



## The United Methodist Church

### General Information

The United Methodist Church (UMC) traces its origins to the lives and ministries of John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles (1707-1788). Its current form took shape in 1968, when The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church merged into a single denomination. The UMC encourages dialogue with other denominations and permits members to hold divergent opinions about a wide range of religious and social issues. The Church teaches, however, that there is a "living core" of Christian truth which "stands revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal and corporate experience, and confirmed by reason" (*Book of Discipline*, 50-51). This core is set down in *The Book of Discipline* and its nonbinding applications to contemporary social issues are explored in *The Book of Resolutions*.

**Number of Members in the United States:** 8.5 million

**Number of Members Worldwide:** 10 million

### Governing Body:

The United Methodist Church strives to ensure representational government through the checks and balances of four branches: the General Conference, which sets official policies and is the only branch empowered to speak for the denomination as a whole; the Council of Bishops, which has administrative oversight responsibilities; the Judicial Council, which is the final court of appeals for disputes; and the Connectional Table, which coordinates the denomination's mission, ministries, and resources. With the exception of the Council of Bishops, where membership is restricted to active and retired clergy, all branches are required to have an equal number of lay and clergy representatives.

### Official Statements on Animals

**The United Methodist Church teaches that salvation is an unmerited gift from God, but that salvation also "evidences itself in good works." As a result of this emphasis on faith put into action, the Church has a strong commitment to social justice and a long history of involvement in contemporary social issues—including issues that impact animals and their habitats. "We cannot just be observers," says the UMC, but instead must actively promote the well-being of all God's creatures. "All creation...[including] animal life...[is] to be valued**

**and conserved because they are God's and not solely because they are useful to human beings."**

"Faith is the only response essential for salvation. However, the General Rules remind us that salvation evidences itself in good works."

--from "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task: 101.I Our Doctrinal Heritage; Faith and Good Works," in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2008* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 47.

"The United Methodist Church believes God's love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. We cannot just be observers. So we care enough about people's lives to risk interpreting God's love, to take a stand, to call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex."

--from "User's Guide: What's the purpose of the Book of Resolutions?" in *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, 2008* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 27-28.

"All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings."

--from "Social Principles: 160. I. The Natural World," in *The Book of Discipline, 98*.

**God's desire for us to be actively engaged in the protection of creation is known within the Church as "stewardship." This word carries with it the constant reminder that creation belongs to God, not to humanity, since "a steward is one given responsibility for what belongs to another."**

"In Genesis 1:26, the Bible affirms that every person is created in God's image. But this gift brings with it a unique responsibility. Being created in God's image brings with it the responsibility to care for God's creation. God chose to give human beings a divine image not so we would exploit creation to our own ends, but so we would be recognized as stewards of God. To have dominion over the earth is a trusteeship, a sign that God cares for creation and has entrusted it to our stewardship."

--from "The Natural World: 1026. Environmental Stewardship: I. A Theology of Stewardship and the Environment; Stewards of God's Creation," in *The Book of Resolutions, 80*.

"In the Bible, a steward is one given responsibility for what belongs to another. The Greek word we translated as steward is *oikonomos*, one who cares for the household or acts as a trustee. The word *oikos*, meaning household, is used to describe the world as God's household. Christians, then, are to be stewards of the whole household (creation) of God."

--from "The Natural World: 1026. Environmental Stewardship: I. A Theology of Stewardship and the Environment: in *The Book of Resolutions, 79*.

"Humankind enjoys a unique place in God's universe. On the one hand, we are simply one of God's many finite creatures, made from the 'dust of the earth,' bounded in time and space, fallible in judgment, limited in control, dependent upon our Creator, and interdependent with

all other creatures. On the other hand, we are created in the very image of God, with the divine Spirit breathed into us, and 'entrusted' with 'dominion' over God's creation (Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:7; Psalm 8:6). We are simultaneously caretakers with all creation and, because of the divine summons, caretakers with God of the world in which we live."

--from "The Natural World: 1001. Energy Policy Statement," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 49.

