



# Church and Culture

2016



THE  
WESLEYAN CHURCH



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# Church and Culture

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2016

**wesleyan**  
PUBLISHING HOUSE  
wphstore.com  
Indianapolis, Indiana

Copyright © 2009, 2011, 2016 by Wesleyan Publishing House  
Published by Wesleyan Publishing House  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250  
Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN: 978-1-63257-207-3

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## Introduction



The Wesleyan Church has periodically commissioned committees and task forces to research current moral and social concerns and articulate the Church's response to them. Select statements resulting from the work of these groups have been combined together with position statements adopted by General Conferences and rulings by the General Superintendents to create this publication of the Church's response to contemporary issues.

We believe that good morals are the fruit of a people who are individually reconciled to God and who seek to live transformed lives within a culture that may not reflect godly values.

Redeemed people should manifest a commitment to social righteousness rather than to evil. Righteousness that is rooted in the experience of being a new creature in Christ should translate into a redeeming and remedial influence upon society.

### **Personal and Collective Conscience**

In the spirit of the apostle Paul's admonition to "stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you" (2 Thess. 2:15), The Wesleyan Church addresses these contemporary social issues from a biblical and collective conscience perspective.

The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and guidance to believers as they seek to discern personal boundaries for holy living. The Scriptures illustrate that personal conscience varies among individuals on matters for which direct commands of God are not given and that what God requires as a matter of obedience for one person He may not require of all. Therefore, relying on His help through prayer, Bible study, godly counsel, and thoughtful reflection, all believers should develop personal convictions to aid them in conforming to God's will as they relate to and

involve themselves in their culture as witnesses for Christ. Such private opinions apply only to one's own conduct. Legalism is the attempt to impose one's personal convictions upon others as if they are conditions for salvation or universal standards for holiness.

Issues arise periodically that require serious deliberation by the Church as a community of believers regarding its collective witness for Christ in society. Just as He does for individuals, the Holy Spirit also instructs the Church in discerning and applying biblical principles to its corporate response to current culture. Out of these prayerful deliberations, "collective conscience" statements are born. These statements are believed to be important enough that they should be a part of the identity of the Church and should characterize the lifestyle of those who are a part of our specific family within the larger body of Christ. By speaking collectively, the Church also seeks to provide examples for and encourage young disciples, recent converts, new members, and its friends in conforming to Christ's likeness in areas of personal conscience not yet informed by personal study and understanding of biblical principles.

These statements of collective conscience do not speak to every issue and must periodically be amended to speak redemptively to important emerging issues affecting the church and society.<sup>1</sup>



# 1. Christian Citizenship



We believe that the Christian possesses a dual citizenship, one heavenly and the other earthly. Our heavenly citizenship affects how we live out our earthly citizenship while we pray and act upon our prayer, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10).

## **Government Duties**

Regarding earthly citizenship, Christians should support their government with prayers, taxes, and respect.

On its part, human government should promote justice, preserve the peace, and respect the separation of church and state. Justice should be expressed in the restraint of social evil and the protection of individual rights. International peace should be promoted consistent with adequate national defense against external forces. Separation of church and state is necessary if the church is to serve as a moral force and a conscience in society.

When there is conflict between the heavenly and earthly citizenships as to specific claims upon the Christian, the individual has a right to seek a change in the law and to act so as to maintain a clear conscience before God.

While we do not place our hope in political action and partisan politics, but in God alone, we encourage Christians to be informed on social issues and engaged in the political process as agents of reconciliation and redemption in their communities. They should use their influence and vote to support the task of rebuilding a strong, God-fearing civilization where the poor receive compassionate care, criminals are punished, governments live within their means, the next generation is educated with wisdom, and trust in God comes to the core of our culture.<sup>1</sup>

### **Public Schools and Prayer**

The Wesleyan Church believes it is the public school's duty to recognize the historical and ongoing contribution of the Judeo-Christian tradition to world cultures and modern life. It affirms the Bible to be an appropriate book for reading in public schools and supports the right of students to pray as desired.<sup>2</sup>

This statement may be seen as a clear belief that no state, province, or federal government possesses an inherent right to either prohibit voluntary individual or group prayer in public schools or institutions or to require any person to participate in prayer.

### **Religion in Public Life**

The Wesleyan Church, believing that it is possible to allow recognition of God and the invoking of His aid in public functions advocates the enactment of suitable legislation which will strengthen the provision for the free exercise of religion in public life and allow reference to, or the invoking of the aid of God by individuals serving, writing, speaking, leading, or contributing to any public function.<sup>3</sup>

### **War, Peace, and Military Service**

The Wesleyan Church, knowing that war results in great suffering for the bodies, minds, and souls of men and women, staggering economic loss with its legacy of debt for future generations, and the unleashing of the baser passions of life, urges that persons and nations seek by every legitimate means to avoid armed conflict among the peoples and nations of the world.

The Wesleyan Church also urges that holy people everywhere pray earnestly for those in authority, so that peace may prevail (1 Tim. 2:2), and for the quick return of the Prince of Peace.

The Wesleyan Church understands that many Christians support their nation in times of conflict based upon the "just war principle." In such instances, war is regarded as just when other non-violent means of resolution have failed, and the cause is for the defense of

the nation and for the freedom of its citizens or those who are unable to defend themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The Wesleyan Church teaches respect for properly constituted civil authority and proper loyalty to one's country. It recognizes the responsibility of the individual to answer the call of government and enter into military service. However, there are those within the fellowship of The Wesleyan Church who believe that military service is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and that their conscience is violated by being compelled to take part in such. The Wesleyan Church will therefore lend moral support to any member who asks and claims exemption by legal processes from military service as a sincere conscientious objector and who asks to serve his or her country as a noncombatant.<sup>5</sup>

### **Lord's Day**

God prescribed that one day a week be set aside for the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of humankind (Gen. 2:2–3; Deut. 5:12–14). The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to observe the Lord's Day in a manner that contributes to the moral and spiritual purposes of the day, including worship and spiritual instruction.<sup>6</sup>

### **God's Name**

The name of the Lord God should be revered and honored; it should not be dishonored by being used in profane expletives or euphemistic swearwords.

