United Methodist Social Principles, As Adopted at Charlotte General Conference, 2024
War and Military Service

The church deplores war and all other forms of violent conflict and urges the peaceful settlement of all disputes. We yearn for the day when there will be no more war and people will live together in peace and justice.

We reject the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy and insist that every peaceful and diplomatic means of resolution be exhausted before the start of armed conflicts. Similarly, we oppose the increasing reliance on preemptive strikes unless they can be clearly demonstrated to be proportionate in response, delimited in human casualties, and undertaken in response to clear and immediate threats to human lives. We grieve that in a world where so many live in poverty, governments continue to dedicate enormous resources to preparing for and conducting wars. We are especially distressed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and call not only for an end to their production, but for their complete elimination.

Christians have struggled with the issue of war since the time of Jesus. Some Christians have argued historically that war and other acts of violence are never acceptable, while other believers have asserted that it is sometimes necessary to take up arms in self-defense or to defend the innocent and prevent unchecked aggression, tyranny and genocide.

We urge all United Methodists to examine their own consciences and earnestly seek God's guidance when it comes to matters of military service. We honor and offer support to those who choose military service as a result of personal conviction and urge that they perform their duties in harmony with the tenets of the Christian faith and in accordance with the laws of the Geneva Conventions.

We also honor and support the witness of pacifists whose consciences and religious convictions prevent them from serving in the military or limit them to taking noncombatant roles. The roots of such pacifist convictions are well established in the historic stances of The United Methodist church and its predecessor bodies. We oppose compulsory military service and urge governments to abolish this practice and, instead, allow those who choose not to serve in the military to complete terms of community service or to contribute in other creative ways.

As a church, we commit ourselves to support all people as they discern how best to model the nonviolent example of Jesus. The church supports and guides those who serve in the military; those who are conscientious objectors; veterans living with physical, psychological, spiritual, and moral injury; and families of people affected by military service. We urge the church to care and work for systemic justice for all people affected by war, and to advocate for peacemaking and nonviolent conflict transformation in global and local conflicts.

The full listing of the UMC Social Principles (revised in 2024) can be accessed here.