

PART III

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

†81. Our Heritage

The interest of The Methodist Church in social welfare springs from the gospel, and from the labours 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, economic, political and environmental issues and challenges.

†82. 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 or passive 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 persons are created in the image of God and are of infinite worth.

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 persons and society from the consequences of sin. This redemption is a continuing necessity.

We believe that the grace of God in Christ is available for redemption from individual and social sin as we seek 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 God’s standard as in the Holy Scripture by their effect upon persons.

Since Jesus died for the redemption of all humanity, we believe we should live to help save humanity from sin and from every harmful or destructive influence.

†83. Our Social Principles

The following Social Principles are formulated as a response of The Methodist Church in Malaysia to human issues in the contemporary world. They are based on a biblical and theological foundation enriched by our Methodist tradition. The Social Principles call on all members of The Methodist Church to a prayerful response of faith and practice. The categories of social principles are as follow:

- The Family and Marriage (†84)
- Christianity and The Economic Order (†85)
- Church and General Welfare (†86)
- Human Rights and Responsibilities (†87)
- Peace and World Order (†88)
- Political Life (†89)

†84. The Family and Marriage

We affirm the importance and sanctity of the family. We believe that the healthy family unit forms a basic social environment in which responsible teachings can be imparted, moral values disseminated, and where love is shared and the worth of each person is affirmed. We deplore and reject values and morals which undermine the sanctity of family life. We also understand the family as encompassing a wider range of options than that of the two-generational unit of parents and children, including the extended family, families with adopted children, single parents, stepfamilies, and couples without children.

1. Marriage and Divorce

- a. We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant which is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and shared fidelity between a man and a woman. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards in marriage. We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman, thus we do not support same sex marriage as it is against Christian teachings. We do not allow Christians to practice polygamous marriage.

- b. We affirm that matrimonial service in the Church should only be conducted for Christians. We do not permit non-believers taking the marriage covenant in the Church before God.
- c. We believe that God's plan is for lifelong, faithful marriages. The Church must be at the forefront of premarital and post-marital counselling in order to create and preserve strong marriages. We do not encourage divorce and always seek for reconciliation of both parties involved. However, when a married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel and prayer, divorce is a regrettable alternative in the midst of brokenness.
- d. It is recommended that methods of mediation be used to minimise the adversarial nature and fault-finding that are often part of our current judicial processes. Although divorce publicly declares that a marriage no longer exists, other covenantal relationships resulting from the marriage remain, such as the nurture and support of children and extended family ties. We urge respectful negotiations in deciding the custody of minor children and support the consideration of either or both parents for this responsibility in that custody not be reduced to financial support, control, or manipulation and retaliation. The welfare of each child is the most important consideration. We encourage an intentional commitment of the Church and society to minister compassionately to those in the process of divorce, as well as members of divorced and remarried families, in a community of faith where God's grace is shared by all.

2. *Single Persons*

We affirm the integrity of single persons, and we reject all social practices that discriminate or social attitudes that are prejudicial against persons because they are single.

3. *Parent and Child Relationship*

- a. We believe the family to be the basic human community through which persons are nurtured and sustained in mutual love, responsibility, respect, and fidelity. We believe that the parental relationship is the primary relationship upon which children are welcome members to the family. We affirm the importance of both fathers and mothers for all children.

- b. We affirm the shared responsibility for parenting by fathers and mothers and encourage social, economic, and religious efforts to enhance and strengthen relationships within families in order that every member may be nurtured and assisted toward complete personhood.
- c. We recognise the burden of single parent families and their need for understanding, care and support from the community and the Church.
- d. We view with concern the diminishing time available for families to be together in our modern society. Families need to give priority to spending quality time together for family life enrichment, and in worship and recreation.
- e. We believe that children have a responsibility to love, honour, respect and care for their parents, especially in sickness and old age.

