

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

By

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Introduction

This study guide provides suggestions and resources for leaders of the study of *Methodist Morals: Social Principles in the Public Church's Witness* (University of Tennessee Press, 2016). According to [the publisher](#), “This is the first full-length study of Methodist social teachings in over fifty years.” This book is timely for United Methodists in the U.S. and abroad, who continue to debate and disagree about standards of morality, particularly as expressed in this denomination’s document of Social Principles.

This study of *Methodist Morals* is about more than the content of the most recent edition of United Methodist Social Principles. The present Social Principles and *Book of Discipline* give no information about the changes that have been made in moral standards within Methodism over the centuries; nor the impact of civil laws, societal changes, and “worldwide” nature of The United Methodist Church. *Methodist Morals* attempts to provide this background and context. The author states:

How a Christian community deals with social change and evolving morals is as significant as what it may say about specific issues of morality at any particular point in time. Not only the words of its statements but also the disciplined practices of formulating a prophetic proclamation offer a witness to the morals of a faith community engaging in discourse with the world around it and with the world present within it. (pp. 2-3)

Thus, this book provides a window into this history and larger institutional context of the Social Principles. The author addresses the evolving morals from the General Rules established by John Wesley to the Social Principles and the United Methodist *Discipline* of today; the specific issues of moral concern by Methodists at particular points in time; the processes used to determine the doctrine, law, and social teachings of this church; and differences within the global United Methodist Church, especially related to marriage.

This study guide is designed to promote thoughtful and faithful reflection and dialogue, with the expectation that participants will bring a variety of opinions and experiences to the classroom. Each class member is encouraged to share relevant experiences and knowledge. Thus, it is important to observe some ground-rules for discussion:

Principles of Holy Conferencing¹

Every person is a child of God

Listen before speaking

Strive to understand from another’s point of view

Speak about issues, do not defame persons

Strive to accurately reflect the views of others

¹ Developed by the Northeastern Jurisdiction of the UMC in 2008.

Use of this Study

This study guide consists of two parts, the Leader's Guide and the Participant Handouts. Leaders will need both. Throughout the study guide, page numbers refer to *Methodist Morals* and paragraph numbers refer to the *Book of Discipline 2012* (General Conference edition).

⇒ Arrows in the Leader's Guide indicate material printed separately as quotes to be read by individual participants or material printed in the Participant Handouts.

Boldface type generally indicates material to be read aloud in unison; italic type generally indicates directions for the study leaders.

The study guide includes plans for six, one-hour sessions. Each session has a Focus, an Objective, suggested Opening and Closing Worship materials, learning activities, and discussion questions. The suggested learning activities are meant to inspire, not to constrain creativity. Study leaders are encouraged to innovate new classroom activities and to bring their own knowledge and experience to the conversation.

Each session relates to one of the chapters in the book:

Session 1: From Social Creed to Social Principles (a study of Chapter 1)

Session 2: Methodist Law and Doctrine (a study of Chapter 2)

Session 3: Politics and Grace (a study of Chapter 3)

Session 4: Theological and Moral Learning (a study of Chapter 4)

Session 5: Marriage (a study of Chapter 6)

Session 6: Moral Leadership and Discernment (a study of Chapter 7)

Thus, the full six-week study will address the origin of the Social Principles; the nature of the Social Principles as doctrine or law; processes of decision making for moral standards; considering the content of the Social Principles; changes especially in relation to divorce and marriage; and requirements for clergy as moral models and professionals.

The study guide does not cover material in the Introduction, Chapters 5 and 8, and the Conclusion to *Methodist Morals*. Interested readers are, of course, encouraged to read and discuss those chapters, too. Further articles and commentaries by the author are available at <https://darrylwstephens.com/>.

For an introductory study of this church's Social Principles, see the quadrennially published booklet by the General Board of Church and Society, which includes the full text of the Social Principles as well as a study guide to the document. Study leaders are strongly encouraged to provide a copy of this booklet to each participant while studying *Methodist Morals*.

Before Beginning the Study

- Secure copies of the current Social Principles for the study participants.
- Become familiar with the statements in the body of the *Discipline* that relate to themes in the Social Principles.

Planning the Sessions

- Read the chapter used as the basis for each session, paying particular attention to the referenced notes at the end of the book.
- Note the Focus and Objective for each session
- Plan the Opening and Closing Worship
- Add information from additional reading as appropriate and share relevant personal experiences.
- Make copies of participant handouts needed for activities.
- Involve class participants in presenting some of the suggested class material. If making assignments for readings, consider giving the material to the participants in advance of the class session.
- Allot time for the various activities and discussions as part of the flow of the session and for class members to share relevant experiences and knowledge.
- At the first session give an overview of the study and promote the principles of Holy Conferencing.

Classroom Setting

1. Meet in a room other than the sanctuary, if possible.
2. Create an atmosphere of openness and community with chairs arranged in a circle or semi-circle to encourage active participation. Tables arranged in a U-shape can also encourage interaction.
3. If using a white board, projection on a screen, or newsprint, be sure all participants have good visual access.
4. If singing hymns, have a piano and pianist for the hymns and/or a song leader. Reading the hymn lyrics aloud in unison is also recommended.

Resources Needed for Each Session

Bible

The United Methodist Hymnal

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016. Free [electronic edition](#).

Methodist Morals: Social Principles in the Public Church's Witness

Copies of the most recent Social Principles of The United Methodist Church (published in the *Book of Discipline*)

Additional Resources

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016. Free [electronic edition](#).

[Guide to General Conference 2016](#).

Podcast interview with Darryl W. Stephens, author of *Methodist Morals*. SEEK, the podcast of *United Methodist Insight*, Feb 22, 2016. Read adapted [transcript](#).

Resources for Further Study (also listed at the end of each session)

- Benedict, Daniel. "Changing Wine into Grape Juice: Thomas and Charles Welch and the Transition to Unfermented Fruit," [Discipleship Ministries](#).
- Brubaker, Ellen A. [The Bible and Human Sexuality: Claiming God's Good Gift](#). Participant Guide by M. Garlinda Burton. New York: United Methodist Women, 2016.
- Campbell, Ted A. *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2011.
- Carder, Kenneth L. *Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013.
- The Church Studies Homosexuality. Study Book* ed. by Gary L. Ball-Kilbourne and *Leader's Guide* by Dorothy L. Williams. Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1994.
- De la Torre, Miguel A. *A La Familia: A Conversation about Our Families, the Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. With Ignacio Castuera and Lisbeth MelendéZ Rivera.
- Dyck, Sally. "[Eight Principles of Holy Conferencing: A Study Guide for Churches and Groups](#)." Minneapolis, MN: 2012.
- Frank, Thomas Edward. *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*, 2006 ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006.
- General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. "[In Search of Unity](#)." New York: 1998.
- Heitzenrater, Richard P. *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2d ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003.
- Hunt, Joan and Richard. *Growing Love in Christian Marriage Third Edition – Couple's Manual*. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2013.
- Iovino, Joe. "Methodist history: Controversy, Communion, and Welch's Grape Juice." [UMC.org](#). June 28, 2016.
- Job, Rueben P., Jr., and Neil M. Alexander. *Finding Our Way: Love and Law in The United Methodist Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014.
- Jung, Patricia Beattie and Darryl W. Stephens, eds. *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.
- Knight, Henry H. and Don E. Saliers. *The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.
- Knotts, Alice G. *Lifting Up Hope, Living Out Justice: Methodist Women and the Social Gospel*. San Diego, CA: Frontrowliving Press, 2007.
- Love, Jan. "Practicing Consensus at the Table: Doing Democracy Differently," in *Conflict and Communion: Reconciliation and Restorative Justice at Christ's Table*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006.
- Melton, Joy Thornburg. *Safe Sanctuaries for Ministers: Best Practices and Ethical Decisions*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2009.
- National Council of Churches in Christ USA and Presbyterian Church (USA), "[A Social Creed for the 21st Century](#)," 2007.
- Nickell, Jane Ellen. *We Shall Not Be Moved: Methodists Debate Race, Gender, and Homosexuality*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.
- Oliveto, Karen P., Kelly D. Turney, and Traci C. West. *Talking About Homosexuality: A Congregational Resource*. Holy Conversations series. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005.
- Robbins, Bruce W. *A World Parish?: Hopes and Challenges of the United Methodist Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004

