



## THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

### 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). The Church permits members to hold divergent opinions about a wide range of religious and social issues, but also teaches that there is a living core of Christian truth that "stands revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal and corporate experience, and confirmed by reason" ([UMC.org: Our Faith](http://www.umc.org))

More information about the UMC, including the Church's beliefs, structure, and history, can be found by going to <http://www.umc.org/>

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

**Number of Members Worldwide:** 10 million

#### Official Statements on Animals

#### **God desires us to put our faith into action, protecting His world and the animals in it**

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

### **Active engagement in the protection of creation is known as "stewardship"**

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

### **Faithful stewardship requires us to respect God's covenant with all creatures**

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

**Faithful stewardship requires actions that support a higher quality of life for all God's creatures**

- **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 to 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 United Methodist Church, "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 United Methodist Church, "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 United Methodist Church, "Social Principles: 160.I. The Natural World," *The Book of Discipline*, 98-99.

### **Faithful stewardship requires the humane treatment of agricultural animals**

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

### **Faithful stewardship requires the humane treatment of pets, research animals, and endangered species**

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

### **The goal of stewardship is shalom (wholeness for all creation)**

- **The ultimate goal of stewardship, 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 United Methodist Church, "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 United Methodist Church, "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 United Methodist Church, "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.

### Historical References on Animals

#### **John Wesley: God extended his mercy to animals in Eden and will deliver them to a future paradise**

- **The UMC's official concern for animals has its roots in the teachings of the denomination's founder, John Wesley.<sup>1, 2</sup> According to Wesley, God blessed both man and animal in Eden and will deliver both to a future paradise where they will have their full portion of immortality and "happiness...without alloy, without interruption, and without end."**
- "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

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<sup>1</sup>Wesley was a close friend of William Wilberforce, the co-founder of the world's oldest anti-cruelty society, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA). For more information about William Wilberforce, see The HSUS, [Amazing Grace: The Works of William Wilberforce](#).

<sup>2</sup> John Wesley's last letter before his death was to Wilberforce, [Letter to William Wilberforce](#), reprinted by The United Methodist Church, Global Ministries.

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 recompense 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.

**John Wesley: God's tender mercy to animals "directs us...to show mercy to these also"**

- **According to Wesley, God's mercy "is over all his works" and He "directs us to be tender of even the meaner creatures; to show mercy to these also."**
  - "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.

**John Wesley: A diet without meat is good for one's health, but is not a requirement of the faith**

- **Wesley was criticized by his detractors for his diet, which frequently was devoid of "wine and animal food" (the word "vegetarian" did not enter the English language until the 19th century). One of these detractors, the Bishop of London, claimed that Wesley made this diet a requirement of the Methodist faith. Wesley explained in a letter to the Bishop that he refrained from eating "flesh" because of his health, not because he believed this diet to be a Christian requirement.**
  - "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.

**Contemporary References on Animals**

**"Service for the Blessing of Animals": Animals share in human fortunes and in Christ's redemption**

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

**Bishop William W. Hutchinson: Cockfighting is inhumane and should be banned**

- **In April 2007, Louisiana UMC Bishop, William W. Hutchinson, joined with the Humane Society of the United States to call for a ban on cockfighting. Thanks in part to the work of Bishop Hutchinson, the ban was passed by the Louisiana legislature in June 2007 and took effect in August 2008.**
- "I join with others in support of SB 39, the ban of cockfighting. This is a inhumane practice that leads to the ill treatment of animals as well as fuels an unhealthy atmosphere in which gambling runs rampant. I encourage the immediate passage of this bill.  
 "The United Methodist Church has taken a clear stand on the issue of Animal Life...It is past time for this cruel and inhumane practice to end."  
 --from William W. Hutchinson, Open Letter, in HSUS, "[Bishop Speaks Out Against Cockfighting](#)."

For more resources, visit **The Humane Society of the United States** Faith Outreach program at [www.humanesociety.org/faith](http://www.humanesociety.org/faith)

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