4. *God's Gift of Sex*

- a. We recognise that human sexuality is a gift of God. We believe that sexual intercourse is a sacred experience and constitutes a needed expression of affection only when it is accompanied by the love and fidelity of a holy matrimony between a man and a woman.
- b. We call all persons to the disciplined, responsible fulfilment of themselves, others, and society in the stewardship of this gift. We believe that sexual relationships outside the bonds of matrimony are contrary to the will of God.
- c. We deplore all forms of commercialisation and exploitation of sex with their consequent degradation of the human personhood. The distribution of pornographic and other sex-exploitative material should always be banned.
- d. We advocate thorough educational efforts in home, church, and school designed to elevate our whole understanding of the meaning of sexuality and sexual experience.
- e. We consider the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teachings. However, we do recognise that homosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. The Church is committed to provide counselling, healing and guidance as well as the spiritual and emotional support of a caring fellowship.

- f. We believe that individuals who are confused about their sexual identity need the healing and transforming power of God's grace rather than sex-change operations.

5. *Birth Control and Abortion*

- a. We believe that planned parenthood, practiced with respect for human life, fulfils rather than violates the will of God. It is the duty of each married couple to prayerfully and responsibly seek parenthood, avert it, or defer it in accordance with the best expression of their Christian love.
- b. We affirm that life begins at conception and that the human embryo is not simply a mass of tissue that has the potential. We therefore do not subscribe to abortion except on medical grounds under proper medical procedures. We call on all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry in situations in which abortion may be contemplated and to seek medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counselling.
- c. We cannot affirm abortion as an acceptable means of birth control, and we unconditionally reject it as a means of gender selection. Decision concerning abortion should be made only after thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel.

6. *Infertility and Assisted Method of Reproduction*

- a. We affirm that every child is a gift from God and not a right to be demanded from God. Procreation is always by the grace of God and not simply a product of modern science even when assisted methods of human reproduction are used.
- b. We recognise that infertility may be cause of suffering for some married couples. We accept the procedures of assisted human reproduction which can be regarded as methods to assist natural reproduction as long as the egg or sperms of another person are not used. We do not accept surrogate parenthood.
- c. Married couples who are burdened with the problem of infertility should prayerfully examine their motives for wanting a child and consider and understand the medical, spiritual, moral and legal implications of assisted reproductive procedures.
- d. We are also concerned that assisted methods of human

reproduction may be used for sex selection or by single persons to have a child. We believe that this is not God's divine plan for the family.

7. Adoption

Children are a gift from God to be welcomed and received. We recognise that some circumstances of birth and childhood make the rearing of a child difficult. We affirm and support the birth parent(s) whose choice is to allow the child to be adopted. We recognise the agony, strength, and courage of the birth parent(s) who choose(s) in hope, love and prayer to offer the child for adoption. In addition, we also recognise the anxiety, strength, and courage of those who choose in hope, love and prayer to be able to care for a child. We affirm and support the use of proper legal procedures. When appropriate and possible, we encourage open adoption so that a child may know all information and people related to the child, both biologically and relationally. We affirm that the adopted children should be given the same legal and social benefits.

†85. Christianity and The Economic Order

With full acknowledgment 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 humankind a society in which liberty is preserved, justice established, and kindredship achieved.

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

1. Responsible Use 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.

2. *Corruption*

We are gravely concerned about the seriousness of problems and threats posed by corruption to the stability and security of societies, undermining the institutions and values of democracy, ethical values and justice and jeopardising sustainable development, the rule of law and the administration of justice. We are also seriously concerned that most of the time, the least privileged bear the highest cost of corruption when the state's financial resources are inefficiently allocated and wasted. The Church stands against all forms of corruption in her endeavour to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. The Church advocates and promotes integrity, accountability and proper management of public affairs and public property and to this end the Church rejects and will not participate in the giving and receiving of bribes. The Church supports all comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach to prevent and combat corruption effectively.

3. *Property and Possessions*

We believe that ownership of property is a trusteeship under God and all our possessions are a trust from God to be managed responsibly. It is contrary to our Christian faith for any person or group of persons to have exclusive and arbitrary control of any part of the created universe.