- Thomas, James S. *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.
- Warner, Lacey C. *The Method of Our Mission: United Methodist Polity & Organization*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014.
- Watson, Kevin M. *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009.
- Wesley, John. [Catholic Spirit](#), 1750.
- -- -. [The Character of a Methodist](#). 1742.
- -- -. [On the Wedding Garment](#), 1790.
- -- -. [A Plain Account of Christian Perfection](#). 1777.
- -- -. [A Thought Upon Marriage](#). 1785.
- -- -. [Thoughts on a Single Life](#).
- -- -. [Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions](#). 1773.
- -- -. [Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse IV](#). 1748.
- Yrigoyen, Charles, Jr. *Belief Matters: United Methodism's Doctrinal Standards*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.
- Yrigoyen, Charles, John Galen McEllhenney, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *United Methodism at Forty: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

STUDY SESSION 1: From Social Creed to Social Principles

FOCUS: the historical roots of the Social Principles of The United Methodist Church

OBJECTIVE: Understand the Social Creeds and Social Principles as provisions for following the example and teachings of Jesus in our personal lives, our societies, the ministry of the church, and the world.

RESOURCES FOR GROUP STUDY:

Bible
Methodist Morals, chapter one
The Book of Resolutions
The Book of Discipline

LEADER PREPARATION:

Participant handout
The United Methodist Hymnal, #427
Copies of the most recent Social Principles for each participant, including “A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed”
Photocopy of historical quotes to be performed by participants

OPENING WORSHIP

HYMN: “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life,” the *United Methodist Hymnal* #427
Frank Mason North, an evangelist in the New York Conference, wrote this hymn in 1903. North was among the founders of the Methodist Federation for Social Service in 1907.

SCRIPTURE: Micah 6:8; Luke 4:16-19

PRAYER: O God, who created and then proclaimed that it was “good,” you entrusted us with the care of the earth and our human relationships. We confess that in the “crowded ways of life,” the goodness of life has been thwarted. We pray for a closer relationship with you and the wisdom, courage, discipline, and persistence to work for our words of good intention to become actions of reality.

In the name of the one whom you sent to show us the way, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SOCIAL CREED LEGACY

The purpose of the early Methodist Movement, according to John Wesley, was “to reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” In the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a group of Methodists were

concerned about economic injustices in the work place, especially child labor, sweat shops, low wages, and long work hours seven days a week.

⇒ The story of a young Irish girl named Maureen describes some of these conditions. *Have a member of the discussion group portray Maureen and tell the story.*

Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, inspired by the prophets' call to justice and mercy and Jesus' biblical preaching of the Kingdom of God, sought to respond in faith. In response to the brutalities suffered by millions of immigrants and the lack of Christian values in society, they organized to bring about social change. Harry F. Ward was one of five Methodist Episcopal clergy who organized the Methodist Federation for Social Service in 1907 (known today as the [Methodist Federation for Social Action](#)). The Federation sought to apply Christian values to social and economic injustices, working to reduce the human suffering of the working class.

TIMELINE

On newsprint or chalkboard, draw a time line for the various Social Creeds and the Social Principles with the dates 1908, 1939, 1968, 1972, 2008, and place a brief statement after each as information is given.

⇒ 1908: the first Social Creed. *Have a member of the discussion group portray Harry Ward.*

Ask participants to discuss the 1908 Social Creed on page 16:

- What injustices were addressed in the Social Creed of 1908?
- Why do you think it was necessary for the church to adopt the Social Creed?

1939: Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Protestant Church to form the Methodist Church. The 1939 General Conference established the segregated Central Jurisdiction for African American member churches. It also affirmed the importance of the Social Creed and acted to assure its perpetual publication.

*Read quote on page 17: "We instruct those in charge of publishing the *Discipline* to include the Social Creed, with such revisions as may be adopted from time to time in all future editions unless other directions are received from the General Conference."*

1968: Union of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church
Discuss the common elements and differences in the social witness statements of the two churches (pages 18-20; also in participant handout).

1972: Adoption of a new statement of Social Principles
Bishop James S. Thomas chaired the Social Principles Study Commission from 1968-72, which wrote the document that General Conference amended and adopted as the new statement of Social Principles. Thomas voiced many hopes and intentions for the work of this committee.

⇒ *Have a member of the discussion group portray Bishop Thomas.*

Ask participants to discuss the following questions.

- What were Bishop Thomas's expectations for the Social Principles? (See pages 14-15, 21-22.)
- How did the 1972 Social Principles differ from previous social witness statements? (See page 28.)

2008: To celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Social Creed, the General Board of Church and Society created "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed."

⇒ *Have a member of the discussion group portray the chair of this task force, Bishop Jane Middleton.*

PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION: SOCIAL PRINCIPLES (ACTIVITY OPTION A)

For this activity, each person in the study group will need access to a copy of the Social Principles. Ask each person to find at least one subsection of the Social Principles that might contribute to the congregation's ministry. Share about each topic and its importance to the church's work.

PUTTING FAITH INTO ACTION: PUBLIC POLICY RESOLUTIONS (ACTIVITY OPTION B)

Resolutions and Public Policy statements on larger social issues approved by General Conference are published in a separate volume known as *The Book of Resolutions*. Boards, agencies, conferences, and individuals submit these statements to General Conference. Upon approval, the texts of the statements are considered to be The United Methodist Church's official positions on the subjects indicated and are used as the basis for actions taken in church and society.

Lead the group in looking at a recent edition of The Book of Resolutions. In groups of two, three, or four, select one of the resolutions mentioned by the author on pages 23-26 or choose a different resolution. Discuss how it contributes to public discourse and debate. Ask each group to share their views.

CLOSING

Join together in reciting or singing "A Companion Litany to Our Social Creed." Both texts are printed with the Social Principles and [available online](#). Provide copies for participants or project on-screen for everyone to see. See appendix for suggested musical setting.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Knotts, Alice G. *Lifting Up Hope, Living Out Justice: Methodist Women and the Social Gospel*. San Diego, CA: Frontrowliving Press, 2007.

National Council of Churches in Christ USA and Presbyterian Church (USA), "[A Social Creed for the 21st Century](#)," 2007.

Thomas, James S. *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.

Quotes to be read by individual participants:

MAUREEN'S STORY:

My family left Ireland to escape famine and came to the United States. We lived in one room in a boarding house. I began work at the age of 14 in a woolen mill in Lawrence MA. Beginning at six o'clock every morning, I swept and cleaned the mill floor. I was paid \$3.50 for a 56-hour week, ten cents of which went for drinking water from a polluted canal. I saw many older workers seriously injured by the dangerous mill machinery because of being forced to work so fast. We could only afford black bread, molasses, and beans for lunch and supper every day. On Sunday we sometimes had a piece of meat.

(“The History of the Social Creed” by George D. McClain, [General Board of Church & Society](#), 1988.)

HARRY F. WARD:

I was the first Executive Director of the Methodist Federation of Social Service. One day I wrote the first draft of ten public policy recommendations and a single theological warrant on a Western Union pad. The statements were taken to the 1908 General Conference by the MFSS and adopted as the church’s Social Creed. It was the first Social Creed adopted by any Christian denomination and became an incentive and model for Protestant churches and ecumenical organizations.

(“The History of the Social Creed” by George D. McClain, [General Board of Church & Society](#), 1988.)

BISHOP JAMES S. THOMAS:

I chaired the Social Principles 1968-1972 Social Principles Study Commission. The first instruction to the committee was to bring “a recommendation concerning” the two statements of social witness from the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. A guiding question was “What is the basis of the church's position on social issues?” By 1970 the commission decided a new statement on social issues was needed and was authorized by General Conference to do so. I believed that the church has to affirm, for every age, what it means to follow Christ in an increasingly complex society. I tried to build a consensus prior to General Conference by having the membership of the Commission represent the diversity of the church as well as voices across the denomination, surveying congregations and church members, holding consultations, and obtaining papers and other written contributions from the church. Our report included the first statements to address environmental issues under the heading “The Natural World.”

