



The Florida Conference
OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A Theological Statement On Voter Participation & Suppression from the Public Policy and Witness Team

All Are Equal Before God

As Christians, we believe that all people are made in the image of God and have sacred worth. The stories we claim in Genesis about creation affirm these unique blessings assigned to humanity. In the giving of the Torah, God's people are commanded to value every human life, with particular attention to the treatment of those who are most vulnerable. In the word spoken through the prophets, we hear God's insistence on pursuing justice wherever there is oppression and dehumanization. Jesus, in his ministry, elevates the lives and experiences of persons who have been overlooked and neglected. Galatians 3:28 reminds us that all attempts to stratify human beings are in opposition to the gospel. Consequently, we commit ourselves to pursuing the fair and equal treatment of all persons with respect to voting rights. Every denial of such treatment is an expression of sin.

Human Sin of Injustice

We name and lament any effort to deny, deter, or delegitimize a person's right to vote as examples of sin. In the United States, systemic practices on every level of government have resulted in the historic and ongoing underrepresentation of racial- and ethnic-minority citizens through voting. Every vote counted is a voice heard. Every vote suppressed or not counted is a voice silenced. Laws and practices such as restricting voter registration, mass purging of voter rolls, disproportionate closing of polling places in communities of color, gerrymandering, and felony disenfranchisement fail to show God's love and treatment of neighbor as self and are sin.

This year, protecting the right to free and fair elections is made all the more urgent by the COVID-19 pandemic. Government bears the responsibility to protect the health and safety of its citizens by providing safe alternatives to in-person voting – such as early voting, extension of registration periods, absentee and mail-in voting alternatives. We especially decry the recent government activities in not funding the U.S. Postal Service that have resulted in a slow-down of the mail delivery system as a means of suppressing the vote.

The Spirit's Work Through the Church and Beyond

We acknowledge that winds of the Spirit are moving in and beyond the church as the work of antiracism has gained momentum and captured the global consciousness. We seek to get caught up in that work. We are divinely inspired by the vision of our world as a beloved community where all voices are heard and equal. Therefore, we partner with God to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to express their voice. In our American context, this expression includes the right to vote.

As United Methodists, "[w]e hold governments responsible for the protection of the rights of the people to free and fair elections...The form and the leaders of all governments should be determined by exercise of the right to vote guaranteed to all adult citizens" (*The Book of Discipline*. "Social Principles," paragraph 164, p. 138). We affirm God's call to choose leaders through the exercise of the vote. Working in cooperation with other faith communities and like-minded civic organizations, we seek to educate and provide information on the electoral process including voting rights and the effective use of alternatives to in-person voting. We will work to abolish laws and practices that suppress votes and promote policies that provide equal access to the ballot by all adults of voting age.