4. *The Acquisition of 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 practice, 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. *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.

6. *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, domestic maids and others especially vulnerable to exploitation.

7. *Social Benefit 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.

8. *The Right to Organise Collective Bargaining*

We stand for the right of employees and employers alike 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.

9. *Simple Lifestyle and Consumerism*

We call on all Christians to adopt a simple lifestyle and to be ever conscious and vigilant against the influence of consumerism which thrives on pride and greed. The simple lifestyle is not necessarily a call to an ascetic life. It is a spiritual discipline which increases our awareness of God's presence and providence in our lives. A simple

lifestyle frees us to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor and the beauty of God's world.

10. Urban and Rural Life

We recognise the basic significance of urban and rural 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 the opportunity to earn a fair income.

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

11. Urban Mission

We believe the inner city to be a mission field crying out for bold new creative way of witness. Here is emerging a pagan generation committed to values that run counter to those of the 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.

12. 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 a sphere of service to God. The creative use of leisure is also a major responsibility for the Christian.

†86. 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 alcoholic beverages imperils the abundant life to which Christ calls us. Individuals and families are destroyed by its use. We join with people of good conscience who seek to overcome the social, economic, and moral waste, which this indulgence has created. The Church must become a healing and redemptive fellowship for those who suffer because of alcoholism.

2. *Crime and Rehabilitation*

We stand for application of the redemptive principle in treating law offenders and for study and action directed toward 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*

Gambling is a menace to society, deadly to the best interest of moral, social, economic, and spiritual life, and destructive of good government. As an act of faith and concern, Christians should abstain from gambling and should strive to minister to those victimised by the practice. Where gambling has become addictive, the Church will encourage such individuals to receive therapeutic assistance so that the individual's energies may be redirected into positive and constructive ends. The Church should promote standards and personal lifestyles that would make unnecessary and undesirable the resort to commercial gambling including public lotteries as a recreation, as an escape, or as a means of producing public revenue or funds for support of charities or government.

4. *Mental Health and Medical Care*

We stand for the provision of adequate medical care for all people, with special attention being given to 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 the 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 unhealthy dependence upon tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. The illicit use of 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 drugs abuse.

6. *Science and Technology*

We recognise science as a legitimate interpretation of God's natural world. We affirm the validity of the claims of science in describing the natural world, although we preclude science from making authoritative claims about theological issues. We recognise technology as a legitimate use of God's natural world when such use enhances human life and enables all of God's children to develop their God-given creative potential without violating our ethical convictions about the relationships of humanity to the natural world.

In acknowledging the important roles of science and technology, however, we also believe that theological understandings of human experience are crucial to a full understanding of the place of humanity in the universe. Science and theology are complementary rather than mutually incompatible. We therefore encourage dialogue between the scientific and theological communities and seek the kind of participation that will enable humanity to sustain life on earth and, by God's grace, increase the quality of our common lives together.

7. *Tobacco*

We affirm our historic tradition of high standards of personal discipline and social responsibility. In light of the over-whelming evidence that tobacco smoking is hazardous to the health of persons of all ages, we recommend total abstinence from the use of tobacco. We urge that our educational and communication resources be utilised to support and encourage such abstinence. Further, we recognise the harmful effects of passive smoking and support the restriction of smoking in public areas and workplaces.

8. *Medical Experimentation*

Physical and mental health has been greatly enhanced through discoveries by medical science. It is imperative, however, that governments and the medical profession carefully enforce the requirements of the prevailing medical research standard, maintaining rigid controls in testing new technologies and drugs utilising human beings. The standard requires that those engaged in research shall use human beings as research subjects only after obtaining full, rational, and informed consent.

9. *Genetic Technology*

The responsibility of humankind to God's creation challenges us to deal carefully with the possibilities of genetic research and technology. We welcome the use of genetic technology for meeting fundamental human needs for health, a safe environment, and an adequate food supply. We oppose the cloning of humans and the genetic manipulation of the gender of an unborn child. Because of the effects of genetic technologies on all life, we call for effective guidelines and public accountability to safeguard against any action that might lead to abuse of these technologies, including political or military ends. We recognise that cautious, well-intended use of genetic technologies may sometimes lead to unanticipated harmful consequences.

