

Faith and Facts: Civil and Human Rights

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

- **Jeremiah 7:5-7** – For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.
- **Luke 4:16-19** – When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’
- **See additional Scripture references related to each issue listed below.**

WHAT DOES THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAY?

Civil and Human Rights are a broad and encompassing topic. The topics addressed by The United Methodist Church include those from the list below. For more detailed descriptions of the UMC’s stance on a particular issue, visit the following link: www.umc-gbcs.org/site/c.frLJK2PKLqF/b.2808821.

- **Abolition of Torture** – “The use of detention and imprisonment for the harassment and elimination of political opponents or other dissidents violates fundamental human rights. Furthermore, the mistreatment or torture of persons by governments for any purpose violates Christian teaching and must be condemned and/or opposed by Christians and churches wherever and whenever it occurs” (2008 Book of Discipline, ¶164A). Scripture reference: John 8:1-11
- **Criminal and Restorative Justice** – “In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of an entirely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole. Restorative justice grows out of biblical authority, which emphasizes a right relationship with God, self and community. When such relationships are violated or broken through crime, opportunities are created to make things right” (Social Principles, ¶164H). Scripture reference: Luke 19:1-10
- **Death Penalty** – “We believe the death penalty denies the power of Christ to redeem, restore and transform all human beings. The United Methodist Church is deeply concerned about crime throughout the world and the value of any life taken by a murder or homicide. We believe all human life is sacred and created by God and therefore, we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in the person’s life ends. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and that the possibility of reconciliation with Christ comes through repentance. This gift of reconciliation is offered to all individuals without exception and gives all life new dignity and sacredness. For this reason, we oppose the death penalty (capital punishment) and urge its elimination from all criminal codes” (Social Principles, ¶ 164G). Scripture references: Matthew 5:38-39 and John 8:1-10
- **Education** – “We believe that every person has the right to education. ... In our society, this function can best be fulfilled through public policies that ensure access for all persons to free public elementary and secondary schools and to post-secondary schools of their choice” (Social Principles ¶164E). Scripture reference: Luke 2:46-47

- **Elections and Voting** – “Therefore, it is resolved, to urge churches in our global community to encourage their members to take advantage of the opportunities to vote” (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Encouragement to Vote in Elections," ¶1270).
- **Gun Control** – “A significant total reduction in the numbers of guns in our communities is our goal in ministry” (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Gun Violence," #251). Scripture references: Micah 4:1-5 and Luke 22:47-51
- **Hate Crimes** – “The United Methodist Church must be proactive in resisting hate and teaching young people and all members how to live in our diverse social world without passively accepting the rise of hate and bigotry. When church members do nothing about hate language or horrifying atrocities, such as the murders of James Bird and Matthew Shepherd, and have not actively taught tolerance, we participate in the social support of hate” (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Hate Crimes in the United States," ¶185). Scripture references: Matthew 5:43-48 and Matthew 22:34-40
- **Human Rights** – “Human rights - expressed in affirmations and declarations, treaties and conventions, laws and statutes - are products of struggles to affirm and fulfill the wholeness and fullness of life. As peoples and governments increase the catalogue of rights that are recognized and protected, protections not only increase, but so do our approximations of and striving for human dignity. Human rights are safeguards of peoples and communities against violations of their rights and infringements on their freedoms. To this end, the General Conference called on 'all governments to accept their obligation to uphold human rights by refraining from repression, torture, and violence against any person' and 'to ratify and supplement international conventions, covenants, and protocols addressing human rights in the context of justice and peace'" (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Globalization and Its Impact on Human Dignity and Human Rights," ¶1309). Human dignity is the sum total of all human rights. The violation and denial of human rights to any person, individually or collectively, are an affront to this God-given dignity. Our United Nations ministry and work on international affairs must be about constructing inclusive, integrative and responsible communities that promote a culture of rights” ("Vision and Mission of the United Nations Ministry of the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church," adopted March 6, 1999). Scripture references: Genesis 1:27 and Psalm 8:4-5
- **Racism and Racial Discrimination** – “We recognize that religion, spirituality, and belief can contribute to the promotion of the inherent dignity and worth of the human person and to the eradication of racism." Affirming United Nations principles relating to global racism and xenophobia, the church called on all nations to "consider signing, ratifying or acceding to all relevant international human rights instruments, with a view to international adherence." The resolution gave emphasis to the role that racism plays in the lives of women, children and youth, especially racism's connection to conditions of poverty, violence and discrimination, including access to power and decision-making. (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Global Racism and Xenophobia: Impact on Women, Children and Youth," ¶1286).
Racial inclusiveness is mandated in the Constitution of The United Methodist Church. It is there for two reasons. First, as a reminder that the church "and its predecessor organizations in years past have participated, as institutions, in acts which have perpetuated the sin of racism, which continues to be a barrier to Christian unity." Second, as an effort toward seeking "repentance for past and present sins of racism." (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Act of Repentance for Racism," ¶162.). Scripture references: Isaiah 25:7-8, John 17:20-21, Ephesians 2:19 and Galatians 3:28
- **Religious Liberty** – “Persons must be allowed to live within the constraints and the demands of their convictions. We believe it is the right of a person to be allowed to follow the call of conscience when it becomes impossible to live by both the dictates of the state and the decisions of faith” (2004 Book of Resolutions, "Religious Liberty," ¶1239). Scripture reference: Romans 14:4