### **Judicial Oath**

The Wesleyan Church reserves for its members the right to affirm the truth in testimony before the civil and criminal courts rather than to engage in a judicial oath.<sup>7</sup>



## **2. Human Rights**



We believe each individual possesses the fundamental right to live and be respected as a human being. These rights are derived from being created in the image of God, and from the vicarious death of Jesus Christ for all persons.

No person for whom Christ died is worthless. Each individual should be respected as a person of intrinsic worth and dignity, and not subjected to discrimination. Discrimination between people on the basis of ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, age, wealth, or physical challenge should be overcome by the unity of Christian love and common personal submission to Christ.

Each person has a right to personal judgment on matters that are not clearly declared by God's law. Public discourse on such matters should be carried out with civility, respecting the dignity and opinion of those who differ.

### **Equal Rights**

The Wesleyan Church upholds the right of all individuals to equal opportunity politically, economically, and religiously, and pledges itself to actively seek to bring about the possession of dignity and happiness by all people everywhere.<sup>1</sup>

### **Women in Leadership**

The Wesleyan Church supports the ordination of women. Ordination should not be denied anyone due to their gender for we believe that both men and women are called to Christian ministry and thus should be ordained. Furthermore, we condemn any practice of exclusive male-only leadership on boards and committees in the church, excluding women from these positions by either public policy or unofficial

behind-the-scenes agreed-upon policy for we believe that God's gifts, graces, and callings are given to all His children for sacred service without regard of gender.<sup>2</sup>

## Racism

The Wesleyan Church opposes the denial of basic human and civil rights to any individual regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, or national origin. While our denomination was born in an anti-slavery movement, we have sometimes ignored our own heritage and been guilty of both personal and collective racism and prejudice. For this sin, we have collectively repented and asked for God's forgiveness, and we intend to strive for complete racial reconciliation, for we know that this is the will of God.<sup>3</sup>

## Immigration

The Wesleyan Church suggests eight biblical principles (kingdom values) to guide Wesleyan responses to the issues of immigration.

1. *The Creation Principle*. All persons are created equal and are of equal worth in their Creator's eyes. Each individual possesses fundamental rights to live and be respected as a human person of intrinsic worth and dignity. These rights are derived from one's creation in the image of God and from the vicarious death of Jesus Christ for all humanity (Gen. 1:26–28; Gal. 3:28).

Action Step: Understanding that all are made in the image of God, as Wesleyans we will seek to treat all people humanely and with dignity, regardless of race, class, nationality, gender, or legal status.

2. *The Great Commandment Principle*. Christ commands us to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and our neighbors as ourselves. This commandment sums up the entire Law and the Prophets, requiring us to live in perfect love with God and our neighbor, which is holiness. We are to love our neighbor unconditionally regardless of race, class, nationality, or legal status in our land (Matt. 22:37–40; 25:40; Gal. 5:14, 22–23; 1 Pet. 1:15–16; 1 John 4:8, 20).

Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will give of ourselves in whole-hearted love to others without intolerance, judgment, favoritism, or

disrespect, and in spite of who they are or what they have done to live among us.

*3. The Sovereignty Principle.* God is sovereignly at work to establish His kingdom in heaven and on earth. He determines the times and places where the peoples of the nations should live so that people will seek Him and perhaps reach out for and find Him. No one can ultimately succeed in thwarting God's work. God can bring good from the fallen intentions and actions of humanity and save many lives. Our responsibility as His people is to recognize His hand at work and cooperate with Him in ways that build up His kingdom in heaven and on earth (Gen. 50:20; Dan. 4:35; Acts 17:26–28; Rev. 7:9–12).

*Action Step:* As Wesleyans, we view immigration as an aspect of God's larger plan to bring salvation to the world. Immigration can be used through God's wisdom to introduce many to Jesus who might not otherwise hear the gospel message.

*4. The Submission Principle.* Christians possess dual citizenship, one heavenly and the other earthly. Christians should respect and submit to the laws of the land, except when they are in contradiction to biblical principles. When there is a conflict between the heavenly and earthly citizenships as to specific claims, Christians have a moral duty and right to seek a change in the law and to act so as to maintain a clear conscience before God (Dan. 3:16–18; Matt. 8:9; 22:21; Acts 4:19–20; 5:29; Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Pet. 2:13).

*Action Step:* As Wesleyans, we will exercise awareness of the laws as they pertain to immigration, endeavor to obey them, and encourage all immigrants to do the same unless these laws are contrary to God's Word as interpreted by the collective wisdom and authority of the body of Christ. We support the rights of those who engage in civil disobedience against harsh and unjust laws, policies, and measures on the basis of biblical principles.

*5. The Hospitality Principle.* Christ's love compels us to be kind and compassionate and to offer hospitality, especially to those in need, including strangers, widows, orphans, aliens, and immigrants regardless

of their legal status (Deut. 10:18–19; Matt. 7:12; 10:42; Luke 10:29–37; Rom. 12:13; James 1:27; 1 Pet. 4:9).

Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will encourage one another to engage in acts of kindness and compassion (i.e., providing food, shelter, clothing, and other resources) toward immigrants who are in need regardless of their immigration status (documented or undocumented).

*6. The Great Commission Principle.* Jesus Christ brings good news and has commissioned us to make disciples of all peoples, including citizens and aliens alike. We are called to follow His example and carry on His ministry, declaring good news to the poor, and proclaiming freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, release to the oppressed, and the year of the Lord's favor (Matt. 9:37–38; 28:19–20; Luke 4:18–19; John 8:1–11).

Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will unashamedly engage in both evangelizing and discipling immigrants in our communities, training and appointing immigrant persons as pastors, lay leaders, and workers, with respect for applicable employment laws as we do.

*7. The Grace Principle.* All have sinned and deserve God's judgment and punishment. Yet, He is a merciful God and seeks to reconcile us to himself by grace. God's grace is a model for our own human relationships, compelling us to respond with grace to those who have sinned. We are called to seek reconciliation wherever possible, by standing against extreme and harsh measures and calling for appropriately balanced measures that restore one to a right relationship with God and with one's neighbors (Matt. 25:35–46; John 3:16; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:17–21; Gal. 6:1–2; Eph. 1:7).

Action Step: As Wesleyans, we will show God's grace by accepting those less fortunate than us. We will seek to have a welcoming heart to those that are strangers in our land, showing them acts of kindness and doing our part to understand other people's cultures to better serve them through God's love.

*8. The Justice Principle.* God's people are called to proactively seek justice for all persons by calling for just, fair, reasonable, and humane laws and serving as advocates and defenders for those who

are powerless, disenfranchised, and marginalized. Special attention ought to be given to protect the welfare of children and innocent dependents of foreigners, regardless of their legal status (Lev. 19:33–34; Ps. 82:3–4; Ezek. 22:29; Mic. 6:8).

**Action Step:** As Wesleyans, we oppose and condemn all unjust and harsh laws, policies and measures directed against immigrants among us, whether documented or undocumented. We will act as advocates for just and humane policies for all people by all levels of government and in all parts of society.<sup>4</sup>

### **Global Human Trafficking**

The Wesleyan Church worldwide is committed to eliminating human trafficking in all its forms. We recognize and accept our biblical responsibility to those who are weak, oppressed, powerless, helpless, and exploited; our duty of advocacy for those who cannot speak for themselves; and the need to raise our prophetic voice in loud protest against the profoundly evil personal and social sin of human trafficking.

We will demonstrate our concern and compassion locally, nationally, and internationally by:

1. Praying earnestly for the end of human trafficking.
2. Becoming aware of what is happening within our own countries and communities.
3. Raising awareness about human trafficking and potential Christian responses, availing ourselves of training materials and providing leadership in this capacity.
4. Providing avenues of healing to trafficked victims.
5. Advocating on the part of the victims of human trafficking, as well as for laws that need to be enacted to end human trafficking.
6. Preaching on the issues related to human trafficking, particularly as it relates to the demand in sex trafficking for pornography, Internet porn, entitlements to abuse those of lesser status, etc.
7. Supporting the prosecution of buyers and consumers of trafficked persons.<sup>5</sup>



### **3. Christian Stewardship**



The Wesleyan Church affirms that the Scriptures teach that God is the owner of all persons and all things, that people are His stewards of both life and possessions, and that every person shall be held personally accountable to Him for the exercise of their stewardship. God, as a God of system and order in all of His ways, has established a system of giving which acknowledges His ownership and humankind's stewardship. To this end, all of His children should faithfully tithe and present offerings for the support of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

The local church of which a person is a member is considered to be the biblical storehouse and the appropriate recipient of that person's regular tithe and special offerings.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Sharing Our Wealth**

Each person's wealth consists of time, health, and such resources as food, energy, income, and accumulated possessions. As stewards of what already belongs to God, Christians should use earth's wealth for the glory of God.

Christians must love God, not the things of the world, and should share their possessions rather than to hold them selfishly. Christians may have to intentionally seek a simpler lifestyle—living on less in order to give more—if they are to combat cultural tendencies toward materialism, participate in meeting the needs of the poor, and support the work of God in all parts of the world. Sharing possessions is important in fulfilling obligations to God, family, government, and societal needs. Christian sharing should be voluntary, motivated by compassion, and administered with justice.<sup>3</sup>

## **Creation Care**

The Wesleyan Church believes Christians should take the lead in ensuring that the beauty and majesty of God's creation are sustained. We believe that these efforts will help ensure the protection and health of future generations, be a blessing to people all around the world (especially the poor), improve our witness to a watching world, and most of all, express our love and worship for our Creator, Redeemer, and Friend.

We encourage Wesleyans to work vigorously for the protection and care of God's creation in ways that honor the dignity and welfare of human beings. We suggest the following practical steps:

1. Become informed about environmental issues and needs—locally, nationally, and globally.
2. Take intentional measures to reduce the harm we personally do to the environment.
3. Encourage our local churches to adopt policies and practices that minimize environmental damage and reflect good environmental stewardship.
4. Include environmental stewardship as a topic for teaching and discussion in our churches, so that Wesleyans might be equipped to take action appropriate to their setting and context.
5. Advocate for reasonable public and governmental policies which will protect and preserve the environment.
6. Lovingly communicate that all of these efforts are motivated by our love for our Creator and our desire to steward what He has entrusted to our care.<sup>4</sup>

## **Use of Time and Entertainment**

The Wesleyan Church believes that its members should exercise responsible stewardship of their time for worship, work, rest, personal leisure, and service to others. Special care should be given to honoring Christ in one's choices and pursuit of entertainment. This will include refusing to patronize and to carefully regulate the use in the home of

activities, media, and communication where they feature the cheapening of human life, the gratuitously violent, the use of immoral or profane language, and the sexually explicit and pornographic.<sup>5</sup>

## Poverty

The Wesleyan Church worldwide is committed to alleviating poverty in all its forms. We recognize and accept our biblical responsibility to the poor, our duty of care for creation and the environment, and the need to value and celebrate the potential of those trapped by poverty.