(Voice of Bishop Thomas creatively compiled from pp. 14, 15 and 21, 22.)

Bishop Jane Middleton, declared:

The Social Creed first adopted in 1908 was a major witness for the church to follow John Wesley's focus on social holiness. I view the present Social Principles as a horizontal line, our relationship to the world and God's people. I also view it as a statement of our marching orders as United Methodists for social action.

(“United Methodist Social Creed: General Conference to Consider New, Singable Version,” by Wayne Rhodes, [Faith In Action](#), March 28, 2008)

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

STUDY SESSION 2: Law and Doctrine

FOCUS: the relation of the Social Principles to Methodist doctrine and law

OBJECTIVE: Distinguish between United Methodist doctrinal standards and Social Principles and understand their interrelatedness

RESOURCES FOR GROUP STUDY:

Bible

Methodist Morals, chapter two

The Book of Discipline (multiple copies, if possible)

LEADER PREPARATION:

Copies of the most recent Social Principles

Handout for participants, including titles of Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith

The United Methodist Hymnal, #85

OPENING WORSHIP

HYMN: “We Believe in One True God,” the *United Methodist Hymnal* #85

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:34-40; I Corinthians 2:1-5

PRAYER: O God, as we look at statements of doctrine and Social Principles of The United Methodist Church, give us discerning spirits to comprehend how these documents might inform our faith and actions. In the name of Jesus Christ who demonstrated by word and actions what it means for us to be Christian. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

John Wesley preached a gospel of head and heart, belief and action. He was concerned about both doctrine and the ways in which Methodists lived out their moral lives.

⇒ **FIRST READER:** “In 1784, Wesley....”

Note: The Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith can only be altered by amending the Constitution, which requires a supermajority vote of annual conferences.

Circulate a copy of the Discipline among the participants and refer to the Restrictive Rules (paras. 17-22).

STANDARDS OF DOCTRINE

In the *Book of Discipline*, the official statements of doctrine are “The Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church” and “The Confession of Faith of The Evangelical United Brethren Church.” Why are there two statements?

⇒ **SECOND READER:** “When the Evangelical and United Brethren Churches....”

Ask participants to compare the [Confession of Faith](#) and the [Articles of Religion](#) from the Book of Discipline. On a chalkboard or large sheet of paper, make two columns, one for each document. In each column, write down the distinctive emphases of each document as well as their similarities (see pages 35-37).

Discuss the following questions as a group.

- How do these theological affirmations provide a basis for your understanding of the Christian faith?
- Which ones provide you with inspiration or courage in the faith?

DOCTRINAL DISCOURSE

Doctrine is what the church teaches about God and our faith. We discuss (discourse about) doctrine in many ways—through creeds, confessions, social statements, Sunday School lessons, hymns, and prayers, just to name a few. Standards of doctrine help us understand what is essential to our faith.

Some church teachings are mandatory, or essential, to our shared understanding of faith as United Methodists. Other church teachings are meant to be instructive or persuasive even though faithful United Methodists may disagree about them. Over the centuries, Methodists and other Christians have debated about which teachings belong in each category, and these determinations have changed over time. Some teachings considered essential by one generation came to be considered less important by later generations of Methodists. For example, abstaining from alcohol and unholy diversions, such as dancing, card playing, and theatre, was considered an essential expression of faith for generations of Methodists.

As a group, discuss

- What has the church taught you about what behavior is essential to your faith as a United Methodist?
- Have you experienced changes in church moral teachings during your lifetime?
- How has your understanding of these teachings changed or matured?

SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

Making a social witness has been an essential part of Methodism from the beginning. John Wesley had a great concern for social justice, especially expressing opposition to the slave trade, smuggling, and the cruel treatment of prisoners. All of the predecessor churches that are now The United Methodist Church had social creeds. A new statement of Social Principles was

adopted in 1972 and has been updated and revised by every General Conference since. United Methodists are still working out what is essential to our faith.

The Social Principles provides one forum for ongoing doctrinal discourse. The Social Principles are (usually) not considered essential doctrine or church law, but “are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions.... The Social Principles are a call to all members of The United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice.” (*Ask participants to refer to the last paragraph of the Preface of the Social Principles.*)

- How is the Social Principles taught in your congregation?
- What hymns does your congregation sing that relate to social witness and social justice?
- How do the various ministries and missional activities of your congregation witness to the needs of individuals and society?

ESSENTIALS OF THE FAITH

In the Social Principles, some beliefs and actions are described as incompatible with, or contrary to Methodist faith and teachings. These statements are sometimes considered to be essential doctrine. The following are specific statements that many persons consider essential doctrine.

1) War and Peace. Study the UMC’s doctrine related to war. Official statements can be found in the Social Principles under “Military Service” (para. 164.I) and “War and Peace” (para. 165.C) as well as Article XVI of the Confession of Faith (p. 38). Additional statements are found in the *Book of Resolutions*.

- What does the UMC teach about war and peace?
- Would it be appropriate for the church to enforce its doctrine against “war and bloodshed” (Confession of Faith, Article XVI) through church law, for example, by bringing to trial clergy persons who conduct ceremonies celebrating those persons who have fought in war?

2) Human sexuality. Study the UMC’s doctrine related to human sexuality. The statement is made that “all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God” (para. 161.F). In 1972, the motion was made to amend this paragraph by adding “...though we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian doctrine.” The word “doctrine” was changed to teaching, and this statement has been the basis for shaping United Methodist law and policies since (pp. 38-39, 44-46). Additional statements on human sexuality are found in the *Book of Resolutions*.

- What difference does it make to use the word “teaching” instead of “doctrine”?
- Is any part of the statement on “Human Sexuality” in the Social Principles is essential doctrine? Why or why not?
- What do the Confession of Faith and the Articles of Religion say about human sexuality? (*Answer: nothing at all.*)

CLOSING

Join together in reciting the “Litany of Grace” in the Participant Handout.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Cambell, Ted A. *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2011.

Carder, Kenneth L. *Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013.

Job, Rueben P., Jr., and Neil M. Alexander. *Finding Our Way: Love and Law in The United Methodist Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014.

Wesley, John. “[Catholic Spirit](#),” 1750.

-- -- --. [The Character of a Methodist](#). 1742.

Yrigoyen, Charles, Jr. *Belief Matters: United Methodism’s Doctrinal Standards*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.

Quotes to be read by individual participants:

FIRST READER: In 1784, Wesley edited the thirty-nine “Articles of Religion,” the official doctrine of the Church of England, and shortened them to twenty-four articles for Methodists in North America. Upon the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the Christmas Conference in 1784, an additional Article that recognized the United States as a “sovereign and independent nation” was adopted. The General Conference of 1808 provided the first Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church and established the Articles of Religion as doctrinal standards, restricted from change or revision.

SECOND READER: When the Evangelical and United Brethren Churches formed the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1946, they kept both inherited statements of doctrine and printed them in their *Discipline*. Later, the EUBC wrote an updated statement of doctrine, the Confession of Faith, adopted in 1963. The United Methodist Church retains both the Confession of Faith and the Articles of Religion. As doctrinal standards, these documents are meant to convey what is essential to our faith as United Methodists.

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

STUDY SESSION 3: Politics and Grace

FOCUS: the process of decision-making in The United Methodist Church regarding its teachings and practices, past and the present.

OBJECTIVE: Explore the relationship between democracy and moral discernment in the UMC.

RESOURCES FOR GROUP STUDY:

Bible
Methodist Morals, chapter three
The Book of Discipline

LEADER PREPARATION:

Participant Handouts
The United Methodist Hymnal, #454
Copies of the most recent Social Principles
Copies of quotes for Reader 1, Reader 2, and “Democracy and Conference” Q&A
Copies of the General Rules (*Discipline 2012*, pp. 75-78)
Copies of the Special Advices of 1904 (see Appendix)

OPENING WORSHIP

HYMN: “Open My Eyes, That I May See,” the *United Methodist Hymnal* #454.

