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Suggested Title: The Girl Child

General Church Budget Implications: No

Global Implications: Yes

NEW: The Girl Child

WHEREAS, Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs,” (Matthew 19:14); and

WHEREAS, The United Methodist Church affirms the rights of children and of women and recognizes that “children are now acknowledged to be full human beings in their own right, but beings to whom adults and society in general have special obligations,” that “children have the rights to food, shelter, clothing, health care, and emotional well-being as do adults,” that “in particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional, and sexual exploitation and abuse,” and that women are affirmed as equal to men “in every aspect of their common life” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, ¶162C, F); and

WHEREAS, there are challenges faced by all children, but there are also challenges that are unique to girls; and

WHEREAS, although girlhood should be a time of growth and learning as the girls of today develop into the women of tomorrow, for millions of girls it is a time of perilous dangers; and

WHEREAS, in many societies, girls are not as valued as boys from the time of birth. Girls everywhere may often have limited opportunities in education, training, and employment. In addition, many face dangerous practices, such as female genital mutilation/cutting (UN Women, 2017) and child marriage that often lead to psychological trauma, infection by sexually

transmitted diseases, and frequent pregnancies, jeopardizing their health and economic well-being. Furthermore, many girls are forced into hazardous and exploitative work situations, while bearing most if not all the burden of housework at home; and

WHEREAS, according to reports from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and the International Labour Organization:

1. Decades after commitments and reaffirmations of those commitments have been made to ensure a quality education for every child, an estimated 34.3 million girls of primary school age and 30 million girls of lower secondary school age are still denied this right (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018);
2. The ILO estimates that 152 million children between 5 and 17 years of age are engaged in child labor. Many of these children are reportedly engaged in work that is likely to harm their health, safety, or moral development (International Labour Organization, 2017);
3. Given its hidden nature, it is impossible to have reliable figures on how many children are globally exploited as domestic workers. According to the ILO, though, more girl-children under 16 are in domestic service than in any other category of child labor. Common risks children face in domestic service are long and tiring working days, use of toxic chemicals, carrying heavy loads, handling dangerous items such as knives, axes, and hot pans, insufficient or inadequate food and accommodations, and humiliating or degrading treatment, including physical and verbal violence and sexual abuse (International Labour Organization, 2012);

4. It is estimated that more than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, primarily in African countries and, to a lesser extent, in some Middle Eastern countries (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2016);
5. Approximately 650 million girls and young women worldwide were married before reaching age 18, resulting in high-risk pregnancies, death in childbirth, lack of support, fewer educational opportunities, and increased vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2018b);
6. Young people are at the center of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. In 2017 approximately 1.8 million adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 were living with HIV worldwide. Adolescent girls and young women are especially vulnerable to HIV. In some countries, they are two to three times more likely to be infected than their male counterparts of the same age (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2018a); and

WHEREAS, “When a child is not healthy, is chronically malnourished, does not receive a quality education, does not feel safe in his or her home, school or community, or lacks the opportunity to have his or her voice heard, this child will not be best equipped to fulfil his or her full potential. That not only denies the individual child his or her rights, but also deprives the entire human family of the intellectual, social, moral and economic benefits that derive from the fulfilment of these rights” (United Nations Children’s Fund, 2014); and

WHEREAS, we have a special concern toward underserved populations, including indigenous children and children in isolated communities, The United Methodist Church has a history of supporting work with children, including girl-children, through both the program support and the advocacy work of United Methodist Women, the General Board of Global Ministries and the General Board of Church and Society;

Therefore, be it resolved, that The United Methodist Church, in accordance with the recommendations of the Report of the Secretary-General on the Girl Child to the General Assembly of the United Nations (United Nations General Assembly, 2017), calls on local churches, conferences, general agencies, church-related organizations, parents, and individuals where appropriate to:

1. Ensure access to inclusive and equitable education for girls including quality curricula as well as safe and enabling learning environments.
2. Improve access to water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities and safe living environments for all girls along with education and destigmatization regarding menstruation and sanitary products.
3. Prioritize girls' health and nutrition through educational initiatives as well as access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care services, including those related to puberty, menstruation, and the prevention and treatment of HIV.
4. End harmful traditional practice including child marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and other harmful practices resulting in violence toward and the exploitation of girls.

See Social Principles, ¶162C.

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