliminate discrimination and exploitation.

- **Rights of the Aging**
  - We urge social policies and programs, with emphasis on the unique concerns of older women and ethnic persons, that ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right as senior members of the human community.

- **Rights of Women**
  - We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. We therefore urge that every effort be made to eliminate sex-role stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in the Church and society.

- **Rights of Men**
  - Because we affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life, we also affirm the rights of men. We affirm equal opportunities in employment, responsibility, and promotion. Men should not be ignored or lose opportunities or influence because they are men.

- **Rights of Immigrants**
  - We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God.
• **Rights of 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.

• **Equal Rights Regardless of Sexual Orientation**
  Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for all persons, regardless of sexual orientation.

• **Population**
  Since the growing worldwide population is increasingly straining the world’s supply of food, minerals, and water and sharpening international tensions, the reduction of the rate of consumption of resources by the affluent and the reduction of current world population growth rates have become imperative.

• **Alcohol and Other Drugs**
  We affirm our long-standing support of abstinence from alcohol as a faithful witness to God’s liberating and redeeming love for persons. We support abstinence from the use of any illegal drugs.

• **Tobacco**
  We affirm our historic tradition of high standards of personal discipline and social responsibility. In light of the overwhelming evidence that tobacco smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco are hazardous to the health of persons of all ages, we recommend total abstinence from the use of tobacco.

• **Medical Experimentation**
  Physical and mental health has been greatly enhanced through discoveries by medical science.

• **Genetic Technology**
  The responsibility of humankind to God’s creation challenges us to deal carefully with the possibilities of genetic research and technology. We welcome the use of genetic technology for meeting fundamental human needs for health, a safe environment, and an adequate food supply.

• **Rural Life**
  We support the right of persons and families to live and prosper as farmers, farm workers, merchants, professionals, and others outside of the cities and metropolitan centers. We believe our culture is impoverished and our people deprived of a meaningful way of life when rural and small-town living becomes difficult or impossible.

• **Sustainable Agriculture**
  A prerequisite for meeting the nutritional needs of the world’s population is an agricultural system which uses sustainable methods, respects ecosystems, and promotes a livelihood for people that work the land.

• **Urban-Suburban Life**
• Urban–suburban living has become a dominant style of life for more and more persons. For many it furnishes economic, educational, social, and cultural opportunities. For others, it has brought alienation, poverty, and depersonalization.

• **Media Violence and Christian Values**
  The unprecedented impact the media (principally television and movies) are having on Christian and human values within our society becomes more apparent each day. We express disdain at current media preoccupation with dehumanizing portrayals, sensationalized through mass media “entertainment” and “news.” These practices degrade humankind and violate the teachings of Christ and the Bible.

• **Information Communication Technology**
  Because effective personal communication is key to being a responsible and empowered member of society, and because of the power afforded by information communication technologies to shape society and enable individuals to participate more fully, we believe that access to these technologies is a basic right.

• **Persons Living with HIV and AIDS**
  All individuals living with HIV and AIDS should be treated with dignity and respect.

• **Right to Health Care**
  Health is a condition of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being, and we view it as a responsibility—public and private...Health care is a basic human right.

• **Organ Transplantation and Donation**
  We believe that organ transplantation and organ donation are acts of charity, agape love, and self-sacrifice. We recognize the life-giving benefits of organ and other 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.

• **Mental Health**
  The World Health Organization defines mental health as “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

**IV. THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY**

We claim all economic systems to be under the judgment of God no less than other facets of the created order. Therefore, we recognize the responsibility of governments to develop and implement sound fiscal and monetary policies that provide for the economic life of individuals and corporate entities and that ensure full employment and adequate incomes with a minimum of inflation. We
believe private and public economic enterprises are responsible for the social costs of doing business, such as employment and environmental pollution, and that they should be held accountable for these costs. We support measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. We further support efforts to revise tax structures and to eliminate governmental support programs that now benefit the wealthy at the expense of other persons.

- **Property**
  - We believe private ownership of property is a trusteeship under God, both in those societies where it is encouraged and where it is discouraged, but is limited by the overriding needs of society.

- **Collective Bargaining**
  - We support the right of all public and private employees and employers to organize for collective bargaining into unions and other groups of their own choosing.

- **Work and Leisure**
  - Every person has the right to a job at a living wage. Where the private sector cannot or does not provide jobs for all who seek and need them, it is the responsibility of government to provide for the creation of such jobs. We support social measures that ensure the physical and mental safety of workers, that provide for the equitable division of products and services, and that encourage an increasing freedom in the way individuals may use their leisure time.

- **Consumption**
  - Consumers should exercise their economic power to encourage the manufacture of goods that are necessary and beneficial to humanity while avoiding the desecration of the environment in either production or consumption.

- **Poverty**
  - In spite of general affluence in the industrialized nations, the majority of persons in the world live in poverty. In order to provide basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, and other necessities, ways must be found to share more equitably the resources of the world.

- **Foreign Workers**
  - We call upon governments and all employers to ensure for foreign workers the same economic, educational, and social benefits enjoyed by other citizens.

- **Gambling**
  - Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interests of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, destructive of good government and good stewardship. As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimized by the practice.

