

## Social Principles for Confirmation Class

Adapted from *Social Principles of the United Methodist Church 2009-2012*, Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House and General Board of Church and Society, 2008.

One of the aspects of the United Methodist Church that is appealing to youth and young adults is our focus on social justice. We have often addressed controversial issues both through activism and policy.

According to the Book of Discipline, a social creed was adopted by the ME Church (North) as early as 1908. The EB Church adopted such a creed in 1946. Four years after the United Methodist Church was formed, in 1972, the General Conference adopted a new statement of our social principles.

The Social Principles are not church law, but they are a part of the General Conference as our prophetic witness. The Social Principles are an expression of our commitment to social holiness, which can not be separated from our personal holiness and a life of prayer.

To know who we are today, we must know where we came from. The original Social Principles of the 1908 ME Church (North) were as follows. The Methodist Episcopal Church stands for<sup>1</sup> :

- Equal rights and complete justice for all men in all stations of life.
- The principles of conciliation and arbitration in industrial dissensions.
- The protection of the worker from dangerous machinery, occupational diseases, injuries, and mortality.
- The abolition of child labor.
- Such regulation of the conditions of labor for women
- The suppression of the sweating system.
- The gradual reasonable reduction of hours of labor to the lowest practical point and work for all.
- A Sabbath from work
- A fair living wage and the highest wage that each industry can afford.
- Following the Golden Rule with the mind of Christ.

Currently the Social Principles address issues such as women's rights, civil rights, and protecting the environment.

Unlike other Creeds the Social Creed was intended to be changed as time went on and social contexts were different. Today the Social Principles cover sections including: the natural world, nurturing community, social community, economic community, political community, and world community.

We may not agree with all of the Social Principles, but they are to be studied and taken seriously. We must at least understand the position that the church has taken as a

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<sup>1</sup> Social Principles of the United Methodist Church 2009-2012, (Washington DC: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2009), 5-6.

whole. There is also a lot of freedom that can be found in the social principles, as we may find that church agrees with some of our own social leaning more then we had previously thought.

#### Exercises for Confirmation Classes:

1.) Ask students what some of the things they care about are. Do they think the church cares about some of the same things? Why or why not?

2.) Ask all of the students to stand in the middle of the room. Explain that one side of the room will be for and the other side will be against as you present issues.

- Capital punishment
- Prayer in schools
- Use of Tobacco
- Abortion
- Personal Firearms
- Gambling
- War

After the students divide themselves on each issue explain what the Social Principles state. Be sure to emphasize that as United Methodists we do not need to agree with the Social Principles, only know what it says.

- Capital punishment - is not permissible under any circumstances.
- Prayer in schools - should not be required
- Use of Tobacco - total abstinence is the best policy as tobacco can cause addiction which can impair our relationship with God and other people.
- Abortion - is not acceptable as a means of birth control or gender selection. However, if the mother's life or well-being is endangered then prayer abortion may be considered.
- Personal Firearms - the United Methodist Church does not have a position on personal firearms.  
Gambling - the United Methodist Church believes that gambling is a menace to society.
- War - is incompatible with the gospel and spirit of Christ.

Ask if the students are surprised that The United Methodist Church has positions on these topics? Which of these concerns do you feel strongly about? How do these positions effect how you feel about being part of the United Methodist Church?

3.) Have the youth discuss the following statements:

- "Healthcare is a basic human right"
- "Foreign workers should be ensured the same economic, educational, and social benefits as other citizens"

- “As a church we are called to support the poor and challenge the rich.”
- “We urge policies that encourage inclusion of young people in decision-making processes”

4.) Have the confirmation class look at articles from newspapers and related them to portions of the Social Principles.