

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY
LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE 1
CHURCH AND SOCIETY A

Renewal and Reform Coalition (RRC)
Priority petitions in bold italics

FAMILY

Support for the family as one of the basic building blocks of both church and society is important. We believe the Board of Church and Society ought to devote significant resources to supporting and advocating for the family.

Pet 60576 ***Page 195*** ***GBCS Staff*** ***Support***

PERSECUTED CHURCH

Support for persecuted Christians around the world lets them know they are not alone, that their suffering is not unnoticed. We need to give voice to our brothers and sisters who are suffering for Christ.

Pet 60550 ***Page 195*** ***GBCS Advocacy for Persecuted Church*** ***Support***

Pet 60462 Page 239 Readopt Resolution Support

This resolution supports International Day of Prayer for the persecuted church.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

It is important to advocate for religious freedom and human rights. Because we believe all persons are created in the image of God and have infinite value, we espouse basic rights for all. Freedom gives the best climate in which human flourishing and Christian conscience can grow.

Pet 60846 ***Page 295*** ***Freedom of Conscience and Religion*** ***Support***

Pet 60840 Page 293 Principle of Religious Freedom Oppose

The first resolution is a solid defense of freedom. The second resolution has some good points, but Point 4 would limit believers' conscience rights by forcing participation in such objectionable activities as same-sex weddings.

Pet 60450 ***Page 282*** ***Eradicating Modern Day Slavery*** ***Support***

One of the greatest affronts to human rights is the slave trade. When people are abducted or tricked into forced servitude, they have lost all their rights. It is imperative that the church be a voice in forefront of eradicating sex trafficking and forced labor. We recommend amending #11 to add "life-affirming" reproductive health care to mitigate abortion as a solution.

Pet 60701 Page 192 Basic Freedoms and Human Rights Oppose

This resolution undermines biblical authority and rejects a traditionalist reading of Scripture. It engages in superficial interpretation of difficult biblical passages without truly wrestling with the deeper issues.

Pet 60697 Page 192 Basic Freedom for All People Support

Pet 60472 Page 261 Korea: Peace, Justice and Reunification AMEND and Support
 This petition calls for peace and justice to return to the Korean peninsula, with the eventual reunification of North and South Korea. We recommend adding a statement acknowledging and condemning the human rights abuses perpetrated by North Korea in its persecution of Christians and those who dissent from the government’s perspective. It must be acknowledged that, as long as the North pursues its oppressive approach, peace and justice, let alone reunification, will be only a dream.

AFRICA

As the Board of Church and Society assumes a more global focus, we believe significant resources ought to be directed to advocacy on behalf of the poor in Africa, where many of the world’s poorest people live. Systemic injustice still prevents many Africans from reaching their potential, and many would benefit from programs to pull them out of poverty into self-sufficiency.

Pet 60578 Page 196 GBCS Focus on Africa Support

BIBLICAL AUTHORITY

Pet 60227 Page 189 Preamble to Social Principles Support
 This petition makes some additions to the Preamble to the Social Principles that reinforce the Bible as our “true rule and guide for faith and practice.” It does so, however, in a winsome way, giving room for disagreements about biblical interpretation.

CHURCH AND SOCIETY BOARD STRUCTURE

Bringing the board’s structure into a new focused and representative model will help the board more effectively address the needs and concerns of church and society.

Pet 60668 Page 197 Reduce Board Size of GBCS Oppose
 While this petition would reduce the board’s size in keeping with other general agency boards, it would also eliminate any proportional representation on the board from larger jurisdictions and minimizes representation from the central conferences.

Pet 60961 Page 195 Permissiveness in AC Structure – GBCS Support
 This petition gives greater flexibility to annual conferences in how they structure their church and society responsibilities.

Pet 60577 Page 196 GBCS Priorities Support
 This petition makes the General Conference responsible for setting priorities for the board, rather than simply allowing the board to set its own priorities without the input of General Conference.