Human gene therapies that produce changes that cannot be passed to offspring (somatic therapy) should be limited to the alleviation of suffering caused by disease. Genetic therapies for eugenic choices or that produces waste embryos are deplored. Genetic data of individuals and their families should be kept secret and held in strict confidence unless confidentiality is waived by the individual or by his or her family, or unless the collection and use of genetic identifi-

cation data is supported by an appropriate court order. Because its long-term effects are uncertain, we oppose genetic therapy that result in changes that can be passed to offspring (germ-line therapy).

10. Information Communication Technology

Because effective personal communication is a key to being a responsible and empowered member of society, and because of the power afforded by information communication technologies to shape society and enable individuals to participate more fully, we believe that access to these technologies is a basic right.

Information communication technologies provide us with information, entertainment, and a voice in society. They can be used to enhance our quality of life and provide us with a means to interact with each other, our government, and people and cultures all over the world. Most information about world events comes to us by the broadcast, cable, print media, and the internet. Concentrating the control of media to large commercial interests limits our choices and often provides a distorted view of human values. Therefore, we support the regulation of media communication technologies to ensure a variety of independent information sources that provides for the public good.

Personal communication technologies such as the Internet allow persons to communicate with each other and access vast information resources that can have commercial, cultural, political and personal value. While the Internet can be used to nurture minds and spirits of children and adults, it is in danger of being overrun with commercial interests and is used by some to distribute inappropriate, immoral and illegal material. Therefore, the Internet must be managed responsibly in order to maximise its benefits while minimising its risks, especially for children.

Denying access in today's world to basic information communication technologies like the Internet due to their cost or availability, limits people's participation in their government and society. We support the goal of universal access to telephone and Internet services at an affordable price.

11. Suicide

We believe that suicide is not the way a human life should end. The Church, therefore, does not condone suicide. Nevertheless, suicide is often the result of untreated depression, or untreated pain and

suffering. The Church has an obligation to see that all persons have access to needed pastoral and medical care and therapy in those circumstances that lead to loss of self-worth, suicidal despair, and/or the desire to seek physician-assisted suicide. We encourage the Church to provide education to address the biblical, theological, social, and ethical issues related to death and dying, including suicide.

A Christian perspective on suicide begins with an affirmation of faith that nothing, including suicide, separates us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). Therefore, we deplore the condemnation of people who commit suicide, and we consider unjust the stigma that so often falls on surviving family and friends.

We encourage pastors and faith communities to address these issues through preaching and teaching. We urge pastors and faith communities to provide pastoral care to those at risk, survivors, and their families who have lost loved ones to suicide, seeking always to remove the oppressive stigma around suicide. The Church opposes assisted suicide and euthanasia.

12. Conservation of Natural Resources

We support and encourage policies aimed at conservation of our natural resources, the prevention of pollution of our air, water and soil, the protection of wild life and the humane treatment of animals.

This involves reducing, reusing and recycling of by-products so as to minimise consumption of raw material inputs that require energy from fossil fuels to mine, process, and transport and manufacture products. The overarching requirement is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from direct use of fossil fuel and also the products derived from fossil fuels such as plastics, fertilisers and pesticides. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will help in slowing down climate change, global warming and enhance sustainability of the environment and our planet. We encourage our members to reduce their carbon footprints in their daily activities.

†87. Human Rights and Responsibilities

1. Freedom from Discrimination

We stand for equal rights for all racial, cultural, and religious groups, and insist that the principles set forth herein apply to all alike. The

right to choose a home, enter a school, secure employment, promotion, 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, race or religion.

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 Christians convictions.

2. *Civil Liberties*

We stand for freedom of speech, assembly, press, broadcasting and all other forms of communications media. 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.

