

# Articles of Religion

## Article 1. Name

**Name 205.** The name of this communion is The Wesleyan Church. Wherever the use of this name is impossible or impractical, adaptation may be made by the authorized body (340:2).

## Article 2. Articles of Religion

### 1. Faith in the Holy Trinity

**210.** We believe in the one living and true God, both holy and loving, eternal, unlimited in power, wisdom, and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things. Within this unity there are three persons of one essential nature, power and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Gen. 1:1; 17:1; Ex. 3:13–15; 33:20; Deut. 6:4; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28–29; Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19; John 1:1–2; 4:24; 16:13; 17:3; Acts 5:3–4; 17:24–25; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Eph. 2:18; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16–17; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 1:8; 1 John 5:20.

### 2. The Father

**212.** We believe the Father is the Source of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, He made man, male and female, in His image. By intention He relates to people as Father, thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives penitent sinners.

Ps. 68:5; Isa. 64:8; Matt. 7:11; John 3:17; Rom. 8:15; 1 Peter 1:17.

### 3. The Son of God

**214.** We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, truly God and truly man. He died on the cross and was buried, to be a sacrifice both for original sin and for all human transgressions, and to reconcile us to God. Christ rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge all humanity at the last day.

Ps. 16:8–10; Matt. 1:21, 23; 11:27; 16:28; 27:62–66; 28:5–9, 16–17; Mark 10:45; 15; 16:6–7; Luke 1:27, 31, 35; 24:4–8, 23; John 1:1, 14, 18; 3:16–17; 20:26–29; 21; Acts 1:2–3; 2:24–31; 4:12; 10:40; Rom. 5:10, 18; 8:34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:3–8, 14; 2 Cor. 5:18–19; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; 4:4–5; Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 1:15; Heb. 2:17; 7:27; 9:14, 28; 10:12; 13:20; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2; 4:14.

### 4. The Holy Spirit

**216.** We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory, as the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. He is the Administrator of grace to all, and is particularly the effective Agent in conviction for sin, in regeneration, in sanctification, and in glorification. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer.

Job 33:4; Matt. 28:19; John 4:24; 14:16–17; 15:26; 16:13–15; Acts 5:3–4; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6.

## **5. The Sufficiency and Full Authority of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation**

**218.** We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures. They are the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority, and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. We believe that they contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man or woman that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. Both in the Old and New Testaments life is offered ultimately through Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and humanity. The New Testament teaches Christians how to fulfill the moral principles of the Old Testament, calling for loving obedience to God made possible by the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit. The canonical books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. The canonical books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation.

Ps. 19:7; Matt. 5:17–19; 22:37–40; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; 5:46; 17:17; Acts 17:2, 11; Rom. 1:2; 15:4, 8; 16:26; 2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 1:8; Eph. 2:15–16; 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Tim. 3:15–17; Heb. 4:12; 10:1; 11:39; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:19–21; 1 John 2:3–7; Rev. 22:18–19.

## **6. God's Purpose for Humanity**

**220.** We believe that the two great commandments which require us to love the Lord our God with all the heart, and our neighbors as ourselves, summarize the divine law as it is revealed in the Scriptures. They are the perfect measure and norm of human duty, both for the ordering and directing of families and nations, CONSTITUTION 222 17 and all other social bodies, and for individual acts, by which we are required to acknowledge God as our only Supreme Ruler, and all persons as created by Him, equal in all natural rights. Therefore all persons should so order all their individual, social, and political acts as to give to God entire and absolute obedience, and to assure to all the enjoyment of every natural right, as well as to promote the fulfillment of each in the possession and exercise of such rights.

Lev. 19:18, 34; Deut. 1:16–17; Job 31:13–14; Jer. 21:12; 22:3; Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:44–48; 7:12; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 6:27–29, 35; John 13:34–35; Acts 10:34–35; 17:26; Rom. 12:9; 13:1, 7–8, 10; Gal. 5:14; 6:10; Titus 3:1; James 2:8; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 John 2:5; 4:12–13; 2 John 6.

## **7. Marriage and the Family**

**222.** We believe that every person is created in the image of God, that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger

whole, and fulfillment. God's Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for His relationship with His covenant people and for revealing the truth that this relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore God's plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship which is divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a covenant union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship. We adhere to the teachings of Scripture regarding gender identity, sexual conduct, and the sacredness of marriage, and believe that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful.

Gen. 1:27–28; 2:18, 20, 23–24; Isa. 54:4–8; 62:5b; Jer. 3:14; Ezek. 16; Hosea 2; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4–6; Mark 10:9; John 2:1–2, 11; 1 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 5:23–32; 1 Tim. 5:14; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 19:7–8

## **8. Personal Choice**

**224.** We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are unable in their own strength to do the right. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each mortal, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.

Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; 1 Kings 20:40; Ps. 51:5; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21–23; Luke 16:15; John 7:17; Rom. 3:10–12; 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1–3; 1 Tim. 2:5; Titus 3:5; Heb. 11:6; Rev. 22:17.