Pet 60728 Page 196 Responsibilities of GBCS Support
 This petition designates actual priorities for the board to pursue in its work.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Pet 60702 Page 189 Global Good Stewardship Consider
 This petition removes mandatory governmental intervention in greenhouse gas emissions in favor of a call to voluntary cooperation, with a focus on clean water and malaria control as urgent needs in the Global South.

Pet 60710 Page 190 Global Climate Stewardship Oppose

This petition calls for divestment from all fossil fuels industries in an effort to reduce climate change. While well-intentioned in terms of helping combat climate change, the financial penalty could be severe, jeopardizing the church's fiduciary stewardship. It also stigmatizes a whole industry in which many of our members earn their livelihood. Would the proponents of this policy be willing to forego the tithes and offerings of these members, potentially hurt by our investment decisions? The policy also potentially hurts developing countries, which depend upon petroleum products for improving their economy and the lives of their people. This policy is a blunt instrument that would cause more harm than good.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Pet 60176 Page 267 To End the "War on Drugs" Oppose

This new resolution proposes that we end the "war on drugs" by "ending drug prohibition." The legalization of recreational use of addictive drugs would only open the door to more addiction. While sentencing reform is undoubtedly needed, and the emphasis should be on prevention and treatment of users, blanket drug legalization goes too far.

Pet 60463 Page 287 Criminal Justice AMEND or Oppose

This new resolution combines several old ones into a comprehensive overview of restorative justice. It calls for the de-criminalization of drug use, prostitution, and consensual sexual activity (without clarifying that such activity must be between adults). We recommend amending the second paragraph on page 289 to delete these activities from the list to be decriminalized (or in the case of sexual activity, add the word "adult"). Prostitution, for example, is a primary driver of human trafficking and slavery and should continue to be criminalized.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

Pet 60795 Page 194 Justice and Law Oppose

We agree that it is appropriate for the church to speak out against violence targeting LGBTQ persons. The insertion of LGBTQ concerns in this paragraph of the Social Principles seems out of place, as it would be the only particular issue addressed in a more generalized statement. These concerns about violence are already mentioned in ¶ 161F.

Pet 60895 Page 230 Military Service Regardless of Sexual Orientation Oppose

This petition asks for the readoption of Resolution 5062, which calls for U.S. military service to be open to all persons, regardless of sexual orientation. Since that has been accomplished, the petition wants to amend the resolution to call for other countries to follow the same policy. We believe each nation needs to determine the feasibility of this step based on the culture and beliefs of that nation.

ISLAM

Pet 60231 Page 269 Our Muslim Neighbors Oppose

This new resolution has the laudable purpose of trying to lessen tensions and suspicion toward Muslims in the U.S. However, the petition romanticizes Islam, failing to take a realistic perspective. It also is too U.S.-centric and does not consider the perspectives of Africans and Filipinos, who live as neighbors with Muslim majorities in some areas who are persecuting Christians. Many of the commonalities the resolution draws between Muslims and Christians in the U.S. do not apply to other countries where United Methodists live. The resolution also undermines the urgency of presenting the Gospel to Muslims.

ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

The conflict between Israel and the Arab nations of the Middle East has got to be one of the most difficult and complex situations in world diplomacy over the past 25 years. As United Methodists, we believe strongly in Israel's right to exist as a Jewish nation, protected from the persecution and anti-Semitism that has followed them for over 2,000 years. Surrounded by hostile nations since 1948, Israel has a unique perspective on self-defense that those in more-secure nations perhaps cannot fully grasp.

On the other hand, United Methodists are particularly sympathetic toward Palestinian Christians, who have been suffering through a difficult time of not having an independent homeland, as well as oppression from Muslim majority populations. In addition, there is the imperative to move toward self-government and self-determination on the part of the Palestinian people, as well as in the surrounding Arab nations.