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:28-31; John 14:15

PRAYER:

Loving God, Open our minds and hearts to discern your will and ways for the living of these days. Speak to us from past experiences and present needs; teach us how to conference together to witness to your love for all humankind; and lead us by your Grace. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Moral formation and spiritual growth have been marks of Methodism since its beginning. How does the church make decisions about moral formation and spiritual growth related to personal life and relations with the world? The author states "One cannot be a Christian alone; to pursue a life of holiness one must submit to mutual accountability and shared responsibility for moral discernment. The purpose is to test one's faith as one grows in faith." (p. 54)

From the beginning, John Wesley gathered people in groups of accountability and responsibility to develop and strengthen their faith and moral behavior. Recommended rules and/or duties were established for guidance, and processes were given to help in the implementation of these directives. These have been changed and/or revised throughout the

history of the church. In this session, we shall focus on the decision-making processes utilized by the early bands, classes, societies and by the later organized church in determining the moral behavior of Methodists in church and society.

Moral Discernment through Christian Conferencing

Christian conferencing was practiced by the bands, classes and societies formed by John Wesley. The practice of Christian Conferencing was a way for members to have accountability and support as well as to experience God's grace. Have class member read statement from John Wesley.

⇒ READER 1: "Are we convinced"

John Wesley listed five instituted means of grace: 1) prayer; 2) reading scripture; 3) Lord's Supper; 4) fasting; 5) Christian Conferencing.

Remind participants of the Principles of Holy Conferencing presented in the introduction.

Question:

1. How would you define Christian Conferencing? How might Christian conferencing benefit you when seeking moral guidance?
2. How can Christian Conferencing be implemented today?

The General Rules

To give guidance for the groups in their discussing and discerning, John Wesley developed the General Rules in 1739. The General Rules were the earliest document of moral standards addressed to church members being set apart from the world.

Give each member of the class a copy of the General Rules from the current Book of Discipline.

Option: Because of the length of the Rules, divide the class into two or more groups and assign each group a part of the General Rules for response to the questions. Have each group report their answers.

Questions:

1. Which rules are applicable today?
2. What are some rules you would write today?

Special Advices for the Moral Lives of Methodists

United States

The General Rules were adapted and changed in the form of Special Rules (Advices) after the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784. Differences between the 1798 Special Advices and the 1936 Special Advices of the Methodist Episcopal Church reflect the changing relationship of Methodists to civil society.

CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Compare the topics addressed in the Special Advices of the 1798 and the 1936 Methodist Episcopal Church Disciplines (pp. 61-64).

Africa Central Conference

The General Conference allows the central conferences, organized for ministry outside the United States, to adapt the DISCIPLINE for their use. The Africa Central Conference still uses Special Advices.

⇒ READER 2: “The [1990] African Special Advices is divided into five sections: Christian stewardship, entertainment, temperance, marriage, and tribalism” (p. 64).

Democracy and Conferencing about the Social Principles

⇒ *Have one person ask questions and another person give the answers about the process of determining the topics and wording of the Social Principles.*

CLOSING

Lead participants in the Closing Unison Prayer printed in the Participant Handouts.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Dyck, Sally. “[Eight Principles of Holy Conferencing: A Study Guide for Churches and Groups.](#)” Minneapolis, MN: 2012.

Frank, Thomas Edward. *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*, 2006 ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2006.

General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. “[In Search of Unity.](#)” New York: 1998.

Job, Rueben P., Jr., and Neil M. Alexander. *Finding Our Way: Love and Law in The United Methodist Church*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014.

Knight, Henry H. and Don E. Saliers. *The Conversation Matters: Why United Methodists Should Talk with One Another*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.

Love, Jan. “Practicing Consensus at the Table: Doing Democracy Differently,” in *Conflict and Communion: Reconciliation and Restorative Justice at Christ’s Table*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006.

Warner, Lacey C. *The Method of Our Mission: United Methodist Polity & Organization*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014.

Watson, Kevin M. *A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley’s General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009.

Wesley, John. [A Plain Account of Christian Perfection](#). 1777.

-- -- --. “[On the Wedding Garment,](#)” 1790.

Yrigoyen, Charles, John Galen McEllhenney, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *United Methodism at Forty: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

Quotes to be read by individual participants:

READER 1: "Are we convinced how important and how difficult it is to order our conversation right? Is it always in grace? Seasoned with salt? Meet to minister grace to the hearers? Do we not converse too long at a time? Is not an hour at a time commonly enough? Would it not be well To plan our conversation before hand? To pray before and after it?" (Wesley, Works, 10:856-857)

READER 2: "The [1990] African Special Advices is divided into five sections: Christian stewardship, entertainment, temperance, marriage, and tribalism" (p. 64 of the text).

DEMOCRACY AND CONFERENCING ABOUT THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES

Have one person ask questions and another person give the answers about the process of determining the topics and wording of the Social Principles.

Question: What is the function of the Social Principles?

Response: The Social Principles addresses moral issues within the church and civil society. "They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best of the prophetic spirit" (Preface to the Social Principles).

Question: What is the process for changes to the Social Principles?

Response: The General Conference meets every four years to conduct the business of the church. Delegates from the United States and the central conferences can vote. A simple majority of 50% plus one determines the outcome.

Question: Who proposes changes to the Social Principles?

Response: Petitions for changes can be made by members of the church, boards, agencies, annual conferences, and recognized caucuses.

Question: What is the value of difference when considering changes to the Social Principles?

Response: Difference yields competing votes in a democratic process. Difference offers critical perspective in Christian Conferencing.

Question: How can the democratic procedure employ the grace of Christian Conferencing?

Response: That's our struggle in order to have a faithful witness.

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

STUDY SESSION 4: Theological and Moral Learning

FOCUS: What can we learn from the Social Principles document?

OBJECTIVE: Reflect upon the meaning of the Social Principles for church members and society today.

RESOURCES FOR GROUP STUDY:

Bible
Methodist Morals, chapter four
The Book of Discipline

LEADER PREPARATION:

Participant Handouts, including litany and statements about alcohol
The United Methodist Hymnal, #581
Copies of the most recent Social Principles
Copy of Grandmother's quote

OPENING WORSHIP

SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:35, 38-39 as a responsive reading

Leader: "Who will separate us from Christ's love? Will we be separated by trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"

Response: "...nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, nor present things or future things, nor powers, or height or depth, or any other thing that is created."

HYMN: "Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service" *The United Methodist Hymnal* #581 (Stanza 3)

PRAYER: God of love and justice, as we consider the Social Principles and its implications for our individual and societal behaviors, give us insight and wisdom to discern how to incarnate the gospel in church and society today. In the name of Jesus Christ who taught us through his teachings and his life, Amen.

INTRODUCTION

The author asks: "What can we learn from the Social Principles?" That is a question for each of us about a document that is included in the United Methodist *Discipline*. Responding to this question, look at the words used most frequently in the 2012 Social Principles. The author has composed a poem of the most commonly used words in descending order of frequency.

Read the poem on page 72 in unison. Then, consider the following questions:

- What words convey important themes for you and the church?
- Does the order of word frequency surprise you? If so, why?

Although the Social Principles does not often refer to specific doctrines of the church, such as sin, perfection, good works, redemption, confession and repentance, or to specific Bible passages, the author states that there is a strong commitment to universal grace and human rights.

Litany of Theological Commitments

Let us read the litany of theological commitments in the Social Principles, printed in the Participant Handout. This litany is based on the narrative trajectory of the Social Principles found on page 79. (*Divide the class into two groups to read the litany.*)

Questions:

- Which statements are important to you?
- Which statements are confusing or troubling?