We will demonstrate these locally, nationally, and internationally by:

1. Placing people and their identified needs at the heart of our mission and activities.
2. Deliberately challenging systemic evil, policies, and practices which enslave people and communities.
3. Proactively engaging with other churches, agencies, governments, and non-government organizations who share our vision for community transformation.

We promote good stewardship, accountability, and justice in society, and hold our respective governments and the United Nations to account by advocating:

1. Economic trade that is fair.
2. Education and training that is relevant.
3. Empowerment through sustained resources and debt relief.<sup>6</sup>

## Hunger

Death from hunger and malnutrition should be prevented as much as possible through support of effective efforts by all appropriate means.<sup>7</sup>

Wesleyans are committed by their membership vows to do good as much as possible to all people as God gives opportunity, especially to

those in the body of Christ, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the destitute, by visiting or helping those who are sick or in prison, and by instructing, correcting, or encouraging them in love.<sup>8</sup>

### **Gambling**

Gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship (i.e., trusting God's provision for us as exemplified in Matt. 6:25–34) and the tenth commandment which forbids coveting (Deut. 5:21); is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive; can be a poor example to others of how to manage the resources of God or trust in God's provision; appeals to greed; endangers families; lowers socio-economic standards and self-esteem; engenders false hope; and is exploitative in that it takes advantage of the misplaced hopes, compulsions, or poor judgments of others. We believe that total abstinence is the best Christian response to gambling in all its forms.<sup>9</sup>



## **4. Marriage and Family**



### **Marriage**

The Wesleyan Church believes that every person is created in the image of God, that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger whole, and mutual fulfillment. God's Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for His relationship with His covenant people and for revealing the truth that that relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore, God's plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a covenant union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship. We adhere to the teachings of Scripture regarding gender identity, sexual conduct, and the sacredness of marriage, and believe the sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful.<sup>1</sup>

### **Family Living**

We believe that the family is the primary unit of society and is ordained of God. Providing encouragement and direction for a Christian marriage and family are vital ministries of the church. These ministries represent the best hope for counteracting destructive trends in modern society. Our homes are to be maintained as centers of moral and spiritual renewal. To achieve this, each Christian family should establish a family altar, have love and respect, take time for companionship, show respect for God and His Church, and consecrate itself to Christian witnessing.

God's plan is that children should be born and reared within the framework of marriage. Stable homes are essential for a stable society. The wholesome relationship of individual to group as it should be learned in the family affects favorably all other institutions of society. Conversely, disturbing forces in society make an impact on the home. The growing acceptance of some modern family concepts, mobility of people, and development of stress are some factors that have an erosive effect, frequently resulting in the breakdown of the traditional family.<sup>2</sup>

Because of divorce, abandonment, abuse, or the death of a spouse, a single parent may have the responsibility of raising children without the help of a mate. In such cases, the Church should become the extended family, providing support, assistance, and personal presence to the single parent and the children.<sup>3</sup>

### **Divorce**

The Wesleyan Church stands firmly on the Bible's teaching that God's plan for marriage is for one man and one woman to be joined together for their entire lives. We regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behavior, bestiality or incest, as clear biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counseling has failed to restore the relationship.<sup>4</sup>

The ripple effects of divorce reach far, often damaging children, separating friends, and threatening the stability of social structures. The Church should provide a redemptive and restorative environment for those who are struggling with the aftereffects of divorce, providing loving acceptance and healing relationships.

### **Remarriage**

The Wesleyan Church believes that the Scriptures teach the following in regard to remarriage after divorce:

1. Recognizing the fallen state of humanity, divorce has been recognized in the Scriptures as a valid and permanent dissolution of

marriage with all its rights and responsibilities. Divorce is not reversible. There is no way to restore a dissolved marriage. The divorced (unmarried) status can be changed only by a new marriage to the same person or another person. No divorced and remarried person has two spouses, only a former spouse and a present spouse, as in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 7.

2. Divorce, however sinful the act and serious the consequences, is not unpardonable. A redeemed sinner or reclaimed backslider is free to marry in the Lord or to remain unmarried, a eunuch for the kingdom of God's sake. The one exception to this freedom of choice is mentioned by the apostle Paul. It is a believer who disobeys the commandment of God and puts away a believing spouse. That person must remain unmarried to leave room for reconciliation to the spouse (1 Cor. 7).

3. The right to remarry in no way excuses the sin of divorce. It only implies that the Church must forgive and restore those whom the Lord forgives and restores. Neither penance nor penalty remain to the truly penitent and restored sinner, or backslider, whatever the traumatic consequences of the sin may be.<sup>5</sup>

### **Divorce and the Minister**

The Wesleyan Church applies these principles regarding divorce and remarriage to its ministers:

1. Any person sustaining a marriage relation contrary to the Scriptures and the membership commitments (see *The Discipline* 265:5–6; 410:6; 3108; 5251) shall be ineligible for licensing, commissioning, or ordination in The Wesleyan Church.<sup>6</sup>

2. Any minister who enters into a marriage relation contrary to the Scriptures, and to those expositions of Scripture as set forth in the covenant membership commitments (see *The Discipline* 265:5–6; cf. 410:6), after having been ordained, commissioned, or licensed, shall be dismissed from ministerial standing, provided that guilt shall be established in accord with judicial processes set forth in *The General Board Policy on Church Discipline* (5206–5212).<sup>7</sup>

3. In performing marriages, Wesleyan ministers shall not unite in marriage any person who is divorced, unless such divorce and remarriage is in keeping with the Scriptures and the membership commitments (see *The Discipline* 265:5–7). In carrying out this duty, the minister shall be guided by the principles set forth in *The Discipline* 410:6.<sup>8</sup>

### **Divorce and Church Membership**

The statements in *The Discipline* are not intended to restrict from membership in The Wesleyan Church persons who have been previously involved in divorce and remarriage. Such persons who have sought and found God's forgiveness for sins occasioned by marriage, divorce, or remarriage, and who are at present living in harmony with the principles of Christ as taught in the Scriptures are eligible for membership in The Wesleyan Church.