## **9. Sin: Original, Willful, and Involuntary**

**225.** We believe that through the disobedience of Adam and Eve sin entered the world and all creation suffered its consequences. The effects of sin include disruption of the relationship between God and humanity, deterioration of the natural order of creation, and exploitation of persons by evil or misguided social systems. The whole of creation groans for redemption. Each person is born with a proclivity toward sin, manifested in an inordinate orientation toward self and independence from God, leading to deliberate acts of unrighteousness. The residual effects of Adam and Eve's disobedience include a marred human nature from which arise involuntary shortcomings, faults, infirmities, and imperfect judgments, which should not be accounted the same as willful sin. However, as manifestations of the fallen nature of humanity, these shortcomings of God's holiness still necessitate the merits of the atonement, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and the self-control of the believer. Willful sin results when a morally accountable person chooses to violate a known law of God, using freedom of choice to please self rather than obey God. The consequences of willful sin include a loss of fellowship with God, a self-absorption with one's own interests rather than love and concern for others, a bondage to things which distort the divine image, a persistent inability to live righteously, and

ultimately everlasting misery and separation from God. The atoning work of Christ is the only remedy for sin, whether original, willful or involuntary.

Gen. 3; 6:5; Ps. 1; 32:1–5; 51; Is. 6:5; Jer. 17:9–10; Matt. 16:24–27; 22:36–40; Mk. 7:20–23; John 16:8–9; Rom. 1:18–25; 3:23; 5:12–14; 6:15–23; 7:1–8:9; 8:18–24; 14:23; I Cor. 3:1–4; Gal. 5:16–25; Eph. 2:1–22; Col. 1:21–22; 3:5–11; I Jn. 1:7–2:4; 3:7–10.

## **10. The Atonement**

**226.** We believe that Christ's offering of himself, once and for all, through His sufferings and meritorious death on the cross, provides the perfect redemption and atonement for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual. There is no other ground of salvation from sin but that alone. This atonement is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. It is unconditionally effective in the salvation of those mentally incompetent from birth, of those converted persons who have become mentally incompetent, and of children under the age of accountability. But it is effective for the salvation of those who reach the age of accountability only when they repent and exercise faith in Christ.

Isa. 52:13–53:12; Luke 24:46–47; John 3:16; Acts 3:18; 4:12; Rom. 3:20, 24–26; 5:8–11, 13, 18–20; 7:7; 8:34; 1 Cor. 6:11; 15:22; Gal. 2:16; 3:2–3; Eph. 1:7; 2:13, 16; 1 Tim. 2:5–6; Heb. 7:23–27; 9:11–15, 24–28; 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

## **11. Repentance and Faith**

**228.** We believe that for men and women to appropriate what God's prevenient grace has made possible, they must voluntarily respond in repentance and faith. The ability comes from God, but the act is the individual's. Repentance is prompted by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It involves a willful change of mind that renounces sin and longs for righteousness, a godly sorrow for and a confession of past sins, proper restitution for wrongdoings, and a resolution to reform the life. Repentance is the precondition for saving faith, and without it saving faith is impossible. Faith, in turn, is the only condition of salvation. It begins in the agreement of the mind and the consent of the will to the truth of the gospel, but issues in a complete reliance by the whole person in the saving ability of Jesus Christ and a complete trusting of oneself to Him as Savior and Lord. Saving faith is expressed in a public acknowledgment of His Lordship and an identification with His Church.

Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; 13:3; 24:47; John 3:16; 17:20; 20:31; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 11:18; 16:31; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 1:16; 2:4; 10:8–10, 17; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8; 4:4–6; Phil. 3:9; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 11:6; 12:2; 1 Peter 1:9; 2 Peter 3:9.

## **12. Justification, Regeneration and Adoption**

**230.** We believe that when one repents of personal sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, that at the same moment that person is justified, regenerated, adopted into the family of God, and assured of personal salvation through the witness of the Holy Spirit. We believe that justification is the judicial act of God whereby a person is accounted righteous, granted full pardon of all sin, delivered from guilt, completely released from the penalty of sins committed, by the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith alone, not on the basis of works. We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that

work of the Holy Spirit whereby, when one truly repents and believes, one's moral nature is given a distinctively spiritual life with the capacity for love and obedience. This new life is received by faith in Jesus Christ, it enables the pardoned sinner to serve God with the will and affections of the heart, and by it the regenerate are delivered from the power of sin which reigns over all the unregenerate. We believe that adoption is the act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer becomes a partaker of all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a child of God.

**Justification:** Hab. 2:4; Acts 13:38–39; 15:11; 16:31; Rom. 1:17; 3:28; 4:2–5; 5:1–2; Gal. 3:6–14; Eph. 2:8–9; Phil 3:9; Heb. 10:38.

**Regeneration:** John 1:12–13; 3:3, 5–8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:5, 10, 19; 4:24; Col. 3:10; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3–4; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1.

**Adoption:** Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5, 7; Eph. 1:5. Witness of the Spirit: Rom. 8:16–17; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 2:3; 3:14, 18–19.

### 13. Good Works

**232.** We believe that although good works cannot save us from our sins or from God's judgment, they are the fruit of faith and follow after regeneration. Therefore they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and by them a living faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

Matt. 5:16; 7:16–20; John 15:8; Rom 3:20; 4:2, 4, 6; Gal. 2:16; 5:6; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 1:3; Titus 2:14; 3:5; James 2:18, 22; 1 Peter 2:9, 12.

### 14. Sin After Regeneration

**234.** We believe that after we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to fall into sin, for in this life there is no such height or strength of holiness from which it is impossible to fall. But by the grace of God one who has fallen into sin may by true repentance and faith find forgiveness and restoration.

Mal. 3:7; Matt. 18:21–22; John 15:4–6; 1 Tim. 4:1, 16; Heb. 10:35–39; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 24–25.