**Unfortunately, says the UMC, "we have confused God's call for us to be faithful stewards of creation with a license to use all of creation as we see fit." It is now time for us to correct our past arrogance, "repent of our devastation of the physical and nonhuman world," and remind ourselves that God's redemptive "covenant is with all creatures."**

"Through the ages, a theological base for the domination of creation was found in Genesis 1:28: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over...every living thing that moves upon the earth.' Misinterpretation of 'subdue' and 'dominion' has been used to justify much of the nature-destroying aspects of modern civilization."

--from "The Natural World: 1023. Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future; Historical and Theological Concerns," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 67.

"We have exploited God's soils, landscapes, plants, and animal life merely for their commercial value, forgetting our proper roles as limited, graced stewards of God's creation. Our relationship with creation is one of 'entrustment.' And we have not fulfilled that trust."

--from "The Social Community: 3184. Guidelines for Developing Genetically Modified Organisms," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 336.

"We are called to repent of our devastation of the physical and nonhuman world, because this world is God's creation and is therefore to be valued and conserved."

--from "The Natural World: 1028. Law of the Sea," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 87.

"We have confused God's call for us to be faithful stewards of creation with a license to use all of creation as we see fit. The first humans had to leave the garden of Eden when they decided they had permission to use all of creation despite warnings to the contrary. We have denied that God's covenant is with all living creatures (Genesis 9:9)...We forget that the good news that we are called to proclaim includes the promise that Jesus Christ came to redeem all creation (Colossians 1:15-20)."

--from "The Natural World: 1023. Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future; Historical and Theological Concerns," *The Book of Resolutions*, 67.

**In order for us to become faithful stewards, we must learn that we live in an interdependent world where seemingly private choices can have public consequences. These choices extend into all areas of life, including the economic, political, social, and technological. "Therefore," says the UMC, "let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyles to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all God's creation." Failure to accept this responsibility, says the Church, is the same as "rejecting or ignoring accountability to God and interdependency with the whole of creation [which] is the essence of sin."**

"All creation is under the authority of God and all creation is interdependent."

--from "The Natural World: 1026. Environmental Stewardship; I. A Theology of Stewardship and the Environment," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 79.

"Failure to accept limits by rejecting or ignoring accountability to God and interdependency with the whole of creation is the essence of sin."

--from "The Social Community: 3181. New Developments in Genetic Science; II. Our Theological Grounding; B. Human beings are stewards of creation," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 323.

"Economic, political, social, and technological developments have increased our human numbers, and lengthened and enriched our lives. However, these developments have led to regional defoliation, dramatic extinction of species, massive human suffering, overpopulation, and misuse and overconsumption of natural and nonrenewable resources, particularly by industrialized societies. This continued course of action jeopardizes the natural heritage that God has entrusted to all generations. Therefore, let us recognize the responsibility of the church and its members to place a high priority on changes in economic, political, social, and technological lifestyles to support a more ecologically equitable and sustainable world leading to a higher quality of life for all of God's creation."

--from "Social Principles: 160.I. The Natural World," *The Book of Discipline*, 98-99.

**Agriculture is one example of a seemingly private activity that has widespread consequences for creation. Current agricultural practices, "particularly North American agricultural practices," have resulted in the loss or obliteration of "strains of corn and apples, reduced the varieties of cattle and sheep..., bred chickens that do not ever get to walk, and turkeys so large they cannot even stand, much less fly." Such practices place profit over responsible stewardship and frequently are "exploitative...to people" as well as to animals and the land. The UMC, therefore, supports "a sustainable agricultural system that will maintain and support the natural fertility of agricultural soil, promote the diversity of flora and fauna...[and treat] agricultural animals...humanely...where their living conditions are as close to natural systems as possible."**

"Sustainable agriculture requires a global evaluation of the impact of agriculture on food and raw material production, the preservation of animal breeds and plant varieties, and the preservation and development of the cultivated landscape."

--from "Social Principles: 162.III The Social Community; Sustainable Agriculture" *The Book of Discipline*, 115.