### **Domestic Violence**

The Wesleyan Church is committed to its mission of fulfilling the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment calls us to minister to the needs of society with the love and spirit of Christ, which is contrary to the violence and abuse that are prevalent in our culture. We condemn sexual, physical, emotional, and verbal abuse by all persons everywhere, but especially abuse perpetrated by members of a family or church community. We seek to protect the well-being and integrity of each person, to bring transformation to culture, and to be a safe haven for those seeking refuge from the damages inflicted upon them by an abusive and godless society.<sup>9</sup>

Without intervention and help, abuse frequently grows more severe. We must call those who act abusively to accountability, repentance, and change. We must engage ourselves in the response of our communities to this issue by cooperating and collaborating with community-based resources, such as shelters, therapists, police, and legal aid. We feed, clothe, and weep with those who are suffering, as Jesus would. We speak out against evil. We obey God and the Scriptures and love our neighbor—both within and beyond the household of faith.

We will demonstrate our concern for the abused and the abuser by:

1. Offering training opportunities through print, web-based resources, and in-person conferences for pastors and other religious leaders on strategies and resources to raise awareness on abuse within their congregations and to meet the needs of those who suffer.

2. Designating one week per calendar year as Domestic Violence Awareness Sunday and offering ideas and resources to help congregations highlight the issue.

3. Encouraging our educational institutions to offer awareness training for students about violence in their personal and dating relationships, support services for students who are experiencing or have experienced (or witnessed) violence in their homes, and training for those preparing for full-time ministry to ensure that they are equipped with resources to respond to this social issue.

4. Supporting community-based policies, programs, and services that protect abuse victims and hold offenders accountable.

5. Encouraging pastors to discuss domestic violence and prevention in their premarital counseling and preaching; to refrain from counseling married couples together when one is the perpetrator and one is the victim; to employ best practices in their response to victims and perpetrators; to provide referral suggestions for victims to faith-based and community-based resources for emergency services, shelters, and counseling; and to call perpetrators to embrace the transforming grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ that leads to righteousness and holiness.<sup>10</sup>

## **Children in Crisis**

The Wesleyan Church is committed to minister to “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40) in our society, which includes children. We deplore the practice of infanticide for population control, illegitimacy, ritual belief, or imperfection. We are equally concerned over the increased reporting of the verbal, sexual, and physical abuse of children, which is found in every social class, race, and geographic location.

Young and immature parents may be unable to provide the emotional and physical support required by their children. Unrealistic expectations combined with poor self-concept and unstable marital relationships are frequent contributors to the problem. Parents who themselves have been abused are more likely to expose their children to the same pattern of abuse and neglect. Parents who are alcohol or drug abusers are particularly prone to abuse their children. Parents who are worn out by their small children, especially when they are under emotional or financial stress and have no one to turn to for help may take out their frustration and hopelessness on their children with devastating results.

Jesus Christ always took time for the children. We believe that by following Him, the Church can proclaim a message of help and hope to hurting little ones and intervene in the conditions that contribute to their abuse.



## 5. Sanctity of Life



We believe that life is a gift from God and must always be regarded as sacred. Because God created human beings in His image, all people share in the divine dignity. Abortion, euthanasia, and unethical human experimentation violate the God-given dignity of human beings.

We believe that decisions about the edges of life that were not even contemplated in previous times are now necessary. Although the necessity of making such decisions is new, the way Christians should make decisions has not changed. Where Scripture speaks clearly, we should obey. Where it does not, we should pray fervently, listening for answers. We should examine the historic positions of the Church. We should get advice from godly people. We should listen to our own consciences.

### **Abortion**

The Wesleyan Church seeks to recognize and preserve the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and is opposed to the use of induced abortion. Scripture seems to indicate that God sees each unborn as a person being formed in the womb with a purpose and a future in mind (Ps. 139). It also instructs us to be fervent in protecting those who cannot protect themselves (Prov. 31:8–9). However, it is recognized that there may be rare pregnancies where grave medical conditions threaten the life of the mother, which raise serious questions about taking the life of the unborn child in order to save the life of the mother. In such a case, a decision should be made only after very prayerful consideration following medical and spiritual counseling.<sup>1</sup>

The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to become informed about the abortion issue and actively involved locally and nationally in

the preparation and passage of appropriate legislation guaranteeing protection of life under law to unborn children.<sup>2</sup>

We call our members to oppose the social evil of induced abortion; however, we reject the use of violence as a means of bringing about this needed change in society.

### **Infanticide, Euthanasia, and Removal of Life-Support Systems**

The Wesleyan Church believes in principle that infanticide and euthanasia are wrong. There are no justifiable grounds to deliberately end the life of an individual through medical or any other means. The Wesleyan Church believes that removing support systems that only prolong physical life-signs, without reasonable medical hope of regaining consciousness, is a matter of conscience for the persons concerned. We urge that families pray and think through the choice they desire to make before being confronted with the actual experience of such a decision and by having a clear understanding with the family and having it in writing. However, removal of life-support systems is not to be confused with or considered a part of infanticide or euthanasia. Life-support systems sustain physical life after the natural functions of the body are destroyed or greatly impaired by disease or injury. Their removal is not taking life but rather leaving the natural process of disease or injury to take its course.<sup>3</sup>

### **Suicide**

Suicide is tragic. To take one's life while fully rational is presumption on the atonement of Christ. We must therefore leave the destiny of such persons in the hands of a merciful God. The unconditional provision of the atonement covers the act of suicide of Christians who are irrational at the time the act occurs.<sup>4</sup>

### **Capital Punishment**

The Wesleyan Church believes that capital punishment should be reserved only for those crimes committed in serious circumstances which are clearly defined by law and administered by justice.<sup>5</sup>

## Care of the Body and Substance Abuse

The Bible teaches the sanctity of the human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20). Christians should avoid the use of anything which would damage the body, destroy the family, harm society (1 Cor. 10:23–24), undermine the fellowship of the church, hinder reaching full potential in Christ, enslave the will (1 Cor. 6:12), inhibit evangelism (1 Cor. 9:19–23), breach the Lord’s command to love God supremely and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37–39), or become a stumbling block to the young in age or faith (Matt. 18:6; 1 Cor. 8:9, 13; 10:32–33).