### 15. Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire

**236.** We believe that sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is separated from sin unto God and is enabled to love God with all the heart and to walk in all His holy commandments blameless. Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God. This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, being effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin. The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers that person for effective service. It is followed by lifelong growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The life of holiness continues through faith in the sanctifying blood of Christ and evidences itself by loving obedience to God's revealed will.

Gen. 17:1; Deut. 30:6; Ps. 130:8; Isa. 6:1–6; Ezek. 36:25–29; Matt. 5:8, 48; Luke 1:74–75; 3:16–17; 24:49; John 17:1–26; Acts 1:4–5, 8; 2:1–4; 15:8–9; 26:18; Rom. 8:3–4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:13, 24; 5:25–27; 1 Thess. 3:10, 12–13; 4:3, 7–8; 5:23–24; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 2:11–14; Heb. 10:14; 12:14; 13:12; James 3:17–18; 4:8; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 1:7, 9; 3:8–9; 4:17–18; Jude 24.

## **16. The Gifts of the Spirit**

**238.** We believe that the Gift of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself, and He is to be desired more than the gifts of the Spirit which He in His wise counsel bestows upon individual members of the Church to enable them properly to fulfill their function as members of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit, although not always identifiable with natural abilities, function through them for the edification of the whole Church. These gifts are to be exercised in love under the administration of the Lord of the Church, not through human volition. The relative value of the gifts of the Spirit is to be tested by their usefulness in the Church and not by the ecstasy produced in the ones receiving them.

Luke 11:13; 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:38–39; 8:19–20; 10:45; 11:17; Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–14:40; Eph. 4:7–8, 11–16; Heb. 2:4; 13:20–21; 1 Peter 4:8–11.

## **17. The Church**

**240.** We believe that the Christian Church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only Head of the Church. The Church includes both those believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those who remain on the earth, having renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and having dedicated themselves to the work which Christ committed unto His church until He comes. The Church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body of believers formally organized on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship, and worship. The Wesleyan Church is a denomination consisting of those members within district conferences and local churches who, as members of the body of Christ, hold the faith set forth in these Articles of Religion and acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of its governing bodies.

Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:41–47; 9:31; 11:22; 12:5; 14:23; 15:22; 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:28; 16:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:22–23; 2:19–22; 3:9–10, 21; 5:22–33; Col. 1:18, 24; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:23; James 5:14.

## **18. The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper**

**242.** We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are tokens of our profession of Christian faith and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith. We believe that water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord and administered to believers. It is a symbol of the new covenant of grace and signifies acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ. By means of this sacrament, believers declare their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Matt. 3:13–17; 28:19; Mark 1:9–11; John 3:5, 22, 26; 4:1–2; Acts 2:38–39, 41; 8:12–17, 36–38; 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Rom 2:28–29; 4:11; 6:3–4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27–29; Col. 2:11–12; Titus 3:5.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death and of our hope in His victorious return, as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other. To such as receive it humbly, with a proper spirit and by faith, the Lord's Supper is made a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.

Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:19–20; John 6:48–58; 1 Cor. 5:7–8; 10:3–4, 16–17; 11:23–29.

### **19. The Second Coming of Christ**

**244.** We believe that the certainty of the personal and imminent return of Christ inspires holy living and zeal for the evangelization of the world. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies made concerning His final and complete triumph over evil.

Job 19:25–27; Isa. 11:1–12; Zech. 14:1–11; Matt. 24:1–51; 25; 26:64; Mark 13:1–37; Luke 17:22–37; 21:5–36; John 14:1–3; Acts 1:6–11; 1 Cor. 1:7–8; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13–18; 5:1–11, 23; 2 Thess. 1:6–10; 2:1–12; Titus 2:11–14; Heb. 9:27–28; James 5:7–8; 2 Peter 3:1–14; 1 John 3:2–3; Rev. 1:7; 19:11–16; 22:6–7, 12, 20.

### **20. The Resurrection of the Dead**

**246.** We believe in the bodily resurrection from the dead of all people— of the just unto the resurrection of life, and of the unjust unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection which will occur at Christ's Second Coming. The raised body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable.

Job 19:25–27; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 22:30–32; 28:1–20; Mark 16:1–8; Luke 14:14; 24:1–53; John 5:28–29; 11:21–27; 20:1–21:25; Acts 1:3; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:1–58; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:1–11; 1 Thess. 4:13–17; Rev. 20:4–6, 11–13.

### **21. The Judgment of All Persons**

**248.** We believe that the Scriptures reveal God as the Judge of all and the acts of His judgment are based on His omniscience and eternal justice. His administration of judgment will culminate in the final meeting of all persons before His throne of great majesty and power, where records will be examined and final rewards and punishments will be administered.

Eccl. 12:14; Matt. 10:15; 25:31–46; Luke 11:31–32; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10–12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 9:27; 2 Peter 3:7; Rev. 20:11–13.

### **22. Destiny**

**250.** We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that there is a conscious personal existence after death. The final destiny of each person is determined by God's grace and that person's response, evidenced inevitably by a moral character which results from that individual's personal and volitional choices and not from any arbitrary decree of God. Heaven with its eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence is the final abode of those who choose the salvation which God provides through Jesus

Christ, but hell with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who neglect this great salvation.

Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:34–46; Mark 9:43–48; Luke 13:3; John 8:21–23; 14:2–3; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8, 10; Heb. 2:1–3; 9:27–28; 10:26–31; Rev. 20:14–15; 21:1–22:5, 14–15.