"Humans, and particularly North American agricultural practices have lost or obliterated strains of corn and apples, reduced the varieties of cattle and sheep to a virtual handful, bred chickens that do not ever get to walk, and turkeys so large they cannot even stand, much less fly. Multinational agribusiness has sought to expand profits and control of agricultural practices by exporting such exploitative practices to peoples in the developing world. These practices have also threatened the diversity of the human community... It is possible to change the technology-driven direction of agriculture and rural development to one that is respectful and appreciative of creation as a gift of God that reflects our responsibilities as stewards and

establishes right relationships of sustainability with creation."

--from The Social Community: 3184. Guidelines for Developing Genetically Modified Organisms," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 336.

"We support a sustainable agricultural system that will maintain and support the natural fertility of agricultural soil, promote the diversity of flora and fauna, and adapt to regional conditions and structures--a system where agricultural animals are treated humanely and where their living conditions are as close to natural systems as possible. We aspire to an effective agricultural system where plant, livestock, and poultry production maintains the natural ecological cycles, conserves energy, and reduces chemical input to a minimum."

--from "Social Principles: 162.III The Social Community; Sustainable Agriculture," *The Book of Discipline*, 115.

**The UMC also supports "regulations that protect the life and health of animals, including those ensuring the humane treatment of pets and other domestic animals, animals used in research, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish, and fowl." The UMC further supports the protection of endangered species, including the "imperiled habitats" on which species depend.**

"We support regulations that protect the life and health of animals, including those ensuring the humane treatment of pets and other domestic animals, animals used in research, and the painless slaughtering of meat animals, fish, and fowl. We encourage the preservation of all animal species including those threatened with extinction."

--from "Social Principles: 160.I. The Natural World; Animal Life" *The Book of Discipline*, 99-100.

"We believe that the wondrous diversity of nature is a key part of God's plan for creation. Therefore, we oppose measures which would eliminate diversity in plant and animal varieties, eliminate species, or destroy habitats critical to the survival of endangered species or varieties. We support national and international efforts to protect endangered species and imperiled habitats."

--from "The Natural World: 1026. Environmental Stewardship; Preservation of the Diversity of Life," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 84.

**The ultimate goal of such support, says the UMC, is "shalom." This term "often translated 'peace,' [has] the broader meaning of...wholeness. Shalom is best understood when we experience wholeness and harmony as human beings with God, with others, and with creation itself."**

"Often translated 'peace,' the broader meaning of shalom is wholeness. In the Old Testament, shalom is used to characterize the wholeness of a faithful life lived in relationship to God. Shalom is best understood when we experience wholeness and harmony as human beings with God, with others, and with creation itself. The task of the stewards is to seek shalom."

--from "The Natural World: 1026. Environmental Stewardship; I. A Theology of Stewardship and the Environment," *The Book of Resolutions*, 80.

"The intention of creation was that all should experience shalom to know the goodness of creation. In the Old Testament, 'fullness of life' means having enough, sufficient, to experience

the goodness of creation. By contrast, our age has come to define 'fullness of life' as more than enough. The desire of many for excess begins to deny enough to others, and shalom is broken. That all should participate in creation's goodness is a fundamental of stewardship."

--from "The Natural World: 1026. Environmental Stewardship; I. A Theology of Stewardship and the Environment; Stewards of God's Creation," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 80.

"The coming of God's reign is the guiding hope for all creation. Hebrew Scripture and the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ affirm that God's reign is characterized by liberation from all forms of oppression, justice in all relationships, peace and good will among all peoples, and the healing of all creation."

--from "The Social Community: 3181. New Developments in Genetic Science; Our Theological Grounding; God's reign is for all creation," in *The Book of Resolutions*, 324.