- **Family Farms**
  - The value of family farms has long been affirmed as a significant foundation for free and democratic societies. In recent years, the survival of independent
farmers worldwide has been threatened by various factors, including the increasing concentration of all phases of agriculture into the hands of a limited number of transnational corporations.

- **Corporate Responsibility**
  - Corporations are responsible not only to their stockholders, but also to other stakeholders: their workers, suppliers, vendors, customers, the communities in which they do business, and for the earth, which supports them. We support the public's right to know what impact corporations have in these various arenas, so that people can make informed choices about which corporations to support.

- **Finance**
  - Financial institutions serve a vital role in society. They must guard, however, against abusive and deceptive lending practices that take advantage of the neediest among us for the gain of the richest.

- **Trade and Investment**
  - We affirm the importance of international trade and investment in an interdependent world. Trade and investment should be based on rules that support the dignity of the human person, a clean environment and our common humanity.

- **Graft and Corruption**
  - Graft and corruption tangle the social thread of communities, erode the moral fiber of human relationships, and sully the reputation of social institutions. Legislative and judicial mechanisms, including a strong, just criminal justice system, must deal with graft and corruption at every level of society.

- **Public Indebtedness**
  - The huge budget deficits produced by years of overspending by governments around the world is of great concern. We acknowledge that for a limited time in a nation's history governmental deficits are sometimes necessary. However, long periods of excessive overspending by governments have produced huge deficits and significant economic challenges for many nations. Such wanton carelessness cannot continue.

**V. THE POLITICAL COMMUNITY**

While our allegiance to God takes precedence over our allegiance to any state, we acknowledge the vital function of government as a principal vehicle for the ordering of society. Because we know ourselves to be responsible to God for social and political life, we declare the following relative to governments:

- **Basic Freedoms and Human Rights**
  - We hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to free and fair elections and to the freedoms of speech, religion, assembly, communications media, and petition for redress of grievances without fear of reprisal; to the right to privacy; and to the guarantee of the rights to adequate
food, clothing, shelter, education, and health care.

- **Political Responsibility**
  - The strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens.

- **Church and State Relations**
  - The United Methodist Church has for many years supported the separation of church and state. In some parts of the world this separation has guaranteed the diversity of religious expressions and the freedom to worship God according to each person's conscience.

- **Freedom of Information**
  - Citizens of all countries should have access to all essential information regarding their government and its policies. Illegal and unconscionable activities directed against persons or groups by their own governments must not be justified or kept secret, even under the guise of national security.

- **Education**
  - We believe that every person has the right to education. We also believe that the responsibility for education of the young rests with the family, faith communities, and the government.

- **Civil Obedience and Civil Disobedience**
  - Governments and laws should be servants of God and of human beings. Citizens have a duty to abide by laws duly adopted by orderly and just process of government. But governments, no less than individuals, are subject to the judgment of God.

- **The Death Penalty**
  - We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. We oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes.

- **Criminal Justice and Restorative Justice**
  - To protect all persons from encroachment upon their personal and property rights, governments have established mechanisms of law enforcement and courts.

- **Military Service**
  - We deplore war and urge the peaceful settlement of all disputes among nations. From the beginning, the Christian conscience has struggled with the harsh realities of violence and war, for these evils clearly frustrate God’s loving purposes for humankind.

**VI. THE WORLD COMMUNITY**

God’s world is one world. The unity now being thrust upon us by technological revolution has far outrun our moral and spiritual capacity to achieve a stable world. The enforced unity of humanity, increasingly evident on all levels of life,
presents the Church as well as all people with problems that will not wait for answer: injustice, war, exploitation, privilege, population, international ecological crisis, proliferation of arsenals of nuclear weapons, development of transnational business organizations that operate beyond the effective control of any governmental structure, and the increase of tyranny in all its forms. This generation must find viable answers to these and related questions if humanity is to continue on this earth. We commit ourselves as a Church to the achievement of a world community that is a fellowship of persons who honestly love one another. We pledge ourselves to seek the meaning of the gospel in all issues that divide people and threaten the growth of world community.

• **Nations and Cultures**
  
  As individuals are affirmed by God in their diversity, so are nations and cultures. We recognize that no nation or culture is absolutely just and right in its treatment of its own people, nor is any nation totally without regard for the welfare of its citizens.

• **National Power and Responsibility**
  
  Some nations possess more military and economic power than do others. Upon the powerful rests responsibility to exercise their wealth and influence with restraint.

• **War and Peace**
  
  We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy.

• **Justice and Law**
  
  Persons and groups must feel secure in their life and right to live within a society if order is to be achieved and maintained by law. We denounce as immoral an ordering of life that perpetuates injustice. Nations, too, must feel secure in the world if world community is to become a fact.

**VII. OUR SOCIAL CREED**

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God’s gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God’s handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.
We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the
good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing;
in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and
responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and
law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God’s Word in human affairs and
gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world.
Amen.

(It is recommended that this statement of Social Principles be continually
available to United Methodist Christians and that it be emphasized regularly in
every congregation. It is further recommended that “Our Social Creed” be
frequently used in Sunday worship.)

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