In the midst of this complex situation with loyalties on both sides of the conflict, the RRC would promote the following principles:

- In the complex Middle-Eastern conflict, there are faults on both sides that must be addressed. Our church serves the cause of a peaceful resolution of this conflict when we address the situation in a balanced way. Both sides in the conflict need to alter their policies and actions, and our church should maintain an even-handed approach.
- Our church ought to advocate for the renunciation of unjustifiable violence by both the Israeli and the Palestinian side.
- Our church ought to advocate for confidence-building measures on both sides, including ending the teaching of hatred for the other side in school curriculums, easing of security measures where possible, resumption of negotiations, refraining from new settlements, etc.
- While most people would agree with an eventual two-state solution to Israel/Palestine, it would be imprudent of our church to specify how that solution is to be reached. That is a matter for negotiation between the two sides. Therefore, we should not advocate actions that could prejudice the negotiation process one way or the other.
- Inasmuch as the church's expertise does not lie in diplomacy, we should be cautious about making sweeping statements about how the Middle-Eastern conflict should be resolved. We can promote the principles of peace, freedom, and security for both sides, without necessarily supporting a list of concrete policy proposals.

On the issue of divestment and boycotts, the RRC is opposed to this strategy. Economic exclusion of companies doing business in the West Bank often hurts Palestinian workers far more than it hurts Israeli companies. A recent boycott of Soda Stream forced them to move their factory out of the West Bank and cost hundreds of Palestinians their jobs. Applying economic pressure to Israel only makes them feel more vulnerable, making them less willing to compromise or make concessions. Such an approach is one-sided, in that these calls for divestment against companies doing business with Israel are not coupled with calling for additional steps to pressure the Palestinian side to stop its incitement to violence and teaching of hatred or to combat the pervasive corruption in Palestinian government. As long as Israel feels it is under attack, it will not change its policies.

Pet 60392 Page 199 Labeling of Products Produced in West Bank, Gaza and Oppose
East Jerusalem

This petition puts unfair economic pressure on businesses that often benefit Palestinians and would be counterproductive.

Pet 60758	Page 246	Opposition to Israeli Settlements in Palestinian Land	Support
Pet 60860	Page 247	Saying No to Violence in Middle East Conflict	No position
Pet 60861	Page 297	Prerequisites for Peace in Judea and Samaria	Support

These three petitions take a more balanced approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

PUERTO RICO

Pet 60971	Page 199	Release Puerto Rican Political Prisoner	Oppose
-----------	----------	---	--------

This petition calls for the release of Oscar Lopez Rivera from prison. Convicted and sentenced to a long prison term in the 1980's due to terroristic activities while pushing for Puerto Rican independence (a goal desired by only a minority of the Puerto Rican people), Rivera was unwilling to renounce the use of terrorism to achieve his political aims. All the others imprisoned with Rivera have been released on clemency, after they renounced terrorism. Rivera was a leader of the Puerto Rican terrorist group FALN that was responsible for murder, robbery, and other violent activities. Unless he is willing to renounce violence, we believe it would be inappropriate to release Rivera during this time when the world is suffering a new wave of violent terrorism. It would send a mixed message about our commitment to fight terrorism and provide for the safety and security of our people.

WAR AND PEACE

While there are a variety of views within the broader church and within United Methodism itself toward the use of war, The United Methodist Church has never been a pacifist denomination. While viewing war as an extreme last resort, most United Methodists would allow for the use of war to defend one's country and freedoms.

Pet 60847	Page 296	Justice, War, and Defending the Innocent	Support
-----------	----------	--	---------

This new resolution defines and explains the Just War tradition and applies it to our understanding of war today in terms of defending the defenseless and limiting the excesses of armed conflict on both a personal and national level.

Pet 60703	Page 194	War and Peace	Support
-----------	----------	---------------	---------

This petition removes a one-side pacifist view of war and replaces it with a more nuanced understanding of war as a last resort.

Pet 60345	Page 229	Prayer and Support for Members of the Armed Forces	Support
-----------	----------	--	---------

This petition amends and readopts Resolution 5061, which calls for prayerful support for members of armed services and veterans, who have made great sacrifices to protect their country and bring peace.

Further information on these and other issues facing the 2012 General Conference may be found on the RRC website: www.umgc2012.org