Commitment Sunday

How have Methodist morals changed through history? Although General Conference has revised the Social Principles many times, there is no evidence in the *Book of Discipline* of previous statements, the historical contexts, or conversations that led to the changes, or the actions that resulted based on the stances taken. For example, the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had a long history of calling for abstinence from alcohol. Let us hear from a grandmother who recalls a special Sunday in the 1930's that was observed to support this social stance.

⇒ GRANDMOTHER: "One of the Special Sundays"

This practice continued in the Methodist Church through the 1960's. (*See Appendix for image of Commitment Card from 1966.*)

Statements on Alcohol

The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church each had statements of abstinence from alcoholic beverages at the time of the merger and formation of The United Methodist Church in 1968. *Give each person a sheet containing statements about the use of alcohol from the Methodist Church, Evangelical United Brethren Church, and The United Methodist Church.*

Question:

- How does the United Methodist statement compare to the earlier witnesses regarding alcohol?

ACTIVITY A

According to the Preface of the Social Principles, the statements are not to be considered church law, but are “to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions.”

Divide the class into six groups and assign each group one of the following subsections of the 2012 Social Principles:

- Global Climate Stewardship (§160.D)
- Science and Technology (§160.F)
- Church and State Relations (§164.C)
- The Death Penalty (§164.G)
- Civil Obedience and Civil Disobedience (§164.F)
- War and Peace (§165.C)

Questions:

- How does the statement express Wesleyan convictions of faith and moral life?
- How does the statement contribute to your sense of faith and moral life?

ACTIVITY B

A major theme of the Social Principles is human rights. On pages 84-91 is a chart showing statements from the Social Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the United States Bill of Rights.

Divide the class into groups and assign each group a few of the statements to note the similarities and/or differences.

Question:

- What is distinctive about the church’s stance versus that of the United Nations, governments, or other institutions of society?

CLOSING

It is recommended that “Our Social Creed” (§166) be frequently used in Sunday worship. In closing, let us read it in unison.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Benedict, Daniel. “Changing Wine into Grape Juice: Thomas and Charles Welch and the Transition to Unfermented Fruit,” [Discipleship Ministries](#).

Campbell, Ted A. *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2011.

Carder, Kenneth L. *Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way, Revised Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013.

Iovino, Joe. "Methodist history: Controversy, Communion, and Welch's Grape Juice."
UMC.org. June 28, 2016.

Wesley, John. [Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions](#). 1773.

Yrigoyen, Charles, John Galen McEllhenney, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *United Methodism at Forty: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008.

Quote to be read by a participant:

GRANDMOTHER: “One of the Special Sundays listed in the *Discipline* was Commitment Sunday. The Adult Student series had a special lesson on abstinence every quarter, but the big lesson was the one in the fall. This usually occurred in late October or early November in our congregation. Cards were passed out to us to check and sign that we would not use any alcoholic beverages. The Anti-Saloon League was allowed to manage that Sunday and receive the cards.”

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

STUDY SESSION 5: Marriage

FOCUS: Marriage and divorce in Methodism, past and present

OBJECTIVE: Analyze continuity and change in church law and social teachings regarding marriage and divorce, including variations in different cultural contexts

RESOURCES FOR GROUP STUDY:

Bible
Methodist Morals, chapter six
The Book of Discipline

LEADER PREPARATION:

Participant Handouts, including history of statements about marriage and divorce
The United Methodist Hymnal, #645
Copies of the most recent Social Principles
Copies of Introductory Dialogue, Persons 1 and 2
Copies of statements by representatives from Germany and Zimbabwe

OPENING WORSHIP

HYMN: "O Perfect Love" the *United Methodist Hymnal* #645
(Stanza 2 with wording for the first line: "*O perfect Love, be thou our full assurance*")

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 7:10-11, 32-33, 38

PRAYER: God of grace and mercy, we come with grateful hearts for your steadfast love for us in spite of the controversies that have been among us in the past, and those that exist in the present day. Grant us the incentive and perseverance to be in respectful dialogue with one another as we seek to be in community and to be faithful witnesses to Christ's life and teachings. AMEN.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage has existed in most cultures in recorded history, but its definition and subsequent relationship have changed repeatedly in society and the church. There are different views today about what being married means and, indeed, who should marry.

⇒ Let us listen to a conversation between two persons about marriage.

Marriage

Since the beginning of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Brethren Church, and the Evangelical Association, the moral facets of marriage have been a perennial topic included in the Disciplines, and especially in the Social Principles. Only the General Conference composed of

an equal number of clergy and lay persons can determine the church's moral stances on these issues. Let's look at some of those changes.

⇒ *In groups of three, distribute information taken from Methodist Morals about changes in marriage made in the United Methodist Church since its beginnings in 1784. Ask the groups to review the information and answer the questions.*

Divorce and Remarriage

Divorce is a legal process under the jurisdiction of each state, not the federal government. The earliest instance of a divorce law in North America was in 1629 by the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. As early as 1701 the state of Maryland declared divorce legal. It wasn't until 1949-50 that South Carolina declared divorce legal. As divorce and Mormon polygamy threatened the social order, the church began to take official actions. Church law in many instances gave specific directives for the clergy.

⇒ *Divide the class into groups of three and distribute information about past Methodist statements on divorce. Ask the groups to review the statements and answer the questions.*

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

The United Methodist Church in other countries, particularly in Europe and Africa are organized as Central Conferences. The Central Conferences are permitted to adapt parts of the *Discipline* to address their distinctive cultural contexts. A representative from the church in Europe and a representative from Africa will share some of their governing statements related to marriage.

⇒ **REPRESENTATIVE FROM EUROPE:** “The Germany Central Conference”

United Methodists in Germany adapted the Social Principles in an attempt to broaden the applicability of the church's teachings on marriage to be relevant for young adults. Ulrich Jahreiss explains that marriage is a lifelong, committed, mutual partnership before God -- even if there is no public ceremony or marriage certificate (from a statement in a pamphlet on marriage published by the Germany Central Conference in 1984). It is felt that the church's teachings on marriage extend their relevancy to the actual cultural situation of young adults in Germany.

⇒ **REPRESENTATIVE FROM AFRICA:** “Marriage in traditional African culture”

It is important to keep in mind that, just as in the United States, United Methodists in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa are not of one mind on issues of morality.

Questions:

- What points of agreement do you find on issues related to marriage and divorce amidst the cultural differences in The United Methodist Church?
- What similarities in reasons are given for positions in the issues of polygamy and same-sex marriage?

CLOSING

PRAYER:

O God of the yesterdays, grant us insight to learn from past experiences. God of today, grace us with compassion to deal with our differences in relationships so that tomorrows will more nearly reflect your will and way for all of humanity. In the name of the One who showed us the way.
AMEN.

FOR FURTHER STUDY:

Heitzenrater, Richard P. *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 2d ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2003.
Hunt, Joan and Richard. *Growing Love in Christian Marriage Third Edition – Couple’s Manual*. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2013.
Robbins, Bruce W. *A World Parish?: Hopes and Challenges of the United Methodist Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2004.
Wesley, John. [A Thought Upon Marriage](#). 1785.
-- -- -. [Thoughts on a Single Life](#).

CONVERSATION -- MARRIAGE

PERSON 1: The June 13, 2016 issue of TIME magazine featured **How To Stay Married** (*and why*). What's happening to the meaning of marriage today when fewer young people are getting married and about half of the marriages end in divorce?

PERSON 2: Perhaps we need to look at the original meaning of marriage and how it has changed through the ages. Many people refer to Adam and Eve as the first married couple, but there are other instances of marriages in the Bible.

PERSON 1: Yes, I recall that Abraham married his half-sister and Jacob married his cousins.

PERSON 2: And Solomon had numerous wives and concubines, and Ruth, a Moabite woman, married Boaz, a Jew.

PERSON 1: I do recall from study of history that many marriages were between first and second cousins and Polygamy was prominent until the ninth century. But what has happened to the Christian meaning of marriage?

PERSON 2: Well, it wasn't until the Council of Trent in 1513 that the Roman Catholic Church made marriage a sacrament and declared that marriages should be celebrated in the church with a priest officiating and at least two witnesses. Before that, the man and woman made the marriage by exchanging vows. There was no need for a priest, witnesses or a ceremony.