The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to practice self-discipline and temperance in matters of proper eating, exercise, and rest. We oppose the production, sale, purchase, and use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, narcotics and other harmful drugs, unless for mechanical, chemical, or medicinal purposes (see *The Discipline* 265:4). The unprescribed use of hallucinogens, stimulants, and depressants, and the misuse and abuse of regularly prescribed medicines should be prohibited; only on competent medical advice and under medical supervision should such drugs be used.

The consequences to society stemming from substance abuse are of major concern because of their unarguably negative impact on the spiritual character and nature of individuals and the welfare of society. These include the creation of barriers to conversion, family dysfunction and breakdown, poverty, disease and death, increased violence and crime, the incalculable loss to national economies, and the destruction of the individual caught by the power of addiction. In light of the overwhelming evidence of damage to society and the spiritual health of the individual by the abuse of such substances, we believe that even where their use may be legalized, we choose total abstinence as our appropriate response (i.e., voluntarily refraining from and totally avoiding the use of something in all unnecessary circumstances as determined by the individual Christian’s conscience in submission to the lordship of Christ and the admonitions of the Church). Such abstinence is a willing act of self-discipline, an acceptance of

group accountability, and never a test of salvation or an evidence of superior spirituality.<sup>6</sup>

### **Addictions**

Christians are admonished not to become enslaved by anything that would rob them of the ability to make free choice, but rather should subject all things to the mind of Christ and the control of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:12; 7:37; Rom. 8:1).

Physical, psychological, and behavioral addictions can result from patterns of behavior or thinking such as: gambling, food, sex, pornography, computers, Internet, work, exercise, television, videos, or video games. These addictions enslave the will, control choices, and apart from the transforming work of grace through Jesus Christ, seem impossible to break.<sup>7</sup>

While we understand the biological and psychological nature of addictions, we affirm that God's grace is powerful enough to deliver any seeking believer from slavery to any of these substances. Furthermore, we believe that the sale and trafficking of tobacco, alcohol, and other non-medicinal drugs is a social evil which is draining and corrupting to society, and thus we believe that the best position is to practice total abstinence, protesting both the legal and illegal trade of such substances.<sup>8</sup>

### **Alcoholic Beverages**

Alcoholism has become a major health problem in North America and much of the world, exceeded only by mental illness, heart disease, and cancer. Alcohol is a poison that causes impairment in reflexes, judgment of distance and speed, and problems in mental concentration. The Wesleyan Church maintains its historic stand of total abstinence.

### **Tobacco**

Tobacco smoking has been said to be the most widespread example of drug dependence in North America. It reduces life expectancy,

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causes miscarriages or premature births, and is addictive. Nicotine causes the heart to beat faster, blood vessels to constrict, and blood pressure to rise. Research has provided evidence that thousands of non-smokers die annually in North America alone as a result of disease caused by passively inhaling tobacco smoke. The United States surgeon general said, "Cigarette smoking is the chief, single, avoidable cause of death in our society and the most important public health issue of our time."

### **Drug Abuse**

The unprescribed use of hallucinogens, stimulants, and depressants, and the misuse and abuse of regularly prescribed medicines should be prohibited. Only on competent medical advice and under medical supervision should such drugs be used.

People at every level of society are involved in the drug abuse epidemic which gives rise to violent crimes, gang activity, and personal and societal misery.<sup>9</sup>

The Wesleyan Church opposes the production, sale, purchase, and use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, narcotics, and other harmful drugs as a means for its members to demonstrate a positive social witness and to abstain from substances destructive to their physical, mental, and spiritual health.<sup>10</sup>



## **6. Human Sexuality**



We believe God created humankind as male and female, and gifted them with a sexual nature that is to be celebrated as a part of the image of God within us. God created male and female in His image with equal worth and essential value. We are planned together, with God and each other, to reflect the full character and image of God's relational nature.

The ideal of God's design for our sexuality celebrates a husband and wife in sexual intimacy, which within the framework of marriage would provide for procreation, mutual pleasure, and intimacy. In this amazing connection of intimacy is the beauty of how we are uniquely prepared to bring new life into being, to father and mother a new person in this world.

Human sexuality remains as a dynamic component of human personality even among those who because of divorce, the death of a spouse, health issues, or personal choice live a celibate life. Some persons choose celibacy in order to give themselves more fully to the service of God and others.

The results of the fall can be seen in the misuse and perversion of God's design and His desire for our sexuality. Sinful people sexually exploit the innocent, weak, and vulnerable, turning sex into a selfish act, devoid of intimacy and decency. Culture distorts the intent of sex and glorifies its perversions. The pornographic industry further twists, inflames, and enslaves minds with sexual lust.

What God glorified and sin desecrated, grace can restore. Sexual sins can be forgiven. Addictions can be broken. Innocence, intimacy, and purity can be restored. God is love, and He can redeem us and cause us to love others unselfishly, enriching them without exploiting them.