### **Article 3. Membership Commitments**

**260.** To be identified with an organized church is the blessed privilege and sacred duty of all who are saved from their sins and are seeking completeness in Christ Jesus. From the Church's beginnings in the New Testament age, it has been understood that such identification involves putting off the old patterns of conduct and putting on the mind of Christ. In maintaining this Christian concept of a transformed life, The Wesleyan Church intends to relate timeless biblical principles to the conditions of contemporary society in such a way as to respect the integrity of the individual believer, yet maintain the purity of the Church and the effectiveness of its witness. This is done in the conviction that there is validity in the concept of the collective Christian conscience as illuminated and guided by the Holy Spirit. The following items (265) represent historic, ethical and practical standards of The Wesleyan Church. While it is hoped that our people will earnestly seek the aid of the Spirit in cultivating a sensitivity to evil which transcends the mere letter of the law, those entering into membership are encouraged to follow carefully and conscientiously these guides and helps to holy living. Disregard of the principles embraced in these Membership Commitments subjects all credentialed ministers and any member serving in an elected leadership capacity to Church discipline (268; see also 550–610).

**265.** Those admitted to membership in our churches commit themselves to demonstrate their life in Christ in such ways as:

#### **Toward God**

(1). To reverence the name of God and to honor the Lord's Day by divine worship and spiritual edification, participating in those activities which contribute to the moral and spiritual purposes of this day.

Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:3, 7–11; Deut. 5:11–15; Isa. 58:13–14; Mark 2:27; Acts 20:7; Heb. 4:9.

(2) To seek only the leading of the Holy Spirit and to abstain from all forms of spiritism, such as the occult, witchcraft, astrology and other similar practices.

Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10–14; Acts 19:18–19; Gal. 5:19–20.

#### **Toward Self**

(3) To exercise faithful stewardship through the wise use of their time and material resources, practicing careful self-discipline in order to further the mission of Christ's church (remembering the principle of

tithing which is basic to the New Testament standard of stewardship) and to demonstrate compassion to those in need.

Prov. 3:9; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 23:23–24; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 5:16; Col. 3:17; James 2:15–16; 1 John 3:17

(4) To demonstrate a positive social witness by abstaining from all forms of gambling and by abstaining from using or trafficking (production, sale or purchase) in any substances destructive to their physical, mental and spiritual health, such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco and drugs (other than proper medical purposes of drugs); and by refraining from membership in secret societies and lodges which are oath bound, believing that the quasi-religious nature of such organizations divides the Christian's loyalty, their secret nature contravenes the Christian's open witness and the secret nature of their oaths is repugnant to the Christian conscience.

Ex. 20:17; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12. Gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship and the tenth commandment, is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive, is a poor example to others, and pollutes the moral climate of society.

Prov. 20:1; Rom. 6:12; 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 10:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:22. Christians are to regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. While no "thing" of itself is sinful, the Christian should avoid the use of anything which would not help build the fellowship of the church, would not help the believers to realize their full potential in Christ, or which would enslave them. In the light of the scientific knowledge of our day concerning the actual and potential harm of these substances, total abstinence is more in keeping with these biblical principles than is moderation.

Ex. 20:3; Matt. 5:34–36; John 18:20; Acts 4:12; James 5:12. These prohibitions do not restrict membership in labor, civic or other organizations which do not contradict loyalty to Christ and the Church. When in these relationships Christian principles are violated, members shall be dealt with because of such violations and not because of the membership itself.

(5) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding gender identity and sexual conduct.

Gen. 1:27; 1 Cor. 6:12–20; 7:17–24.

### **Toward Family**

(6) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding marriage and divorce. We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. We further affirm that marriage between one man and one woman is God's design, and we regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behavior, bestiality or incest, as clear biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counseling has failed to restore the relationship.

Ex. 20:14, 17; 22:19; Lev. 20:10–16; Matt. 5:32; 19:19; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18.

(7) To preserve the sanctity of the home by honoring Christ in every phase of family life and by demonstrating Christlike love (always avoiding violence, including physical, psychological, emotional, or sexual abuse toward one's spouse or family members, as well as sexual infidelity or desertion, any of which warrant church discipline for the offender and may justify separation or divorce if true repentance and appropriate counseling cannot bring about reconciliation), and by living peacefully with one another, thereby building up one's spouse and family members through word and deed, and encouraging the nurture and education of the children in the Christian faith so as to bring them early to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Prov. 22:6; Malachi 2:13–16; Mark 10:9; 1 Cor. 7:10–16, Eph. 5:28; 6:4.

### **Toward The Church**

(8) To work together for the advancement of God's kingdom and for the mutual edification of fellow believers in holiness, knowledge and love; to walk together in Christian fellowship by giving and receiving counsel with gentleness and affection; by praying for each other; by helping each other in sickness and distress; and by demonstrating love, purity and courtesy to all.

Rom. 15:1–2; Eph. 4; 1 Thess. 5.

(9) To grow in the knowledge, love and grace of God by participating in public worship, the ministry of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, family and personal devotions and fasting.

Mark 2:18–20; Acts 13:2–3; 14:23; Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 11:23–28; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1–2; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; Heb. 10:25; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18.