PERSON 1: That's certainly different than our marriages today. Although I'm a little disturbed that so many marriages are held in places other than churches and sometimes with a Justice of the Peace or Judge instead of a clergyperson.

PERSON 2: Civil marriages began in the United States when Massachusetts required a license for marriage in 1639. Since the 19th century, civil marriages have been common in the United States.

PERSON 1: Let's join the discussions about how The United Methodist Church has dealt with marriage.

Quotes to be read by participants:

REPRESENTATIVE FROM EUROPE: The Germany Central Conference 2002 edition of the Social Principles has a few significant adaptations of the 2000 edition of the United States United Methodist Church. Several of these are:

- Does not refer to marriage as a covenant, but refers to a relationship in which a man and a woman “live with each other.”
 - Subsection “Human Sexuality” in both editions begins, “Although all persons are sexual beings,” but the German edition omits the phrase “*whether or not they are married.*”
 - Changes the phrase “the marriage bond” to “a binding partnership.”
 - Subsection on rights of children, omits the phrase “including faithfulness in marriage and abstinence in singleness” that implies sexuality may only be legitimately expressed in the context of marriage.
-

REPRESENTATIVE FROM AFRICA: Marriage in traditional African culture is quite distinct from US practices. For example, in Zimbabwe one must take into account the *labola* (dowry), “traditional African marriage,” and African polygamy. More prominent than Social Principles, the church has Special Advices with much stricter standards related to marriage, divorce and remarriage of divorced persons. According to the 1990 Africa Central Conference *Book of Discipline*:

- Divorce is considered a sin and requires repentance. Divorced persons may remarry only if the divorce was due to childlessness, adultery or other forms of cruelty.
- A Christian marriage is between two Christians; therefore, mixed marriages are not considered Christian.
- Polygamous persons who convert to Christianity cannot be ordered to divorce. A man who converts to Christianity cannot subsequently take a second wife.
- If a woman decides to become a polygamous wife she will be classified as a probationary member.

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE
STUDY SESSION 6: Moral Leadership and Discernment

FOCUS: the church's history of exemplifying and enforcing morality through the lives of clergy, particularly through church trials

OBJECTIVE: Deliberation and discernment of the future of moral leadership in Methodism

RESOURCES FOR GROUP STUDY:

Bible
Methodist Morals, chapter seven
The Book of Discipline

LEADER PREPARATION:

Participant Handouts
Copies of the most recent Social Principles
The United Methodist Hymnal #39 and #420 and / or #399
Dates and statements from the Discipline
Rev. Tuttle's story
Stories of four persons who had church trials
Time Lines

OPENING WORSHIP

HYMN: Take My Life and Let It Be, *The United Methodist Hymnal* # 399

SCRIPTURE: I Timothy 4:1-12

PRAYER: Almighty God, as you called persons in the past to lead your people, so you call men and women today to communicate the Gospel taught and lived by Jesus Christ. Give to us understanding of the needs and responsibilities to be fulfilled today as well as openness to those who are called to leadership roles in the church and world today. In the name of the supreme model of leadership, Jesus Christ. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

This is the final study session of *Methodist Morals*, though hopefully not the last time we will engage in deliberation and discernment about morality and faith as Methodists. In this session, we study the church's history of enforcing morality through the lives of clergy, particularly through church trials. Methodism considered debt, drugs, and divorce the cardinal sins for clergy for much of its history. More recently, heterosexuality has become the principle litmus test of morality. Regardless of the current issues, Methodists consistently hold clergy to high moral standards, exemplifying the morality expected of all Christians.

Invite two participants as readers:

⇒ READER 1: “All Christians are in ministry....”

⇒ READER 2: “Clergy are persons....”

Clergy have been considered moral leaders -- as models -- in the church and community. Historically, clergy have had tremendous influence on the moral standards of the community and even the nation. More recently, clergy have been viewed as professionals whose misconduct is considered professional malpractice. Additionally, clergy sometimes engage in forms of ecclesial disobedience to live out their faith in opposition to church laws they consider unjust. The author addresses each of these approaches, their possibilities, and their limitations.

At the end of this session, we will be invited to reflect back on the themes of the past six sessions. What role do we as Methodists, both laity and clergy, have in discerning how to live a moral life? How can we support and hold each other accountable for living morally?

CLERGY AS MODELS FOR MORALITY

John Wesley’s General Rules from 1739 provide the first substantive description of the behavior expected of Methodists. At the time, these were intended for all of the members of the Societies and Classes under John Wesley. As the Methodists, Brethren, and Evangelicals organized into churches, their *Disciplines* included a variety of moral positions and specific expectations for clergy moral conduct.

Divorce

One of the major issues of morality in Methodism was that of divorce – for all members and especially clergy. From the later half of the 19th c. through the mid-20th c., clergy were neither allowed to be divorced nor to solemnize marriage where there is a divorced wife or husband living, with few exceptions (p. 150). This stance was based on application of scriptural passages as law and remained in effect with few changes until the forming of The United Methodist Church in 1968. A case from the 1920s is illustrative.

In 1922, Rev. Frank L Tuttle married a divorcee. The Conference Relations Committee of the California Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church reported that he was in violation of the law of the church. However, due to "extenuating circumstances" and his good character, they brought no charges against him.

⇒ Listen to Rev. Tuttle tell his story...

Bishop Adna Leonard considered the recommendation of the Conference Relations Committee to be contrary to the law of the church and ordered a trial. The bishop's ruling was appealed, but upheld by the Committee on Judiciary reasserting the only legitimate ground for divorce was adultery and that remarriage of divorcees under any other circumstance was against church law. Rev. Tuttle died before he could be brought to trial (p. 150).

Past Statements on Moral Standards for Clergy

⇒ *Study past denominational statements as printed in the Participant Handouts.*

Questions:

- What major shifts in moral standards occurred between the time of John Wesley and 1972?
- Why do you think these changes were made?

HOMOSEXUALITY

As soon as the proscriptions regarding divorce were removed, the General Conference began to focus on homosexuality and increasingly moved toward an absolute prohibition.

Timeline of Actions Related to Homosexuality

⇒ *Put the timeline on screen or whiteboard or assign the statements to persons to be read.*

Listen to these clergy who were brought to trial based on their violation of the law of the church:

⇒ **Jimmy Creech:** “I performed a union ceremony”

⇒ **Beth Stroud:** “In a sermon”

⇒ **Frank Schaefer:** “I married my son and his partner”

⇒ **Rev. Amy DeLong:** “I had a trial in 2011”

Questions:

- Why did the initial restrictive language about divorce based on Scripture, become more lenient and the language re homosexuality become more restrictive?
- Why the differences in the outcomes of the trials?
- How do these trials help you understand appropriate moral behavior as a Methodist?

CLERGY AS ETHICAL PROFESSIONALS

Since the 1980s, clergy have been held to ethical standards as professionals differing from expectations for laity. Clergy misconduct of a sexual nature is a violation of the sacred trust of ministry as well as criminal under some state laws.

⇒ *Discuss the Participant Handout, showing a definition and timeline.*

Questions:

- How can a clergy person distinguish between personal and professional life in moral situations?
- What ethical expectations do you have for your pastor that you do not have for lay members of your congregation?

CLOSING

PREAMBLE OF THE SOCIAL PRINCIPLES: third paragraph

We pledge to continue to be in respectful conversation with those with whom we differ, to explore the sources of our differences, to honor the sacred worth of all persons as we continue to seek the mind of Christ and to do the will of God in all things. We stand united in declaring our faith that God’s grace is available to all, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

HYMN: “Breathe On Me Breath of God,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* #420

FOR FURTHER STUDY, LESSON 6:

Brubaker, Ellen A. *The Bible and Human Sexuality: Claiming God’s Good Gift*. Participant Guide by M. Garlinda Burton. New York: United Methodist Women, 2016.

The Church Studies Homosexuality. Study Book ed. by Gary L. Ball-Kilbourne and *Leader’s Guide* by Dorothy L. Williams. Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1994.