## **Sexual Purity**

The Wesleyan Church calls upon its members to lives of sexual purity in a culture of sexual perversion and promiscuity. God's holy people are to avoid relationships that may not involve actual intercourse, but the intimate nature of the relationship subjects them to temptations from which they should flee. We affirm that sexual intercourse before marriage is a sin, and sexual intercourse with anyone except one's spouse after marriage is likewise a sin that requires repentance, forgiveness, and restoration.

The Church should create a safe place in which youth who are struggling to understand and develop a biblical understanding of their sexuality can ask honest questions and be guided appropriately in the formation and expression of their sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

## **Pornography and Obscenity**

We believe that pornography and obscenity are repugnant to the Christian mind and a destructive force in civilized society. Pornography distorts the Christian view of sex; victimizes the innocent; contributes to sexual abuse and violence; and damages its victims physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.<sup>2</sup>

The Wesleyan Church is committed to:

- Influencing the media to cease exploiting and being exploited by the pornography industry.
- Influencing law enforcement agencies to fairly but firmly enforce those laws designed to protect family, church, and community values.
- Influencing and motivating citizens to join in formulating and taking specific actions to reduce this blight locally and nationally.
- Influencing local, state, provincial, and national legislators and administrators to call for enforcement of existing obscenity laws, pledging support and prayers as they exercise increased vigilance to curb the scourge of pornography and obscenity.

## Homosexuality

It is the historic and sustained conviction of The Wesleyan Church that homosexual activity is contrary to the known will of God as revealed to us in the Bible. We believe the strongest biblical argument against homosexual activity comes from the account of creation (Gen. 1–2). God’s intentions can be discerned from the way God created things. The account of creation teaches these key truths about human sexuality:

- We are created male and female, and that male and female together reflect the image of God (Gen. 1:27).
- It is through the relationship between a man and a woman that human beings can be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28).
- Man and woman were created for one another, and it is God’s intention that a man and a woman become one flesh within marriage (Gen. 2:24).

God’s plan for our sexuality is revealed in our design, and the book of Genesis shows unmistakably that God has designed our bodies for heterosexual relationships. God’s majestic creation of human beings in His own image, male and female, shows us that homosexual activity is a use of our bodies that rejects God’s original intention and design.

It is important to understand the distinction that the sin of homosexuality is about the behavior; it is not about the orientation, desire, or temptation. We are all tempted in many ways—some to greed, pride, envy, or self-righteousness. Jesus himself was tempted. And the temptation itself is not sin; sin comes only when a person yields to that temptation and engages in the sinful behavior or attitude (1 Cor. 10:13; Jas. 1:13–15). The same is true of homosexuality. The temptation or desire (or orientation) to find sexual fulfillment with members of the same sex is not sin; homosexuality becomes sin only when that desire is acted on through homosexual lust or behavior. We believe that people with homosexual orientations can be healed of that orientation and become heterosexuals. We also believe that those who are

not freed of the orientation can be obedient to Christ by abstaining from homosexual practices and living in sexual purity (1 Cor. 6:9–11). We believe that the grace of God is sufficient to redeem and restore the homosexual so that with the help of the Holy Spirit both the practice of such activity and the inclination leading to its practice may be overcome.<sup>3</sup>

### **Ministering to Homosexuals**

Wesleyans are called to respond to the homosexual community with both boundless compassion and a call to biblical standards of sexual morality. We cannot endorse homosexual activity as a lifestyle; just like we cannot endorse all other kinds of behaviors that displease God. But we also cannot endorse condemning, hate-filled, self-righteous attitudes toward those in the homosexual community. This type of attitude, all too common among evangelical Christians, serves only to drive people farther away from the God who loves them and the community where they can find Him.

We believe God loves—and we should also love—all persons who violate His holy law. To all who are sinners, He offers grace that can forgive and transform. Those who have been redeemed by grace are to be conduits of grace to others, regardless of the nature of their sin. From a biblical background, we seek to minister to the homosexual as we should to any person who violates God’s laws of chastity and purity. Ministering to the needs of homosexuals is not approval of their lifestyles.

We can stand firmly with the Scriptures on the evils of the sinful practice of homosexuality and with the Scriptures which offer forgiveness, deliverance, and healing for any and all sins of the flesh.<sup>4</sup>

### **Same Sex Marriage**

The Wesleyan Church affirms that marriage between one man and one woman is God’s design.<sup>5</sup>

In performing marriages, Wesleyan ministers shall not unite in marriage persons of the same gender.<sup>6</sup>

## **Transgender Issues**

The Wesleyan Church adheres to the teachings of Scripture regarding gender identity, sexual conduct, and the sacredness of marriage. We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful.<sup>7</sup>

Gender differentiation and male/female uniqueness are part of a divine design that God indelibly engraved upon creation. God gives our bodies to us for spiritual and relational purposes, as well as physical ones. It is His desire that the most fundamental distinctions we experience as human beings should remind us that our completeness is ultimately found in communion with Himself and others. For this reason, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18). Personal fulfillment involves intimate fellowship and union with God, as exemplified by the ideal of Christ as the bridegroom and the Church as His bride (Eph. 5:22-32; Rev. 19:7-9).

Based on our biblical and theological study, there is no argument for a “third gender” among humans. Gender confusion and dysphoria are ultimately the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual consequences of the human race’s fallen condition.

It is God who assigns individuals their fundamental human identity and gender. Switching sexual identity is not God’s will for individuals. Those who do so with a rebellious spirit are in danger of rejecting God and His created order, and substituting self as an idol in His place.

Pastoral care for transsexual persons will communicate the eternal worth of all persons to our Creator/Redeemer God. The Lord’s desire for all persons to be reconciled to Him must be proclaimed unequivocally. God loves transsexuals with everlasting love, just as He loves all other persons in need of His saving grace and the gift of faith. Christ’s ambassadors will imitate His love.<sup>8</sup>

## **HIV/AIDS**

The Wesleyan Church has historically been active on issues of major social concern. The HIV/AIDS (Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) issue can be no exception. As we have opportunity, we must oppose the growing climate that seeks to legitimize deviate sexual practices known to fuel the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For both biblical and health reasons, we stand for chastity before marriage and fidelity in marriage.

