

Adult Membership Class Session

Justice and Mercy

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One of the questions asked at baptism is:

“Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression, in whatever form they present themselves?”

To which the person to be baptized (or in the case of children who cannot speak for themselves, their parents) answers **“I do.”**

What are we saying with this affirmative response? What does it mean to lead a Christian life by these standards?

One of the ways that the early Methodists believe that we lived into this part of our baptismal vow was through works of mercy. How would you define works of mercy?

United Methodists, like our early founders, believe that salvation involves a change of heart that leads to a change in our attitudes and actions. Further, Wesley believed that salvation was a continual process of falling deeper in love with God *and* our neighbors. The two entities could not be separated.

Read James 2: 14-26. What does this passage of scripture say about the link between loving God and loving one another? How are faith and good works inseparable?

Acts of mercy involve those actions we take to help alleviate the suffering of others. When we offer a cup of water or meal to those in need - this is an act of mercy. What acts of mercy does your church participate in? How do these works spread the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Another way that United Methodists live into their baptismal vows involve acts of justice. Acts of justice differ from acts of mercy in that they seek to make the Kingdom of God appear on earth by changing the structures in which we live to bring them more in line with God’s vision. In other words, works of justice are not simply acts of service, but those things that we do to bring us into right relationship with God and one another. An example of a work of justice would be seeking a fair, living wage for workers in order to alleviate poverty. What acts of justice does your church participate in?

Read Amos 5:24 and Micah 6:8. What does justice look like? According to the prophets, is seeking justice optional for followers of God?

The purpose of the Church is to glorify God and edify believers while making disciples. The Church isn’t a building, but a transformational group of people on a mission for God. How do acts of justice help the Church make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church has defined our communal stance on issues in order to help us seek justice as a Church. For example: the United Methodist Church believes in protecting the environment - and the Council of Bishops have released a study and plan of action on the topic.

Our communal stance of justice on issues can be found in the Social Principles. Review the Social Principles¹. What stands out to you about them? How do you feel about the United Methodist Church have a communal stance on issues of justice?

The United Methodist Church has resources that support both acts of mercy and acts of justice. One of the six special offerings collected throughout the Church, by action of General Conference, is Peace with Justice Sunday. Fifty percent of the proceeds from this offering stay within the annual conference to empower acts of mercy and justice within our own bounds, with the other fifty percent going to the church at large to help endorse seeking mercy and justice in larger ways than we could as individuals.

One of the four general boards of the church, the General Board of Church and Society, seeks to unite Methodists for public witness and advocacy. This board also supports the ministry of the United Nations and works closely with the General Board of Global Missions to equip the local church.

Often our celebration of Holy Communion ends with the words, "*Make us be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.*" How does seeking both mercy and justice help us live into this sending forth?

Acts of mercy and acts of justice are greatly needed in the world today and it is the call of the Church to live them out. In doing so, we are expressing our belief that God wants to redeem the world as we seek out a new heaven and a new earth. What difference can United Methodists make in the world through acts of mercy and justice?

Resources:

Carder, Kenneth L. *Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009.

General Board of Church and Society. <http://umc-gbcs.org/about-us>.

Joyner, F. Belton. *United Methodist Questions, United Methodist Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.

¹ The Social Principles are available online at: <http://umc-gbcs.org/social-principles>
They can also be found in print as part of the Book of Discipline.