(10) To preserve the fellowship and witness of the Church with reference to the use of languages. The Wesleyan Church believes in the miraculous use of languages and the interpretation of languages in its biblical and historical setting. But it is contrary to the Word of God to teach that speaking in an unknown tongue or the gift of tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit or of that entire sanctification which the baptism accomplishes; therefore, only a language readily understood by the congregation is to be used in public worship. The Wesleyan Church believes that the use of an ecstatic prayer language has no clear scriptural sanction, or any pattern of established historical usage in the Church; therefore, the use of such a prayer language shall not be promoted among us.

Acts 8:14–17; 1 Cor. 12:1–14:40; Gal. 5:22–24.

### **Toward Others**

(11) To do good as much as is possible to all people as God gives opportunity, especially to those in the body of Christ; by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the destitute, by visiting or helping those who are sick or in prison; by instructing, correcting or encouraging them in love.

Matt. 25:31–46; Eph. 5:11; 1Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:13; 10:23–25.

(12) To respect the inherent individual rights of all persons, regardless of race, color or sex.

1 Cor. 8:13; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 5:21.

(13) To live honestly, be just in all dealings and faithful in all commitments.

Eccl. 5:4–5; Rom. 12:17; Phil. 4:8–9; 1 Peter 2:12.

268. These are the Membership Commitments of our Church. We believe all these to be consistent with the principles of Christ as taught in the Word of God, which is the only and sufficient rule both of our faith and practice. If any among us do not observe them, and/or habitually break any of them, we will admonish such persons in love with the hope of restoring them to lives of harmony with the above Membership Commitments. If such efforts of restoration continue to prove fruitless, official action may be taken toward termination of said persons' church membership. However, the church members are encouraged to continue efforts toward the spiritual restoration of these persons.

Matt. 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:6–7, 9–13; 2 Cor. 2:5–7; 5:18–20; 6:14–18; Gal. 6:1–10; Eph. 4:25–32; Titus 3:10–11.

#### **Article 4. Elementary Principles**

**270.** Christ is the only Head of the Church, and the Word of God the only rule of faith and conduct.

**272.** No person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and obeys the gospel of God our Savior, ought to be deprived of church membership.

**274.** Every person has an inalienable right to private judgment in matters of religion, and an equal right to express personal opinions in any way which will not violate the laws of God or the rights of others.

**276.** All church hearings should be conducted on gospel principles only; and no minister or member should be excommunicated except for immorality, the propagation of unchristian doctrines, or for neglect of duties enjoined by the Word of God.

**278.** The pastoral or ministerial office and duties are of divine appointment, and all ordained ministers in the church of God are equal; but ministers are forbidden to be lords over God's heritage, or to have dominion over the faith of the saints.

**280.** The Church has a right to form and enforce such rules and regulations only as are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, and may be necessary or have a tendency to carry into effect the great system of practical Christianity.

**282.** Whatever power may be necessary to the formation of rules and regulations is inherent in the ministers and members of the Church; but so much of that power may be delegated from time to time, upon a plan of representation, as they may judge necessary and proper.

**284.** It is the duty of all ministers and members of the Church to maintain godliness and oppose all moral evil.

**286.** It is obligatory upon ministers of the gospel to be faithful in the discharge of their pastoral and ministerial duties, and it is also obligatory upon the members to esteem ministers highly for their works' sake, and to render them a righteous compensation for their labors.

### **Article 5. Observance of Sacraments**

**290.** All persons to be baptized shall have the choice of baptism by immersion, pouring or sprinkling. Since children are born into this world with natures inclined to sin, and yet the prevenient grace of God provides for their redemption during the period before reaching the age of accountability, those parents who so choose may testify to their faith in God's provision by presenting their small children for baptism, while those who prefer to emphasize baptism as a testimony by individual believers to their own act of faith may present their children for dedication.

Mark 10:13–16; Acts 2:38–39; 16:15; 18:8.

**293.** The Lord's Supper shall be observed in each local Wesleyan church at least once each three months.

### **Article 6. Membership**

**295.** The privileges and conditions of membership in the Church are constitutional, and changes therein may be made only by constitutional enactment. The General Conference may at its own discretion establish categories of membership. Nothing shall be included in the membership ritual that is contrary to the following definitions, conditions, and privileges of membership.

**297.** The conditions of membership are:

(1) Confession of faith in Jesus Christ as evidenced by an inner witness of new birth through the Holy Spirit and a commitment to pursue holiness in all things.

(2) Christian baptism.

(3) Instruction in, acceptance of, and a commitment to abide by the Articles of Religion which are summarized in 299, the Elementary Principles, and the authority of The Wesleyan Church in matters of church government.

(4) A commitment to live out the mission and vision of The Wesleyan Church through a discipling relationship within the local church.

**299.** Candidates for membership shall declare their agreement with the following summary of the Articles of Religion:

We believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ the Son suffered in our place on the cross, that He died but rose again, that He now sits at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge every person at the last day.

We believe in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

We believe that by the grace of God every person has the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and that those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified by faith.

We believe that God not only counts the believer as righteous, but that He makes such persons righteous, freeing them from sin's dominion at conversion, purifying their hearts by faith, perfecting them in love at entire sanctification, and providing for their growth in grace at every stage of spiritual life, enabling them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live victorious lives.