HIV/AIDS is a global issue with devastating personal effect on those who contract it, particularly in places where poverty prohibits access to available therapies. Innocent persons are afflicted with this disease as well as persons given to promiscuous sexual activity and drug addiction. The Christian church must reach out to all persons suffering with HIV/AIDS with compassionate care, mixed with a call for transformed lifestyle when it is appropriate, whether it is a neighbor or citizen of another country.

We believe that no person diagnosed as being HIV positive or having full-blown AIDS should be excluded from attending any Wesleyan church. It is always our intent that persons of all backgrounds and needs may find hope, help, and acceptance within our local congregations.<sup>9</sup>



## 7. Dangers to Spiritual Life



Jesus prayed that His followers not be taken out of the world, but that they be protected by the Father as they were sent into the world to live and serve redemptively. Each age and culture presents dangers to the spiritual lives and focus of God's people, as the Enemy seeks to dilute the truth, divert the focus, and diminish the fervor and impact of God's people.

### **Lodges and Secret Societies**

The Wesleyan Church opposes membership in secret societies and lodges which are oath bound, believing that the quasi-religious nature of such organizations divides the Christian's loyalty; their secret nature contravenes the Christian's open witness; and the secret nature of their oaths is repugnant to the Christian conscience.<sup>1</sup>

The Wesleyan Church urges total separation from such organizations. It is recognized that some persons have insurance and other involvements which make severance from lodge membership difficult, but its desire is to minister to such persons through the fellowship of the congregation until they choose membership in the church rather than the lodge.<sup>2</sup>

### **Religious Cults**

The Wesleyan Church believes Jesus Christ is the only mediator between sinful man and a righteous God and that faith in Him and His death upon the cross for our sins is our only means of redemption. Against this simple but profound truth many cults and false religions battle for the minds and souls of humankind. Cults are to be avoided because:

- They replace the lordship of Christ with human "heroes."
- They undermine the moral standards based on biblical principles.

- They prey on those who lack clear understanding of Christian teaching.
- They question the deity of Christ.
- They undermine the authority of the Word of God.
- They offer salvation by works.

The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to protect themselves by being grounded in a knowledge of biblical truth and by being informed about cults and false religions. For those who have become victims of devious error, we proclaim there is deliverance from the grip of error through faith in the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup>



## Notes



### Introduction

1. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), para. 400.

### Chapter 1

1. 1996 General Conference, Indianapolis, Ind., June 9–12, 1996.
2. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 410:8.
3. *Ibid.*
4. “Public Morals and Social Concerns” (pamphlet, Board of General Superintendents, 1984).
5. *Discipline*, 410:3.
6. *Ibid.*, 265:1; 410:7.
7. *Ibid.*, 410:10.

### Chapter 2

1. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 410:1.
2. 1996 General Conference, Indianapolis, Ind., June 9–12, 1996.
3. *Ibid.*
4. 2008 General Conference, Orlando, Fla., June 7–11, 2008.
5. *Ibid.*

### Chapter 3

1. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 460.
2. *Ibid.*, 465.
3. “Public Morals and Social Concerns” (pamphlet, Board of General Superintendents, 1984).
4. 2008 General Conference, Orlando, Fla., June 7–11, 2008.
5. *Discipline*, 410:12.
6. 2008 General Conference.
7. “Public Morals and Social Concern.”

8. *Discipline*, 265:11.
9. *Discipline*, 410:12.

### Chapter 4

1. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 222.
2. "Public Morals and Social Concerns" (pamphlet, Board of General Superintendents, 1984).
3. Faith and Public Life Think Tank. This was a committee for the General Superintendents of The Wesleyan Church.
4. *The Discipline*, 265:6.
5. *The Discipline*, 410:6b–d.
6. *Ibid.*, 3012.
7. *Ibid.*, 3108.
8. *Ibid.*, 3111.
9. *Ibid.*, 400.
10. 2008 General Conference, Orlando, Fla., June 7–11, 2008.

### Chapter 5

1. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 410:11.
2. *Ibid.*
3. "Public Morals and Social Concerns" (pamphlet, Board of General Superintendents, 1984).
4. Faith and Public Life Think Tank. This was a committee for the General Superintendents of The Wesleyan Church.
5. "Public Morals and Social Concerns."
6. *Discipline*, 410:4.
7. Faith and Public Life Think Tank.
8. 1996 General Conference, Indianapolis, Ind., June 9–12, 1996.
9. "Public Morals and Social Concerns."
10. *Discipline*, 410:4.

### Chapter 6

1. Faith and Public Life Think Tank. This was a committee for the General Superintendents of The Wesleyan Church.
2. "Public Morals and Social Concerns" (pamphlet, Board of General Superintendents, 1984).
3. Faith and Public Life Think Tank.

4. J. D. Abbott, O. D. Emery, Robert W. McIntyre, and Virgil A. Mitchell, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesley Press, 1983).
5. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 265:6
6. *Discipline*, 3112.
7. *Discipline*, 410:6
8. *A Wesleyan View of Gender Identity and Expression*, position statement of the General Board of The Wesleyan Church, May 2014.
9. Faith and Public Life Think Tank.

## Chapter 7

1. *The Discipline of The Wesleyan Church 2016* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016), 265:4.
2. J. D. Abbott, O. D. Emery, Robert W. McIntyre, and Virgil A. Mitchell, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, (Indianapolis, Ind.: Wesley Press, 1983).
3. "Public Morals and Social Concerns" (pamphlet, Board of General Superintendents, 1984).

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