

Combating the Erosion of Human Dignity

Whereas, a foundational tenet of Christian faith is that all people are created in the image of God, and a foundational Wesleyan belief is that prevenient grace reveals God’s love and mercy to all people; and

Whereas, the quality of human dignity is universal and inherent in all persons of every race, ethnicity, gender, religion, ability, age, status, orientation, nationality; and

Whereas, texts throughout the Old Testament impart the priority of justice through hospitality and mercy for vulnerable people. Rahab risked her life to harbor foreigners in danger.² The prophet Zechariah conveys God’s command to “show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another.”³ Inspired by God’s Spirit, this message is echoed by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, and Malachi, who urge practices of mercy and hospitality, just as God has been merciful and hospitable to God’s people even in their wandering and transgressions; and

Whereas, in the New Testament Jesus lived as a refugee and sojourner aided by others, and in his teaching set love of neighbor and enemy⁴ alongside love of God. Jesus pointed the lawyer toward the Good Samaritan as an example of neighbor;⁵ declared the greatest commandment to be loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and your neighbor as yourself;⁶ and proclaimed that in welcoming and offering aid to the least of these, Christ himself is welcomed, fed, clothed, sheltered, visited, and comforted;⁷ and

Whereas, people of faith have sought and offered refuge during times of struggle. In Matthew’s birth story of Jesus, the family facing danger flees to another country, Egypt. Throughout the Middle Ages, churches served as sanctuary for people in danger. Churches and people of faith were instrumental in protecting escaped slaves on the Underground Railroad, sheltering Jews during the Holocaust, and other efforts to give comfort and safety to those fleeing persecution and danger.

Whereas, John Wesley worked to improve the lives of people without resources: founding schools, establishing a printing press, starting a medical clinic,⁸ and publishing a medical primer for home use. Wesley urges the people called Methodist to balance their faith between acts of piety and acts of mercy.⁹ In talking about Christian perfection, Wesley cited “love governing the heart and the life, tempering our words and actions;”¹⁰ and

Whereas human dignity and societal compassion have been eroded in these and other instances:

- **Rising incidence of hate crimes in the United States** (Hateful harassment increased drastically, with nearly 900 incidents across the United States in early November of 2016.¹¹ In 2014-2015, single-incident hate crimes toward individuals and faith communities increased, with more than half motivated by race or ethnicity, over 20% by religious bias, almost 20% related to sexual orientation, and the rest linked to gender identity, disability, and gender bias.¹²)

² Joshua 2; 6:17

³ Zechariah 7:9-10

⁴ Matthew 5:44

⁵ Luke 10:25-27

⁶ Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27

⁷ Matthew 25:44-45

⁸ Heitzenrater, Richard P. ‘The Poor and the People Called Methodists.’ p.34

⁹ Wesley’s Discourse 4

¹⁰ From Wesley’s sermon, “Thoughts on Christian Perfection.” Cited in Field, David H. “Holiness, social justice and the mission of the Church: John Wesley’s insights in contemporary context.” <http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/03-field.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.splcenter.org/20161129/ten-days-after-harassment-and-intimidation-aftermath-election>

¹² https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2015/topic-pages/incidentsandoffenses_final.pdf

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- **Tense and escalating race relations** (While 60% of Blacks believe racial relations are bad, 60% of Whites believe racial relations are good.¹³ These opposing experiences and the greater implications affect persons of color throughout our society and systems.)
- **The normalcy of degrading language of women, their bodies and personhood** (which increases the risk for violence against women. Women’s human rights are directly tied to reduction in hunger and poverty.¹⁴¹⁵)
- **Threat of defunding access to women’s health options** (exacerbated by additional funding restrictions limiting accessible and affordable healthcare through established organizations.)
- **Threat to quality, life-sustaining and life-saving healthcare** (directly affecting persons with disabilities, chronic illness, or the challenges of aging, as well as those with generally good health. Being aware and treating common conditions can improve quality of life and control long-term health costs.¹⁶)
- **Rising anti-immigrant sentiment** (Escalating rhetoric ignites xenophobic attitudes, and recent policy moves include potential bans of specific people groups, Federal defunding of Sanctuary Cities,¹⁷ and emphasis on deporting large numbers of undocumented immigrants. In 2014, we saw large numbers of unaccompanied children migrating to escape violence and persecution, many of whom were detained for months in ad hoc jails at the border and returned to the danger from which they sought refuge.¹⁸ The 2010 census found 38.5 million immigrants living in the U.S., or 12.5% of the population.¹⁹ Economic growth benefits from immigrant skill and labor.²⁰²¹)

Therefore, be it resolved that both individually and corporately the people and churches of the Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church should stand in the light of Wesleyan social holiness and historic Methodist praxis by valuing the dignity and worth of all humans through acts of hospitality, compassion, mercy and grace. Further, these acts can include speaking out about injustice and the erosion of human dignity, even calling upon those with power to act in the interest and respect of all persons created in the image of God, and being in a spirit of prayer, seeking God’s wisdom and strength to act courageously in love.

As followers of Christ, we will model “commitment to addressing the needs of the poor, marginalized and suffering through social and sometimes political engagement.”²² As such, we commit to do everything in our power to ensure that all persons are afforded their dignity and human rights.

There is no financial impact to the Florida Conference by adopting this resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

¹² https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2015/topic-pages/incidentsandoffenses_final.pdf

¹³ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/27/key-takeaways-race-and-inequality/>

¹⁴ See Bread for the World’s 2015 Hunger Report: *When Women Flourish, We Can End Hunger*.

¹⁵ ‘Violence Against Women’ World Health Organization

¹⁶ <http://kff.org/medicaid/fact-sheet/key-medicare-questions-post-election/>

¹⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/sanctuary-cities/>

¹⁸ https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html?_r=0

¹⁹ From www.census.gov, cited on <http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/preach/statistics/>

²⁰ <http://www.maptheimpact.org/state/florida/>

²¹ <https://umc-gbcs.org/resolutions/welcoming-the-migrant-to-the-united-states>

²² Field, David H. “Holiness, social justice and the mission of the Church: John Wesley’s insights in contemporary context.” <http://www.wesley.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/03-field.pdf>

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