## Contemporary References on Animals

**The UMC's message of shalom through active, faithful stewardship has reached down into the pews. For example, UMC member Dr. Matthew Sleeth, author of *Serve God, Save the Planet* and *The Gospel According to the Earth*, speaks of stewardship as a "major part of what God commanded us to do." However, says Sleeth, we can see that we are disobeying God's command when we notice that "all these species are disappearing and...all these resources are being used up...The United Methodist Church has this wonderful, wonderful theology that's perfect for the problems that we have today but...we really have to get a little bit more passionate about what it is that we do."**

"Just before Jesus left this earth, he said, 'Go into the world and preach the gospel to all the creatures, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.' The very first commandment we were given in the Bible is recorded in Genesis 2:15. We were told to tend and care for this garden—the earth. We can't go out and make disciples while simultaneously destroying the water, the air, and the creatures that God loves. If we don't respect the world around us, we're missing a major part of what God commanded us to do."

--from Dr. Matthew Sleeth, "And it Was Good," *Blessed Earth: Serving God, Saving the Planet*, <http://www.blessedearth.org/blogs/matthewsblog/anditwasgood.html>

"I thought all these species are disappearing and if all these resources are being used up, how much does my family have to do with that? We realized we were dead average in what's called your footprint. We decided we had to change, which meant moving to a house that was much smaller, and changing the way we got around and the way we ate, what we bought or didn't buy. And I really then began to work on connecting that with the Bible, which I now had a whole new respect for."

--quote from Dr. Matthew Sleeth, in The United Methodist Church, "Matthew and Nancy Sleeth share the importance of caring for God's creation,"

<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=1723949&ct=6796965&undefined%20>

"I would like to see the United Methodist Church have leadership both from grassroots up and from the top down. I believe that The United Methodist Church has this wonderful, wonderful

theology that's perfect for the problems that we have today, but that we really have to get a little bit more passionate about what it is that we do. We've got to think outside normal ministries, in a way, and we'll grow as we serve. To be effective, the church has to move beyond the sanctuary, out with the trees and the birds."

--quote from Dr. Matthew Sleeth, UMC "Matthew and Nancy Sleeth,"

<http://www.umc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=IwL4KnN1LtH&b=1723949&ct=6796965&undefined%20>

**In order to help other parishioners make the connection between God's love for creation and our own treatment of animals, the UMC offers "A Service for the Blessing of Animals." In this service, people are reminded of biblical passages in which God employs animals as special messengers and promises animals that they will share in God's gifts and God's salvation. "We, therefore, invoke God's blessing on these animals," intones the service. "As we do so, let us praise the Creator and thank God for setting us as stewards over all the creatures of the earth."**

"The animals of God's creation inhabit the skies, the earth, and the sea.

They share in the fortunes of human existence  
and have a part in human life.

God, who confers gifts on all living things,  
has often used the service of animals  
or made them reminders of the gifts of salvation.

Animals were saved from the flood  
and afterwards made a part of the covenant with Noah. (Genesis 9:9-10)

The paschal lamb recalls the Passover sacrifice  
and the deliverance from slavery in Egypt. (Exodus 12:3-14)

A giant fish saved Jonah; (Jonah 2:1-10)

ravens brought bread to Elijah; (1 Kings 17:6)

Animals were included in the repentance of Nineveh; (Jonah 3:7)

and animals share in Christ's redemption of all God's creation.

We, therefore, invoke God's blessing on these animals

As we do so, let us praise the Creator  
and thank God for setting us as stewards

over all the creatures of the earth."

--from "Occasional Services: A Service for the Blessing of Animals," *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 608-609.

## **Historical References on Animals**

**The UMC's concern for animals can be traced back to its founder, John Wesley. Wesley was a friend of William Wilberforce, the latter of who was an anti-slavery crusader and co-founder of the world's oldest anti-cruelty society (SPCA).<sup>1</sup> The last letter John Wesley wrote before his death was to Wilberforce.<sup>2</sup>**

**Wesley was a proponent of the health-effects of vegetarianism (although he never made vegetarianism a requirement of the faith), and a believer in the common origins and destinies**

**of all God's creatures. According to Wesley, "Nothing is more sure than that as 'the lord is loving to every man,' so 'his mercy is over all his works.'"**

