

Methodist Articles of Religion

Article 10 – On Good Works

Although good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgment; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

Matthew 5:16; 7:16-20; Romans 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; Titus 3:5.

The General Rules of the Methodist Church

The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to Mr. Wesley, in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

This was the rise of the **United Society**, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called **classes**, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the **leader**. It is his duty:

1. To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order: (1) to inquire how their souls prosper; (2) to advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require; (3) to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.
2. To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order: (1) to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved; (2) to pay the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies: "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

The taking of the name of God in vain.

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness: buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.
Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.

Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing;
the using many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking things on usury—i.e., unlawful interest.

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:

The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.
Softness and needless self-indulgence.

Laying up treasure upon earth.

Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.
It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison.

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine that "we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it."

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another, helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake.

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

The public worship of God.

The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.

The Supper of the Lord.

Family and private prayer.

Searching the Scriptures.

Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

Social Principles

The Methodist Social Creed

I. Our Heritage.

The interest of The Methodist Church in social welfare springs from the gospel, and from the labors of John Wesley, who ministered to the physical, intellectual, and social needs of the people to whom he preached the gospel of personal redemption.

In our historic position we have sought to follow Christ in bringing the whole of life, with its activities, possessions, and relationships, into conformity with the will of God.

As Methodists we have an obligation to affirm our position on social and economic questions.

II. Our Theological Basis

The Methodist Church must view the perplexing times and problems which we face today in the light of the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus taught us to love our neighbours and seek justice for them as well as for ourselves. To be silent in the face of need, injustice, and exploitation is to deny him.

We believe that God is Father of all peoples and races, that Jesus Christ is his son, that all men are brothers, and that each person is of infinite worth as a child of God.

We believe that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof". Our own capacities and all we possess are gifts of the Creator, and should be held and used in stewardship to him.

We believe that God in Christ is seeking to redeem all men and also society. This redemption is a continuing necessity.

We believe that the grace of God in Christ is available for redemption from individual and social sins as well in penitence and obedience to do his holy will.

We believe that all persons have supreme value in the sight of God, and ought to be so regarded by us. We test all institutions and practices by their effect upon persons. Since Jesus died for the redemption of all men, we believe we should live to help save man from sin and from every influence which would harm or destroy him.

III. Our Declaration of Social Concern

Applying the foregoing principles, The Methodist Church declares itself as follows :

A. The Family

We seek equal rights and justice for all persons; protection of the individual and the family by high standards of morality; Christian education for marriage, parenthood, and the home; adequate housing; improved marriage and divorce laws.

We believe that the church must be vitally concerned with the health and welfare needs of all people, first within the family, and where necessary, through institutional care with high standards of scientific service and Christian dedication.

We believe that planned parenthood, practiced with respect to human life, fulfills rather than violates the will of God. It is the duty of each married couple prayerfully and responsibly to seek parenthood, avert it, or defer it, in accordance with the best expression of their Christian love. Families in all parts of the world should have available to them the necessary information and medical assistance for birth control through public and private programmes. This issue must be seen in reference to the pressing population problem now before the whole world.

We believe it is the plain responsibility of the family, as it is also the deep concern of the community, that the welfare of children whose mothers are employed outside the home be safeguarded. This responsibility includes provision for the protection, education, spiritual nurture, and wholesome recreation of every child, and for religious and educational programmes which will secure these ends.

B. Economic Life

1. Christianity and the Economic Order

With full acknowledgement of stewardship under God and accountability to him, we stand for the acquisition of property by moral processes and the right to private ownership thereof. We refuse to identify Christianity with any economic system. We are under obligation to test each aspect of every economic order by the commands of Christ and judge its practices by the Christian gospel. We believe that it is our duty not only to bring Christ to the individual, but also to bring the increasingly technological society within which we live more nearly into conformity with the teachings of Christ. We believe that a free democratic way of life, influenced by Christian principles, can bring to mankind a society in which liberty is preserved, justice established, and brotherhood achieved.

We believe in the use of such opportunities for political action as are consistent with Christian principles. We urge Christians to view political responsibilities as an opportunity for Christian witness and service.

2. *Responsible User of Power*

The Christian point of view demands that concentrations of power in government, labour, business, and religious organisations be used responsibly. The task of the church in this regard is to help people in positions of power and the organisations which they serve to achieve and exercise a high level of social responsibility.