De la Torre, Miguel A. *A La Familia: A Conversation about Our Families, the Bible, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity*. With Ignacio Castuera and Lisbeth MelendéZ Rivera.

General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns. “[In Search of Unity](#).” New York: 1998.

Jung, Patricia Beattie and Darryl W. Stephens, eds. *Professional Sexual Ethics: A Holistic Ministry Approach*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013.

Melton, Joy Thornburg. *Safe Sanctuaries for Ministers: Best Practices and Ethical Decisions*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2009.

Nickell, Jane Ellen. *We Shall Not Be Moved: Methodists Debate Race, Gender, and Homosexuality*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014.

Oliveto, Karen P., Kelly D. Turney, and Traci C. West. *Talking About Homosexuality: A Congregational Resource*. Holy Conversations series. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2005.

Quotes to be read by participants:

READER 1: All Christians are in ministry. The *Discipline* states: “All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment” (para. 127). However, distinction is made between the call of “all Christians” (laity) and persons with a special call to leadership in the church (clergy).

READER 2: Clergy are persons “who respond to God's call by offering themselves in leadership as set-apart ministers...” (para. 301.2). This call is affirmed by the local church community and the called persons set apart through a special service of ordination developed from the practice of the early church. “The early church, through the laying on of hands, set apart persons with responsibility to preach, to teach, to administer the sacraments, to nurture, to heal, to gather the community in worship, and to send them forth to witness” (para. 302).

Frank Tuttle: I was married to Mrs. E. L. Anderson of Pacific Grove on October 8, 1922. She has obtained a divorce from her husband in 1909 after four years of desertion and lack of support. I knew Mrs. Anderson for about ten of her thirteen years as a divorcee during which time her Christian character and service to the church were exemplary. My first wife died in 1921. I had been retired from active ministry for eight years. At the time of our wedding, I was seventy-three and Mrs. Anderson was seventy-one years old.

Jimmy Creech: I performed a union ceremony for two women at First United Methodist Church in Omaha, September 14, 1997. Charges were filed based on my violating the law of the church. After a three-day church trial in Nebraska, I was acquitted of violating the order and discipline of the church. In April 1999, I performed a union ceremony of two men in North Carolina. I was taken to trial again, and lost my ministerial credentials. Between the two trials, the Judicial Council of the church ruled that the disciplinary sentence against same-sex unions in the Social Principles is law and clergy who violate the prohibition could be charge with disobeying the order and the discipline of the church. (p. 45)

Beth Stroud: In a sermon at Germantown United Methodist Church in Philadelphia in 2003, I disclosed that I am a lesbian and in a committed relationship with another woman. Charges were brought against me based on the forbidding of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" from being "appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church." A trial was held in 2004 at Camp Innabah, a camp where I had gone as a teenager. The decision of the jury of clergy persons was that I had violated the Disciplinary requirement; therefore, my ministerial credentials were removed. Although there were appeals, the decision of the trial was upheld. (United Methodist News Service Archives)

Quotes to be read by participants (cont.):

Frank Schaefer: I married my son and his partner in 2007 and charges were brought against me in 2013 shortly before the end of the six-year statute of limitations. The trial was held in November 2013 and the jury's verdict was I had violated the Discipline's prohibition for clergy to celebrate homosexual marriages (Par. 341.6 and Par. 2702.1) I was asked to report to the Conference Board of Ordained Ministry in thirty days if I would promise not to perform any same-sex marriages in the future. If I refused to make that commitment, my credentials were to be removed. I did refuse to make that promise and my credentials were removed. However, an appeal was made to the Northeastern Jurisdictional Committee who reversed the decision. An appeal was made to the Judicial Council of The United Methodist Church that upheld the ruling of the Jurisdiction, and my credentials were restored. I am presently serving a church in California. (United Methodist News Service)

Amy DeLong: I had a trial in 2011 on two charges: conducting a marriage ceremony of Carrie Johnson and Carolyn Larson on September 19, 2009 in Menominee, Wisconsin and being a self-avowed practicing homosexual. I was suspended from active ministry for twenty days and required to engage in a year-long process to "restore the broken clergy covenant relationship" (pp. 167, 168)

METHODIST MORALS STUDY GUIDE

APPENDIX A: Changes legislated to the Social Principles by General Conference 2016

(See <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/legislation-tracking>.)

¶ 161.R Bullying – *new subsection*

Bullying is a growing problem in parts of the connection. It is a contributing factor in suicide and in the violence we see in some cultures today. We affirm the right of all people regardless of gender, socio-economic status, race, religion, disability, age, physical appearance, sexual orientation and gender identity to be free of unwanted aggressive behavior and harmful control tactics.

As the Church, we can play a pivotal role in ending this problem. We urge churches to seek opportunities to be trained in responding to the needs of those who have been bullied, to those who perpetrate bullying, and to support those in authority who may witness or be called to intervene on behalf of those who have been bullied. Churches are urged to connect with community associations and schools in this outreach.

We encourage churches to adopt a policy of zero tolerance for bullying, including cyber-bullying, within their spheres of influence; stand with persons being bullied; and take a leadership role in working with the schools and community to prevent bullying.

¶ 161.A Culture and Identity – *new subsection*

We believe that our primary identity is as children of God. With that identity comes societal and cultural constructions that have both positive and negative impacts on humanity and the Church. Cultural identity evolves through our history, traditions and experiences. The Church seeks to fully embrace and nurture cultural formation and competency as a means to be fully one body, expressed in multiple ways. Each of us has multiple identities of equal value that intersect to form our complete self. We affirm that no identity or culture has more legitimacy than any other. We call the Church to challenge any hierarchy of cultures or identities. Through relationships within and among cultures we are called to and have the responsibility for learning from each other, showing mutual respect for our differences and similarities as we experience the diversity of perspectives and viewpoints.

¶ 161.D Divorce – *amend as follows*

God's plan is for lifelong, faithful marriage. The church must be on the forefront of premarital, marital, and postmarital counseling in order to create and preserve healthy relationships ~~strong marriages~~ . . .

¶ 161.H Family Violence and Abuse – *amend as follows*

We recognize that family violence and abuse in all its forms—verbal, psychological, physical, sexual—is detrimental to the covenant of the human community. We encourage the Church to provide a safe environment, counsel, and support for the victim and to work with the abuser to understand the root causes and forms of abuse to overcome such behaviors. Regardless of the cause or the abuse, both the victim and the abuser need the love of the church. While we deplore the actions of the abuser, we affirm that person to be created in God’s image and in need of God’s redeeming love.

¶ 161.L Ministry With Those Who Have Experienced an Abortion – *amend as follows*

We urge local pastors to become informed about the symptoms and behaviors associated with post-abortion stress. We commit our Church to continue to provide nurturing ministries to those who terminate a pregnancy, to those in the midst of a crisis pregnancy, and to those who give birth. We further encourage local churches to make available contact information for counseling agencies that offer programs to address post-abortion stress for all seeking help.

¶ 161.Q Pornography – *new subsection*

Scripture teaches that humans are created in God’s image and that we are accountable to God through right relationship. Sexual images can celebrate the goodness of human sexuality through positive depiction in art, literature, and education. We deplore, however, images that distort this goodness and injure healthy sexual relationships.

We oppose all forms of pornography and consider its use a form of sexual misconduct. Pornography is sexually explicit material that portrays violence, abuse, coercion, domination, humiliation, or degradation for the purpose of sexual arousal. Pornography sexually exploits and objectifies both women and men. Any sexually explicit material that depicts children is abhorrent and victimizes children. Pornography can ruin lives, careers, and relationships. We grieve the pervasiveness of Internet pornography, including among Christians, and especially its impact on young people and marriages.