**302.** The rights of membership are:

- (1) The fellowship of the saints and the encouragement, admonition, and spiritual guidance of the ministry.
- (2) The access to the sacraments and ordinances of the Church.
- (3) The right to participate in any vote being taken by the local church conference.
- (4) The eligibility to hold leadership positions (552:2–3), providing the qualifications are met (260–268; 558) and if not under discipline.
- (5) The right to hearing and appeal if charged with failure to maintain the conditions of membership, with the specific provision that joining another religious body shall of itself sever membership in the Church.
- (6) A member in good standing in any Wesleyan church is entitled to membership privileges in any Wesleyan church to which a transfer of membership may be desired, subject to 567.

305. Church membership may be terminated only by one or more of the following (585):

- (1) Voluntary withdrawal.
- (2) Joining another religious body or a secret order.
- (3) Expulsion after proper hearing and conviction.
- (4) Persistent neglect of church relationship as defined by The Discipline.
- (5) Death.

### **SPECIAL DIRECTIONS**

**400.** The special directions are expressions by which The Wesleyan Church seeks to bear witness to contemporary society concerning the Christian life and character required by its Articles of Religion and

Membership Commitments. While they may or may not be membership commitments, they are official admonitions to the members, ministers and officials of The Wesleyan Church, and provide guidelines for bearing public testimony on the issues discussed.

The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and guidance to believers as they seek to discern personal boundaries for holy living. The Scriptures illustrate that personal conscience varies among individuals on matters for which direct commands of God are not given and that what God requires as a matter of obedience for one person He may not require of all. Therefore, relying on His help through prayer, Bible study, godly counsel, and thoughtful reflection, all believers should develop “personal convictions” to aid them in conforming to God’s will as they relate to and involve themselves in their culture as witnesses for Christ. Such private opinions apply only to one’s own conduct. Legalism is the attempt to impose one’s personal convictions upon others as if they are conditions for salvation or universal standards for holiness.

Issues arise periodically that require serious deliberation by the Church as a community of believers regarding its collective witness for Christ in society. Just as He does for individuals, the Holy Spirit also instructs the Church in discerning and applying biblical principles to its corporate response to current culture. Out of these prayerful deliberations, “collective conscience” statements are born. These statements are believed to be important enough that they should be a part of the identity of the Church and should characterize the lifestyle of those who are a part of our specific “family” within the larger Body of Christ. These statements are not implied to be conditions for salvation, and as such become legalistic and judgmental. Rather they reflect commonly held values of our Church that are voluntarily accepted in order to make a positive statement to society; to protect the wellbeing and integrity of each person; to bring transformation to culture; and to be a safe haven for those seeking refuge from the damages inflicted upon them by an abusive and godless society. By speaking collectively, the Church also seeks to provide examples for and encourage young disciples, recent converts, new members, and its friends in conforming to Christ’s likeness in areas of personal conscience not yet informed by personal study and understanding of biblical principles.

These statements of collective conscience do not speak to every issue and must periodically be amended to speak redemptively to important emerging issues affecting the church and society.

#### **A. Christian Social Concern**

**410.** The Wesleyan Church seeks recognition by the society which surrounds it of the authority of Almighty God, and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, in civil, political, and temporal as well as spiritual matters, and the transformation of that society into the image of Christ insofar as is possible in this present age. It believes that such a transformation of society shall primarily be accomplished by the divine transformation through faith in Christ of the individuals who compose society, but that Christians ought also to manifest social concern in every manner that is in keeping with their Christian testimony. To this end:

(1) Equal Rights. The Wesleyan Church upholds the right of all individuals to equal opportunity politically, economically, and religiously, and pledges itself to an active effort to bring about the possession of dignity and happiness by all people everywhere (cf. 220; 265:11–13; 360:3d).

(2) Peace. The Wesleyan Church, knowing that war results in great suffering for the bodies, minds, and souls of men and women, staggering economic loss with its legacy of debt for future generations, and the unleashing of the baser passions of life, urges that persons and nations seek by every legitimate means to avoid armed conflict among the peoples and nations of the world. The Wesleyan Church also urges that holy people everywhere pray earnestly for those in authority, so that peace may prevail (1 Tim. 2:2), and for the quick return of the Prince of Peace.

(3) Military Service. The Wesleyan Church teaches respect for properly constituted civil authority and the proper loyalty to one's country. It recognizes the responsibility of the individual to answer the call of government and to enter into military service. However, there are those within the fellowship of The Wesleyan Church who believe that military service is contrary to the teaching of the New Testament and that their consciences are violated by being compelled to take part in such. The Wesleyan Church will therefore lend moral support to any member who asks and claims exemption by legal processes from military service as a sincere conscientious objector and who asks to serve one's country as a noncombatant.

(4) Care of the Body and Substance Abuse. The Bible teaches the sanctity of the human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Christians should avoid the use of anything which would damage the body, destroy the family, harm society (1 Corinthians 10:23–24), undermine the fellowship of the church, hinder reaching full potential in Christ, enslave the will (1 Corinthians 6:12), inhibit evangelism (1 Corinthians 9:19–23), breach the Lord's command to love God supremely and to love one's neighbor as oneself (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:37–39), or become a stumbling block to the young in age or faith (Matthew 18:6; 1 Corinthians 8:9, 13; 10:32–33). The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to practice self-discipline and temperance in matters of proper eating, exercise, and rest. We oppose the production, sale, purchase and use of alcoholic beverages, tobacco, narcotics, and other harmful drugs, unless for mechanical, chemical, or medicinal purposes (cf. 265:4). The unprescribed use of hallucinogens, stimulants, and depressants, and the misuse and abuse of regularly prescribed medicines should be prohibited; only on competent medical advice and under medical supervision should such drugs be used. The consequences to society stemming from substance abuse are of major concern because of their unarguably negative impact on the spiritual character and nature of individuals and the welfare of society. These include the creation of barriers to conversion, family dysfunction and breakdown, poverty, disease and death, increased violence and crime, the incalculable loss to national economies, and the destruction of the individual caught by the power of addiction. In light of the overwhelming evidence of damage to society and the spiritual health of the individual by the abuse of such substances, we believe that even where their use may be legalized, we choose total abstinence as our appropriate response (i.e., voluntarily refraining from and totally avoiding the use of something in all unnecessary circumstances as determined by the individual Christian's conscience in submission to the lordship of Christ and the admonitions of the Church). Such