3. *Poverty and Unemployment*

We believe that the economic development which makes possible material plenty for all imposes upon us great moral responsibility, in that the physical and spiritual development of millions of persons throughout the world is hindered by poverty. We therefore stand for the eradication of poverty everywhere.

We believe it is our Christian duty to provide opportunities for education and training for people to earn a living for themselves and their dependents, so that they may take advantage of new technology.

Lack of significant employment tends to destroy human self-respect. We believe that employable workers must be safeguarded from enforced unemployment.

4. *Wealth*

We recognise the perils of prosperity. Our Lord has told us that we cannot serve God and mammon. As Christians we must examine earnestly before God our personal and business practices, lest we adopt the standards and assumptions of a materialistic society. Churches and their institutions as well as individuals own property, invest funds, and employ labour. In these areas practices and relationships must conform to the highest Christian standards.

5. *Working Conditions*

We oppose all forms of social, economic, and moral waste. We urge the protection of the worker from dangerous and unsanitary working conditions, and from occupational diseases.

We stand for reasonable hours of labour, for just wages, for a fair day's work, for a fair day's wages, for just working conditions, for periods of leisure, and for an equitable division of the product of industry.

We believe special protection should be provided for women and children, as well as migrant workers and others especially vulnerable to exploitation.

6. *Social Benefits for Workers*

We stand for public and private programmes of economic security for old age, for adequate insurance covering sickness and injury to the worker, and for increased protection against those preventable conditions which produce want.

7. *The Right to Organise for Collective Bargaining*

We stand for the right of employees and employers to organise for collective bargaining, protection of both in the exercise of their right, the responsibility of both to bargain in good faith, and the

obligation of both to work for the public good.

8. *Town and Country Life*

We recognise the basic significance of town and country areas in relation to population supply, natural resources, community life, and Christian culture. We believe farmers, other agricultural workers, and those displaced by mechanisation should have opportunity to earn a fair income.

Methodism, because of its large town and country membership and worldwide impact, must lead in developing an adequate Christian programme in rural areas everywhere. This should pertain to people in their relationship to God, to the stewardship of the soil and the conservation of all natural resources, and to family, church, and community welfare.

9. *Urban Life*

We believe the inner city to be a mission field crying out for bold new creative ways of witness. Here is emerging a pagan generation committed to values that run counter to those of Christ. Therefore we call our urban congregation to a deeper involvement in neighbourhood life. We call the church to come into the city for Christ's sake, there to touch all forgotten persons with his passion.

10. *Christian Vocation*

We believe that every employable person so far as possible should be engaged in some vocation productive of common good. Every such vocation should be viewed as a Christian calling by those who pursue it as well as by those who receive its benefits, and our daily work should be regarded as a sphere of service to God. The creative use of leisure is also a major responsibility for the Christian.

C. *The Church and General Welfare*

The Church is called to be a redeeming community of discerning Christian love – a fellowship of those who confess their sin, who rejoice in the love of God freely given, and who commit themselves continually to spiritual excellence in every facet of life.

1. *Alcohol Problems*

We believe that the Christian principle of love for God and neighbour calls us to abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages and to minister to those victimised by their use. The use of beverage alcohol imperils the abundant life to which Christ calls us. This is especially true in an organised and mechanised society. Individuals and families are destroyed by its use. We join with men of good conscience who seek to overcome the social, economic, and moral waste which this indulgence has created. The church must be a healing and redemptive fellowship for those who suffer because of beverage alcohol.

2. *Crime and Rehabilitation*

We stand for the application of the redemptive principle in treating law offenders and for study and action directed towards the improvement of laws, correctional facilities and services, and court procedures in order to facilitate rehabilitation. For this reason we deplore capital punishment.

We do not believe an individual should be excused from his personal responsibility to society; but we recognise that crime, and in particular juvenile delinquency leading to crime, is often a result of family failure and bad social conditions. Christian citizens and churches have a special opportunity and

responsibility for creating those conditions of family life and social surroundings, wholesome recreation, vocational training, personal counselling and social adjustment by which crime may be reduced and offenders rehabilitated and redeemed by God's grace.

3. *Gambling*

We stand for the achievement of community and personal standards, which make unnecessary the resort to petty or commercial gambling as a recreation, escape, or producer of public or charitable revenue. As an act of faith and love, Christians should abstain from all gambling, and should participate in efforts to minister to those victimised by the practice, including compulsive gamblers.