3. *Multi-Religious Understanding*

Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society. We believe that everyone is equal in God's sight regardless of social status, creed, race, sex or age. We believe that it is healthy and necessary to engage in open and honest dialogue with persons of other faiths in a spirit of love, mutual respect and sensitivity. We believe in religious freedom for all, and for every adult individual to have the right to choose and practise the religion of his or her choice.

We affirm the right of religious groups to practise their faith as well as share their faith with others. We also affirm the right of religious groups to practise their faith without undue legal, political or financial encumbrances or any form of harassment or threat from any party.

4. *Multi-Racial Harmony*

We believe that the foundation of racial harmony is love, mutual respect and acceptance of our neighbours regardless of their race, culture, political persuasions or religious beliefs.

We recognise that racial as well as religious and cultural pride and prejudice when left unchecked is a potential source of inter-racial and inter-religious strife and conflict.

5. *Rights of Children*

We recognise that parents or guardians and society in general have special obligations to children. Children should not be deprived of education, food, shelter, clothing, health care, emotional wellbeing and religion. They must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse.

6. *Rights of Young People*

We recognise that generally young people are energetic, adventurous and creative. They need respect, acceptance, proper guidance and mentoring from the adults. Young people should neither be deprived of employment nor exploited because of their inexperience.

Christian parents and guardians and the Church have the responsibility to ensure that young people receive premarital counselling and education consistent with Christian morality, including faithfulness in marriage and abstinence in singleness.

7. *Rights of the Elderly*

We advocate social policies that integrate the seniors into the life of the total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and non-discriminatory employment opportunities, educational and service opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing within the existing communities. We recognise that children have the obligation to take proper care of their aged parents.

8. *Rights of Women*

We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. Women should therefore be given equal treatment in employment, promotion, remuneration, compensation and citizenship privileges. We recognise the importance of women in decision-making and leadership positions at all levels of life.

Women should be protected from all forms of violence, abuse and discrimination in any sector of society.

9. *Rights of Ethnic Minorities*

We affirm the rights of those who belong to ethnic minorities. They should be given equal treatment in employment, promotion, remuneration, compensation, education, voting, in positions of leadership and all other citizenship privileges, including freedom of religion. They should not be marginalised, intimidated or discriminated by any party in whatever way.

10. Rights of Persons with Disabilities

We recognise and affirm the full humanity and personhood of all individuals with mental, physical, developmental, neurological, and psychological conditions or disabilities. We affirm their rightful place in both the Church and society. We also affirm the responsibility of the Church and society to minister to their needs so as to enable them to participate fully in the community of faith and in the society at large.

11. Rights of Persons Living with Human Immune Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

We affirm that all individuals living with HIV/AIDS should be treated with dignity and respect. The Church and the society have the responsibility to minister to and with these individuals and their families regardless of how the disease was contracted. We support their right to employment, appropriate medical care, full participation in public education, and full participation in the Church.

We urge the Church to be actively involved in the prevention of the spread of AIDS by providing educational opportunities to the congregation and the community. The Church should be available to provide counselling to the affected individuals and their families.

12. Rights of Migrant Workers and Domestic Maids

We recognise the roles the migrant workers and domestic maids play in our country. We stand for reasonable hours of work, for fair wages and for just and proper working conditions. They should be treated with respect and dignity. They should not be discriminated and exploited in whatever way.

†88. 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 subjected persons; the removal of racial tensions; the taking of steps towards disarmament; and the support of patient negotiations.

1. International Organisation

We believe that the United Nations, The Commonwealth of Nations and ASEAN are working centres of international co-operation which provide the most hopeful avenues leading to peace and world order. The United Nations, The Commonwealth of Nations and ASEAN, with their 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's 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 and 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.

†89. Political Life

1. Basic Freedom and Human Rights

- a. We affirm our historic concern for the world as our parish and seek the welfare of all people.
- b. We hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to free and fair elections and to the freedom of speech, religion, assembly, communications media, and petition for redress of grievances without fear of reprisal; to the right to privacy; and to the guarantee of the rights to adequate food, clothing, shelter, education, and health care. The form and the leaders of all governments should be determined by exercise of the right to vote guaranteed to all adult citizens. We also strongly reject domestic surveillance and intimidation of political opponents by governments in power and all other misuses of

elective or appointive offices. 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.