The Church is called to transformation and healing for all persons adversely affected by pornography. Congregations should send a clear message of opposition to pornography and commitment to safe environments for everyone. We encourage strategies to eradicate pornography, to support victims, and to provide open and transparent conversation and education around sexuality and sexual ethics. We also believe that people can be rehabilitated and should

have the opportunity to receive treatment; therefore, churches should seek ways to offer support and care for addressing issues of addiction. Further, all churches are encouraged to review and update appropriate child, youth, and adult protection policies to reflect The United Methodist Church's position that the use of pornography is a form of sexual misconduct. By encouraging education, prevention, and pathways to recovery for all affected by pornography, we live out our Wesleyan understanding of grace and healing.

¶ 162.H Rights of Immigrants – *amend as follows*

We recognize, embrace, and affirm all persons, regardless of country of origin, as members of the family of God. We affirm the right of all persons to equal opportunities for employment, access to housing, health care, education, and freedom from social discrimination. We urge the Church and society to recognize the gifts, contributions, and struggles of those who are immigrants and to advocate for justice for all. We oppose immigration policies that separate family members from each other or that include detention of families with children, and we call on local churches to be in ministry with immigrant families.

¶ 162.A – *amend as follows*

Rights of Racial and Ethnic ~~Groups~~ Persons—Racism is the combination of the power to dominate by one race over other races and a value system that assumes that the dominant race is innately superior to the others. Racism includes both personal and institutional racism. Personal racism is manifested through the individual expressions, attitudes, and/or behaviors that accept the assumptions of a racist value system and that maintain the benefits of this system. Institutional racism is the established social pattern that supports implicitly or explicitly the racist value system. Racism manifested as sin, plagues and hinders ~~cripples~~ our growth relationship with ~~in~~ Christ, inasmuch as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. ~~Unfortunately, historical and institutional racism provide support for white privilege, and white people, as a result of the color of their skin, are granted privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color.~~ We oppose the creation of a racial hierarchy in any culture. In many cultures, white people are granted unearned privileges and benefits that are denied to persons of color. Racism breeds racial discrimination. We define racial discrimination as the disparate treatment and lack of full access ~~and equity to~~ in resources, and opportunities, and participation in the Church and in society based on race or ethnicity.

Therefore, we recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commit as the Church to move beyond symbolic expressions and representative models that do not challenge unjust systems of power and access.

We commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society. We assert the obligation of society and people within the society to implement compensatory programs that redress long-standing, systemic social deprivation of ~~certain~~ racial and ethnic ~~groups~~ persons. We further assert the right of members of historically underrepresented racial and ethnic ~~groups~~ persons to equal and equitable opportunities in employment and promotion; to education and training of the highest quality; to nondiscrimination in voting, access to public accommodations, and housing purchase or rental; to credit, financial loans, venture capital, and insurance policies; ~~and~~ to positions of leadership and power in all elements of our life together and to full participation in the Church and society. We support affirmative action as one method of addressing the inequalities and discriminatory practices within ~~our~~ the Church and society.

¶ 164.A Basic Freedoms and Human Rights – *amend by inserting after the first sentence:*

Blockades and embargoes that seek to impede the flow or free commerce of food and medicines are practices that cause pain and suffering, malnutrition, or starvation with all its detrimental consequences to innocent and noncombatant civilian populations, especially children. We reject these as instruments of domestic and foreign policy regardless of political or ideological views.

All of the above excerpted from <http://um-insight.net/general-conference/2016-general-conference/part-3-amending-the-old-social-principles-while-awaiting-the/>.

Note also erratum in the *Book of Discipline 2012*, Social Principles Preamble, page 104.

Third paragraph should read:

“We pledge to continue to be in respectful conversation with those with whom we differ, to explore the sources of our differences, to honor the sacred worth of all persons as we continue to seek the mind of Christ and to do the will of God in all things. We stand united in declaring our faith that God’s grace is available to all, that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”

Delete final paragraph, beginning “We acknowledge that...”

(From <http://images.umph.org/cokeburyporthals/BOD%202012%20Errata%2006-04-2015%20final.pdf> and review of General Conference 2012 petition 20544, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/general-conference-2012-legislation-tracking>.)

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APPENDIX B: Musical Setting of “Companion Litany to Our Social Creed”

See attached PDF for musical score.

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APPENDIX C: SPECIAL ADVICES 1904 DISCIPLINE OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

I. Temperance

It implies a subordination of all the emotions, passions, and appetites to the control of reason and conscience. Dietetically, it means a we use of suitable articles of food and drink, with entire abstinence from such as are known to be hurtful....The business of manufacturing and vending such liquor is also against the principles of morality, political economy, and the public welfare. We therefore regard voluntary total abstinence from all intoxicants as the true ground of personal temperance and complete legal prohibition of the traffic in alcoholic drinks as the duty of civil government. We heartily approve of all lawful and Christian efforts to save society from the manifold and grievous evil resulting from intemperance, and earnestly advise our people to cooperate in all measures which may seem to them wisely adapted to secure that end. We refer to our General Rules on the subject and affectionately urge its strict observance by all our Members. Finally, we are fully persuaded that under God, hope for the ultimate success of the Temperance Reform rests chiefly upon the combined and sanctified influence of the Family, the Church, and the State.

II. Dress

All our people be exhorted to conform to the spirit of the apostolic precept not to adorn themselves "with gold, or pearls, or costly array." (I Tim. 2:9)

III. Marriage

1. We do not prohibit our people from marrying persons who are not of our Church, provided such persons have the form, and are seeking the power, of godliness; but we are determined to discourage their marrying persons who do not come up to this description. Many of our Members have married unawakened persons. This has produced bad effects; they have been either hindered for life, or have turned back to perdition.

2. To discourage 1) Let every Minister publicly enforce the Apostle's caution "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers (II. Cor. 6:14) 2) Let all be exhorted to take no step in so weighty a matter without advising with the more serious of their brethren.

3. In general a woman ought not to marry without the consent of her parents. Yet there may be exceptions. For if 1) a woman believes it to be her duty to marry; 2) her parents absolutely refuse to let her marry any Christians; then she may, nay, ought to marry without their consent. Yet even then a Methodist Minister ought not to be married to her.

IV. Divorce

No divorce, except for adultery, shall be regarded by the Church a lawful; and no Minister shall solemnize marriage in any case a divorced wife or husband living; but this rule

shall not be applied to the innocent party to a divorce for the cause of adultery, nor to divorced parties seeking to be reunited in marriage.

V. Slavery

We declare that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery. We believe that the buying and selling, or holding of human beings, to be used as chattels, is contrary to the laws of God and nature, and inconsistent with the Golden Rule, and with that Rule in our Discipline which requires all who desire to continue among us to "do no harm" and to "avoid evil of every kind." We therefore affectionately admonish all our Ministers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extermination by all lawful and Christian means.

VI. Amusements

Improper amusements and excessive indulgences in innocent amusements are serious barriers to the beginning of the religious life and fruitful causes of spiritual decline. Some amusements in common use are also positively demoralizing and furnish the first steps to the total loss of character. We therefore look with deep concern on the great increase of amusements and on the general prevalence of harmful amusements and lift up a solemn note of warning and entreaty particularly against theater-going, dancing, and such games of chance as are frequently associated with gambling all of which have been found to be antagonistic to vital piety, promotive of worldliness, and especially pernicious to youth. We affectionately admonish all our people to make their amusements the subject of careful thought and frequent prayer, to study the subject of amusements in light of their tendencies, and to be scrupulously careful in this matter to set no injurious example. We adjure them to remember that the question for a Christian must often be, not whether a certain course of action is positively immoral, but whether it will dull the spirit and be an unwise example. We enjoin all our Bishops, Presiding Elders, and Pastors to call attention to this subject with solemn urgency in our Annual and Quarterly Conferences and in all our pulpits, and on our Editors, Sunday School Officers, Epworth League Officers, and Class Leaders, to aid in abetting the evils we deplore. We deem it our bounden duty to summon the whole Church to apply a thoughtful and instructed Conscience to the choice of amusements, and not to leave them to accident or taste or passion; and we affectionately advise and beseech every Member of the Church absolutely to avoid "the taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus."

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APPENDIX D: COMMITMENT SUNDAY 1966

See attached PDF image.