

Chapter 5

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 Covenant Membership Commitments. While they are not covenant 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.

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; 265:10, 11; 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) **Substance Abuse.** The Wesleyan Church is opposed to 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.

(5) **Human Sexuality.** The Wesleyan Church abhors the trend to ignore God's laws of chastity and purity, and vigorously opposes public acceptance of sexual promiscuity and all factors and practices which promote it. 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. The depth of the sinfulness of homosexual practice is recognized, and yet we believe the grace of God sufficient to overcome both the practice of such activity and the perversion leading to its practice.

(6) **Divorce and Remarriage.** On the basis of a careful study of the Scriptures, and in keeping with its Covenant Membership Commitments (265:5), 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 subjects a member to Church discipline (5115; 5120).

(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 Cor. 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) **Merchandising on the Lord’s Day.** The Wesleyan Church opposes the legalization of merchandising on the Lord’s Day (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 Constitution of the United States, advocates the enactment of suitable legislation by the Congress which will strengthen the present provision for the free exercise of religion in national life and allow reference to, or the invoking of the aid of God, in any governmental or public document, proceeding, activity, ceremony or institution. The Wesleyan Church further affirms its belief in the public school’s duty to do full justice to the large place of the Judeo-Christian tradition in our American heritage, and its conviction that the Bible is an appropriate book for reading in the public schools and that the right of students to pray should not be abridged.

(9) **Public School Activities.** The Wesleyan Church protests the inclusion of such questionable items as social dancing in the public school curriculum and maintains the right of its 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, Covenant Membership Commitments or Elementary Principles of The Wesleyan 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 Leisure Time.** The Wesleyan Church believes that its members should exercise responsible stewardship of their leisure time. This will include careful regulation of the use in the home of mass media, such as current literature, radio and television, guarding the home against the encroachment of evil (cf. 265:6). It will also involve witnessing against social evils by appropriate forms of influence, the refusal to participate in social dancing, the refusal to patronize the motion picture theater (cinema), together with other commercial ventures as they feature the cheap, the violent or the sensual and pornographic, and the refusal to engage in playing games which tend to be addictive or conducive to gambling (cf. 265:4).

(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 righteously and holily 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 Director of Stewardship Ministries is prepared to assist in these matters (2070-2075; 4240; 4940).