2. Political Responsibility

- a. We believe that all governments are under the sovereignty of God.
- b. We believe that the strength of a political system depends upon the full and willing participation of its citizens.
- c. We believe that all Christians should exercise and discharge their duty and power to register and vote and participate in the political process.

3. Religion and State Relations

- a. We believe in interaction between religious institution and State.
- b. The separation of religion and State means no organic union of the two, but it does permit interaction. The religious bodies should continually exert a strong moral influence upon the State, by supporting policies and programmes which are just and compassionate and opposing policies and programmes which are not.
- c. We will uplift all those in authority who serve the public in our prayers and we support their efforts to secure justice, benefits, and equal opportunities for all people.
- d. We believe that the State should not use its authority to promote a particular religious belief (including atheism), but it should leave citizens free to practise their own religious convictions.
- e. We believe that the State should not attempt to control religion, nor should religion seek to dominate the State. The rightful and vital separation of religion and state, which has served the cause of religious liberty, should not be misconstrued as the abolition of all religious expression from public life.

4. Freedom of Information

Citizens of all countries should have access to all essential informa-

tion regarding their government and its policies. Illegal and unconscionable activities directed against persons or groups by their own governments must not be justified or kept secret, even under the guise of national security.

5. *Education*

We believe that every person has the right to education. We also believe that the responsibility for education of the young rests with the family, faith communities, and the government. In 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. The Government should make available free education to the public throughout.

6. *Civil Obedience and Civil Disobedience*

- a. Governments and laws should be servants of God and of human beings. Citizens have a duty to abide by laws duly adopted by orderly and just process of government. But governments, no less than individuals, are subject to the judgment of God. Therefore, we recognise the right of individuals to dissent when acting under the constraint of conscience and, after having exhausted all legal recourse, to resist or disobey laws that they deem to be unjust and that are discriminately enforced. Even then, respect for law should be shown by refraining from violence and by being willing to accept the cost of disobedience. We do not encourage or condone, under any circumstances, any form of violent protest or action against anyone. We offer our prayers for those in rightful authority who serve the public, and we support their efforts to afford justice and equal opportunity for all people. We assert the duty of churches to support those who suffer because of their stand of conscience represented by non-violent beliefs or acts. We urge the government to ensure civil rights to persons in legal jeopardy because of those non-violent acts.
- b. We respect properly constituted civil authority and encourage both love of country and love of all people. We believe that the defence of the country is the responsibility of every able-bodied citizen.

7. *Criminal and Restorative Justice*

- a. We support governmental measures designed to reduce and eliminate crime that are consistent with respect for the basic

freedom of persons to protect all persons from encroachment upon their personal and property rights.

- b. We reject all misuse of these mechanisms, including their use for the purpose of revenge or for persecuting or intimidating those whose race, appearance, lifestyle, economic condition, or beliefs differ from those in authority. We support measures designed to remove the social conditions that lead to crime, and we encourage continued positive interaction between law enforcement officials and members of the community at large.
- c. In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole. Restoration justice grows out of biblical authority, which emphasises a right relationship with God, self, and community. When such relationships are violated or broken through crime, opportunities are created to make things right.
- d. Most criminal justice systems around the world are retributive. These retributive justice systems profess to hold the offender accountable to the state and use punishment as the equalising tool for accountability. In contrast, restorative justice seeks to hold the offender accountable to the victimised person, and to the disrupted community. Through God's transforming power, restorative justice seeks to repair the damage, right the wrong, and bring healing to all involved, including the victim, the offender, the families, and the community.

†90. Our Social Creed

We believe in God, Creator of the World; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sins in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the seniors, and people with disabilities; to improvement

of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God's Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

†91. Our Mandate: Read, 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.