4. *Mental Health and Medical Care*

We stand for the provision of adequate medical care for all people, with special attention being given the aging, the young, and minority and low income groups. We strongly favour the healing ministries of the church and other private groups. We support our government, individuals, and foundations in required research in public health; and we support legislation to meet these needs.

We believe that adequate facilities with professionally trained staff must be made available for the emotionally ill and mentally retarded of every community. We also believe that churches may become spiritual centres of healing through worship, pastoral concern, and volunteer service for the emotionally ill.

5. *Drug Abuse*

We seek to overcome those social and psychological forces which lead so large a part of our society to unhealthful dependence upon tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. The illicit traffic in drugs cannot be tolerated. Society must provide through public and private facilities for the treatment, rehabilitation, and after-care of narcotic addicts and other victims of drug abuse.

6. *Sex in Christian Life*

We believe that sexual intercourse within holy matrimony with fidelity and love is a sacred experience and constitutes a needed expression of affection. We also believe that sexual intercourse outside the bonds of matrimony is contrary to the will of God. The outrageous exploitation of the strong forces underlying sexual experience is a destructive element of our culture. It not only distorts the meaning of sex experience but constitutes a blasphemous disregard of God's purpose for men and women. A case in point is the distribution of hard-core pornographic and other sex-exploitative material. We advocate through educational efforts in home, church, and school designed to elevate our whole understanding of the meaning of sexual experience.

7. *Social Welfare*

We believe that meeting human need is both a private and a community responsibility. Adequate public assistance should be made available to all persons solely on the basis of need. Every individual should provide for his own needs and share responsibility for the needs of others to the full extent of his ability, but we believe that no person in an affluent society should be demoralised because of unmet needs.

D. *Human Rights*

1. *Freedom from Discrimination*

We stand for equal rights for all racial, cultural, and religious groups, and insist that the principles set forth in this creed apply to all alike. The right to choose a home, enter a school, secure employment, vote, and have access to public accommodations should be guaranteed to all regardless of race, culture, national origin, social class, or religion. Neither should any person be denied equal political, economic, or legal rights or opportunities because of sex.

That the church should ever refuse access to worship or membership in its fellowship to any person because of race, colour, or national origin is contrary to our fundamental Christian convictions.

2. *Civil Liberties and Civil Rights*

We stand for freedom of speech, assembly, and press and broadcasting. The fundamental responsibility in the use of these freedoms and the justification of their exercise is adherence to the truth.

We stand for the right of all individuals and groups to advocate any peaceful and constitutional method for the solution of the problems that confront society.

E. *Peace and World Order*

We believe that Christianity cannot be nationalistic; it must be universal in its outlook and appeal. The influence of the church must always be on the side of every effort seeking to remove those conditions of heart and mind, of social, economic, and international injustice, and of ideological conflict in which wars begin.

We must actively and constantly create the conditions of peace. We stand for the promotion of understanding, reconciliation, and good will; the relief of suffering, the lifting of living standards around the world; concern for the freedom and welfare of dependent and subject persons; the removal of racial tensions; the taking of steps towards disarmament; and the support of patient negotiations.

1. *International Organisations*

We believe the United Nations is a working centre of international co-operation which provides the most hopeful avenue leading to peace and world order. The United Nations with its related agencies should be strengthened through governmental co-operation and support. This effort deserves the support of all Christians. The church itself, as a world fellowship, makes an important contribution to the development of world order.

2. *The Christian and Military Service*

The Methodist Church, true to the principles of the New Testament, teaches respect for properly constituted civil authority. It encourages both love of country and love of all men. Believing that government rests upon the support of its conscientious citizens, it holds within its fellowship those who sincerely differ as to the Christian duty in regard to military service. We ask and claim exemption by legal processes from all forms of military preparation or service for all religious conscientious objectors, as for those of the historic peace churches. We recognise the right of the individual to answer the call of his government according to the dictates of his Christian conscience. We also recognise that non-violent resistance can be a valid form of Christian witness. In all of these

situations members of the Methodist Church have the authority and support of their church.

IV. Our Mandate: Ready, Study, Apply

We recommend that this Social Creed be presented to our congregations orally or in printed form at least once a year, and that frequent references be made to it. Every local church shall encourage the study of the Social Creed and seek to apply its principles.

All resources above sourced from The Book of Discipline of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, 2004 edition