abstinence is a willing act of self-discipline, an acceptance of group accountability, and never a test of salvation or an evidence of superior spirituality.

(5) Human Sexuality. The Wesleyan Church maintains a biblical view of human sexuality which makes the sexual experience, within the framework of marriage, a gift of God to be enjoyed as communion of a man and woman, as well as for the purpose of procreation. Sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. Yet we believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome both the practice of such activity and the inclination leading to its practice.

(6) Divorce and Remarriage. On the basis of a careful study of the Scriptures, and in keeping with its Membership Commitments (265:6), The Wesleyan Church teaches the following with reference to divorce and remarriage after divorce:

(a) To obtain a divorce on other than scriptural grounds is a sin against God and humanity. Such putting asunder of what God has joined is a direct and deliberate act of disobedience against both the Law and the Gospel. It separates one from God and may subject a member to Church discipline (222).

(b) However, recognizing the fallen state of humanity, divorce has been recognized in the Scriptures as a valid and permanent dissolution of marriage with all its rights and responsibilities. Divorce is not reversible. There is no way to “restore” a dissolved marriage. The divorced (unmarried) status can be changed only by a new marriage to the same person or another person. No divorced and remarried person has two spouses, only a former spouse and a present spouse, as in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 7.

(c) Divorce, however sinful the act and however serious the consequences, is not “unpardonable.” A redeemed sinner or reclaimed backslider is “free” to marry “in the Lord” or to remain unmarried, a eunuch for the kingdom of God’s sake. The one exception to this freedom of choice is mentioned by the Apostle Paul. It is a believer who disobeys the commandment of God and puts away a believing spouse. That person must remain unmarried to leave room for reconciliation to the spouse (1 Corinthians 7).

(d) The right to remarry in no way excuses the sin of divorce. It only implies that the Church must forgive and restore those whom the Lord forgives and restores. Neither penance nor penalty remain to the truly penitent and restored sinner, or backslider, whatever the traumatic consequences of the sin may be.

(7) The Lord’s Day. God prescribed that one day a week be set aside for the spiritual, mental, and physical well being of humankind (Genesis 2:2–3; Deuteronomy 5:12–14). The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to observe the Lord’s Day in an appropriate manner (Romans 14:4–6; cf. 265:1).

(8) Religion in Public Life. The Wesleyan Church, believing that it is possible to allow recognition of God and the invoking of His aid in public functions without violating the personal rights and freedoms granted in many nations, advocates the enactment of suitable legislation by legislative bodies at all levels of government which will strengthen provision for the free exercise of religion in public life and allow reference to, or the invoking of the aid of God by individuals serving, writing, speaking, leading or contributing to any public function. The Wesleyan Church further affirms its belief in the public school's duty to recognize the historical and ongoing contribution of the Judeo-Christian tradition to world cultures and modern life. The Wesleyan Church verifies the Bible is an appropriate book for reading in public schools and the right of students to pray as desired.

(9) Public School. The Wesleyan Church supports the right and responsibility of parents to determine what is appropriate education for their children, testing the education their children are receiving in accordance with biblical principles and striving for excellence in the education provided for all children. We maintain the right of our members to seek exemption from participation by their children in all matters that are contrary to scriptural doctrines and principles as expressed in the Articles of Religion, Membership Commitments, Elementary Principles or Special Directions of our Church, without prejudice to academic standing.

(10) Judicial Oaths. The Wesleyan Church reserves for its members the right to affirm the truth in testimony before the civil and criminal courts rather than to engage in a judicial oath.

(11) Abortion. The Wesleyan Church seeks to recognize and preserve the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death and, thus, is opposed to the use of induced abortion. However, it recognizes that there may be rare pregnancies where there are grave medical conditions threatening the life of the mother, which could raise a serious question about taking the life of the unborn child. In such a case, a decision should be made only after very prayerful consideration following medical and spiritual counseling. The Wesleyan Church encourages its members to become informed about the abortion issue and to become actively involved locally and nationally in the preparation and passage of appropriate legislation guaranteeing protection of life under law to unborn children.

(12) Use of Time and Entertainments. The Wesleyan Church believes that its members should exercise responsible stewardship of their time for worship, work, rest, personal leisure, and service to others. Special care should be given to honoring Christ in one's choices and pursuit of entertainments. This will include refusing to patronize and to carefully regulate the use in the home of activities, media, and communication where they feature the cheapening of human life, the gratuitously violent, the use of immoral or profane language, and the sexually explicit and pornographic. Members should avoid involvement with activities that tend to be addictive or conducive to gambling (i.e., risking one's assets or property on the outcome of legal or illegal games of chance, including government-sponsored lotteries). We believe gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship (i.e., trusting God's provision for us, as exemplified in Matthew 6:25–34) and the tenth commandment which forbids coveting (Deuteronomy 5:21); is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive; can be a poor example to others of how to manage the resources of

God or trust in God's provision; appeals to greed; endangers families; lowers socio-economic standards and self esteem; engenders false hope; and is exploitative in that it takes advantage of the misplaced hopes, compulsions or poor judgment of others. We believe that total abstinence is the best Christian response to gambling in all its forms.

