





## Introduction

For more than 100 years, women organized for mission have been involved in social action, often leading the church in the call for social justice. They have worked in the name of Jesus to change legislation, systems, structures and practices considered unjust and oppressive to others.

Why must the church be involved in politics? Why does United Methodist Women take positions on social justice issues? Homelessness, hunger, poverty, racism, illiteracy, economic justice, war and peace, health care for children, international conflicts—the list of national and global issues with which United Methodist Women has been involved over the years seems endless.

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## What Does the Bible Say?

In Genesis 1:27 we read that human beings were created in God's image. Scripture shows that every human being is precious. We are people of different races, different genders and different heritages, and we are all precious in God's sight.

Genesis 1:31 reads, God saw everything that was made, "and indeed, it was very good." This affirmation clearly states God's intention that all living creatures, all human beings and all nature should experience the goodness of creation.

Institutional structures and social relations that oppress people are instruments in defying the will of God. The gospel breaks down barriers of race, religion and social class. In the Old Testament, God acted through Moses to free the Hebrew people from the oppression they were experiencing under the Egyptian pharaoh. This teaches us that the spiritual dimension and the socioeconomic and political dimensions are inseparable. Spirituality is demonstrated here as none other than God at work through human beings to penetrate all of life's basic aspects.

**"and  
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good."**

**– Genesis  
1:31**

In the New Testament, because "God so loved the world," God sent Jesus Christ. Jesus' mission was undoubtedly a controversial one. It was a challenge to the social order, proclaiming God's reign as the establishment of a new set of human relationships. Jesus aligned himself with the captive, the blind, the oppressed, the poor, the widowed and the weak. Jesus came to proclaim the "year of the

Lord's favor" (see Luke 4:16-19). The year of the Lord's favor, or the year of the Jubilee, that Jesus was proclaiming is nothing less than a call for social justice, a challenge to social structures and a call for liberation.

## Our United Methodist Heritage

Our United Methodist heritage reflects a history of commitment to social justice and social action. John Wesley placed strong emphasis on the Christian life as a combination of faith and love put into practice. *The 2012 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* states,

"For Wesley  
there is  
no religion  
but social religion,  
no holiness  
but social holiness."

(¶1101, p. 52)

Our commitment to social justice can be best represented in the church's historic opposition to social evils such as slavery, inhumane prison conditions and child labor. The biblical integration of the spiritual and the social is also well expressed in our *Book of Discipline*:

“We proclaim  
no *personal*  
*gospel*  
that fails  
to express itself  
in relevant  
social concerns;  
we proclaim  
no *social gospel*  
that does not  
include  
the personal  
transformation  
of sinners.”

(¶101, p. 53, emphasis in the original)

The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church and *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church* also speak to the human issues confronting the world from a biblical and theological perspective.

## How Can United Methodist Women Members Get Involved?

We can all do something toward building a just world, to “proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” as the Bible and as our *Book of Discipline* command us to do.

**1 Choose an issue.** Look in your community, your neighborhood or even the world. Find an issue that interests you. United Methodist Women is always involved in social issues and can be a source of support for you. Examples of issues are economic justice, racial justice, child advocacy, women’s concerns, environmental justice, health care and global concerns (such as child labor, human rights violations, self-determination and others). Always ask why the conditions exist. Develop a list of ways you can work to alleviate the reason for the problem in the area of public policy at the institution level and at the individual level.

**2 Narrow your focus.** Social problems can be very complex. If you try to deal with the whole problem you will become frustrated and overwhelmed. So find a focus. For example, you may choose child advocacy and work on an after-school program for children of working mothers. The key is to find an aspect of the problem that you know you can manage.

**3 Learn about the problem.** Knowledge is power. (a) Contact your social action coordinator. (b) Join the Social Action Network at [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/act/network](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/act/network). (c) Participate in the Reading Program: [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org).

org/programs/readingprogram. (d) Stay abreast on issues that affect women and families by visiting [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org). (e) For daily United Methodist Women news and information on United Methodist Women concerns, follow us on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/UMWomen](http://www.twitter.com/UMWomen). (f) Like us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/UMWomen](http://www.facebook.com/UMWomen). The more you know about a problem, the better equipped you are to deal with it. If you are dealing with a local issue, you should use the resources available in your community that can provide you with information, such as your local government, your church and other churches, United Methodist Women's groups and local organizations. If you are dealing with an international issue, there are also many sources of information, such as United Methodist Women through the United Methodist Office for the United Nations, newspapers and local and national organizations.

**4 Design a plan of action.** You have to set realistic goals. Then plan clear ways to achieve them. Identify the sources of support that you have within the United Methodist Women organization, such as staff contacts for social action, spiritual growth, education and interpretation, and membership nurture and outreach. In your conference and in your district you have many resources that can be useful to you. Contact your conference leadership for program resources. Use your resources. Identify other resources in your community, church and local United Methodist Women's unit. You can also collaborate with a local group that is already actively working on an issue. Involve others!

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**Act.** Your action can take many forms:

- (a) Education of others: Share with other people the skills necessary to effect social change. This is one of the fundamental steps toward the construction of a just society.
- (b) Political action: This includes actions such as letters to elected officials, vigils and public prayers, acts of protest, voter registration and radio and television ads.
- (c) Social and economic action: This can take several forms, from boycotting or refusing to buy a product to participation in rallies, marches and public demonstrations.
- (d) Issue advocacy: Advocate for changes in unjust laws and regulations that relate to specific social issues.
- (e) Advocate to end violence toward women in conflict zones and in their homes: Work with local and state governments to protect survivors of human trafficking and bring their perpetrators to justice. Speak out in partnership with the homeless and those who are losing their homes due to foreclosures. Organize forums with elected officials.
- (f) Get involved in media literacy in your community: Monitor media messages and images. Advocate for fairness in news coverage, equal representation of women and wholesome television entertainment. Join the Green Team and work with local environmental groups to protect the earth, create green spaces and support sustainable development. Serve others by working in soup kitchens, food banks, community gardens and meal delivery programs.
- (g) Pray: Remember, prayer is one of the most powerful sources of support and change in our lives. Let the power of prayer support you in your actions for justice.

## Resources

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012).

*The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012).

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