

Addressing Political Resolutions by the Church

Christians have long related their faith to politics. In his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” Martin Luther King, Jr. noted the early church’s public witness against infanticide in the Roman Empire. John Wesley opposed slavery.

But the Church is not a political party. With very different expertise, its social witness should be unique. Ideally, our church’s social witness would respectfully and thoughtfully promote clear biblical and Wesleyan principles. It should be well-informed by diverse sources, honest about the church’s limited knowledge about political details, and humbly averse to claiming God has clearly spoken to political specifics.

In *The Character of a Methodist*, Wesley explained that while Methodists believe such foundational Christian doctrines as the authority of Scripture and the eternal divinity of Christ, “as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.” Thanks to this ethos, United Methodism includes diverse views on non-essential political questions. An increasingly international church further illustrates how we can transcend political differences while standing united at the foot of the Cross.

Yet our nearly thousand-page Book of Resolutions sends a very different message. In 1952, the Methodist Church had only ten resolutions. Today, there are 368 resolutions totaling 886 pages. The 2008 General Conference will consider dozens more. Few United Methodists have any idea. And most would be surprised by the one-sided slant of most resolutions. Should our church not consider a different way?

We respectfully urge all delegates to ask the following before voting for a political resolution:

- Have I carefully read a resolution’s full text to be sure it contains nothing objectionable?
- Does the resolution broadly adhere to biblical and Wesleyan principles?
- Will the resolution accurately represent the whole church?
- If the resolution cites specific legislation or rulings, have I actually read the law(s) in question and listened to different experts from the relevant fields?
- Is the issue truly urgent and meriting the church’s commitment amid limited resources?
- For proposals to keep older resolutions, is the issue still timely and pertinent? (Example: the Women’s Division is urging the unedited retention of Resolution #309, which calls for participation in a 2001 United Nations conference!)