(13) Modesty in Attire. The Wesleyan Church believes that our people should provide clear testimony to Christian purity and modesty by properly clothing the body and by dressing with Christian simplicity.

## **B. Christian Worship and Fellowship**

**420.** Rites and Ceremonies of Churches. True religion does not consist in any ritual observances such as forms or ceremonies, even of the most excellent kind, be they ever so decent and significant, ever so expressive of inward things. The religion of Christ rises infinitely higher and lies infinitely deeper than all these. Let no one conceive that rites and ceremonies have any intrinsic worth, or that true worship cannot subsist without them. Therefore, it is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same or exactly alike, for they have always been different and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and customs, provided that nothing be ordained against God's Word.

Acts 15:10, 28–29; Rom. 14:2–6, 15, 17, 21; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:25; 14:26; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:1, 13; Col. 2:16–17; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; 1 Tim. 1:4, 6; 1 Peter 2:16.

430. Healing. The truth that Jesus is both able and willing to heal the body as well as the human soul, whenever such healing is for His glory, is clearly set forth in God's Word and attested by the experience of many of His people at the present day. Prayer for healing according to the pattern set forth in the Scriptures shall be encouraged.

Matt. 10:8; Luke 9:2; 10:9; Acts 4:10, 14; 1 Cor. 12:9, 28; James 5:14–16.

**440.** Christian Liberty. Christ, through His death on the cross, has freed His followers from sin and from bondage to the law. Christians are "called unto liberty" (Gal. 5:13 KJV), and are not under the law as a means of salvation. They are rather exhorted, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1 KJV).

This liberty, however, is not to be construed as license (Gal. 5:13). Rather, love for Christ constrains the Christian to live a righteous and holy life as God demands. By the Spirit of God, His laws are written on the heart (Heb. 8:10). So Christians resist evil and cleave to the good, not in order to be saved, but because they have been saved.

Within the bounds of Christian liberty, there will be differences of opinion. In such cases, the believer seeks to avoid offending other believers. The stronger one is mindful of the opinions of the one with the weaker conscience (1 Cor. 8 and 10), and is careful not to put a stumbling block in another's way (1 Cor. 10:24; Gal 5:13). On the other hand, the weak does not criticize the strong (1 Cor. 10:29–30), for the conscience of the weak may need instruction.

The recognition and exercise of that liberty which Christ affords will glorify God and promote the unity of the Church.

**450.** Christian Unity. The Wesleyan Church, having originated through merger between those of like precious faith, is fully committed to that true Christian unity which is based on scriptural truth and the fellowship of the Spirit, and deplors the separation or division of Christians over peripheral and nonessential matters. While The Wesleyan Church opposes the building of one all-inclusive ecclesiastical organization which regards neither scriptural doctrine nor practice, it welcomes fellowship with those who are committed to the same doctrines and standards of holy living, and cooperation across denominational lines with those who hold the cardinal doctrines of the Christian religion revealed in the Bible.

### C. Christian Stewardship

**460.** Meaning of Stewardship. The Scriptures teach that God is the owner of all persons and all things, that people are His stewards of both life and possessions, that God's ownership and one's stewardship ought to be acknowledged, and that every person shall be held personally accountable to God for the exercise of their stewardship (cf. 265:3). God, as a God of system and order in all of His ways, has established a system of giving which acknowledges His ownership and humankind's stewardship. To this end, all His children should faithfully tithe and present offerings for the support of the gospel.

**465.** Storehouse Tithing. Storehouse tithing is a scriptural and practical performance of faithfully and regularly placing the tithe into that church to which the member belongs. Therefore, the financing of the church shall be based on the plan of storehouse tithing, and The Wesleyan Church shall be regarded by all its people as the storehouse. All who are a part of The Wesleyan Church are urged to contribute faithfully one-tenth of all their increase as a minimum financial obligation to the Lord and freewill offerings in addition as God has prospered them.

Gen. 14:20; 28:22; Lev. 27:30–32; Deut. 14:22; Prov. 3:9–10; 11:24–25; Mal. 3:10–11; Matt. 23:23; Acts 4:34–35; 6:1–3; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:13–14; Heb. 7:1–2, 6, 9.

**470.** Methods of Fund Raising. In the light of the scriptural teaching concerning the giving of tithes and offerings (cf. 465) for the support of the gospel, and for the erection of church buildings, no Wesleyan church should engage in any method of fund raising which would detract from these principles, hinder the gospel message, sully the name of the Church, discriminate against the poor, or misdirect the people's energies from promoting the gospel.

**475.** Wills, Bequests and Annuities. It is essential in the exercise of Christian stewardship that careful thought be given as to what shall be done with one's estate after death. Civil laws often do not provide for the distribution of an estate in such a way as to glorify God. Each Christian should give careful attention to the preparation of a last will and testament in a careful and legal manner, and The Wesleyan Church and its various ministries through the local church, the district, world missions, extension and evangelism, education, and benevolences are recommended for

consideration. The General Superintendent's office is prepared to assist in these matters (4240; 4940)