*Responding to criticism from the Bishop of London about Wesley's diet, Wesley wrote: "By 'extraordinary strictness and severities,' I presume your lordship means, the abstaining from wine and animal food; which, it is sure, Christianity does not require. But if you do, I fear your lordship is not thoroughly informed of the matter of fact. I began to do this about twelve years ago....But I resumed the use of them both, about two years after, for the sake of some who thought I made it a point of conscience; telling them 'I will eat flesh while the world standeth,' rather than 'make my brother to offend.' Dr. Cheyne advised me to leave them off again, assuring me, 'Till you do, you will never be free from fevers.' And since I have taken his advice, I have been free (blessed be God!) from all bodily disorders. (I continued this about two years). Would to God I knew any method of being equally free from all 'follies of indiscretions!' But this I never expect to attain till my spirit returns to God."*

--from John Wesley, "Letter to the Bishop of London," in John Emory, ed. *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, AM*, Vol V (New York: T. Mason & G. Lane, 1839), 345.

"All the beasts of the field, and all the fowls of the air, were with Adam in paradise. And there is no question but their state was...paradisiacal; perfectly happy. Undoubtedly, it bore a near resemblance to the state of man himself... And they too were immortal..."

--from John Wesley, "Sermon 60: The General Deliverance," in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, AM*, Vol. VI (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), 242.

"(God) seeth 'the earnest expectation' wherewith the whole animal creation 'waiteth for' that final 'manifestation of the sons of God;' in which 'they themselves also shall be delivered' (not by annihilation; annihilation is not deliverance) 'from the' present 'bondage of corruption, into' a measure of the 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'... thus, in that day, all the vanity to which they are now helplessly subject will be abolished; they will suffer no more, either from within or without; the days of their groaning are ended. In the new earth, as well as the new heavens, there will be nothing to give pain, but everything that the wisdom and goodness of God can create to give happiness. As a recompence for what they once suffered, while under the 'bondage of corruption,' when God has 'renewed the face of the earth,' and their corruptible body has put on incorruption, they shall enjoy happiness suited to their state, without alloy, without interruption, and without end."

--from Wesley "Sermon 60," 248-250.

"Nothing is more sure, than that as 'the Lord is loving to every man,' so 'his mercy is over all his works;' all that have sense, all that are capable of pleasure or pain, of happiness or misery. In consequence to this, 'He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness. He prepareth food for cattle,' as well as 'herbs for the children of men.' He provideth for the fowls of the air, 'feeding the young ravens when they cry unto him.' 'He sendeth the springs into the rivers, that run among the hills, to give drink to every beast of the field,' and that even 'the wild asses may quench their thirst.' And, suitably to this, he directs us to be tender of even the meaner creatures; to show mercy to these also."

--from Wesley, "Sermon 60," 241.



1 For more information about William Wilberforce, see *The HSUS: Amazing Grace: The Work of William Wilberforce*

[http://www.humanesociety.org/news/profile/2007/william\\_wilberforce\\_021607.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/news/profile/2007/william_wilberforce_021607.html)

2 John Wesley, *Letter to William Wilberforce*, reprinted by The United Methodist Church, Global Ministries

<http://gbgm-umc.org/umw/wesley/wilber.stm>

## **Endorsement of HSUS Sponsored Legislation**

### **Ban on Cockfighting:**

In support of The HSUS's campaign to ban cockfighting in Louisiana, Bishop William W. Hutchinson, head of the Louisiana United Methodist Church, issued a public statement condemning the bloodsport. The ban passed in June 2007 and took effect in August 2008, in part due to Bishop Hutchinson's leadership.

-from *The HSUS: Bishop Speaks Out Against Cockfighting*

[http://www.humanesociety.org/about/departments/faith/facts/bishop\\_hutchinson\\_statement.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/about/departments/faith/facts/bishop_hutchinson_statement.html)

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For more information, visit The Humane Society of the United States Faith Outreach program at

<http://www.humanesociety.org/about/departments/faith/>