

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE 2

CHURCH AND SOCIETY 2

Renewal and Reform Coalition (RRC)

Priority petitions in bold italics

ABORTION

Abortion is a controversial subject within both our church and society. As Christians, we should lean toward protecting and preserving life whenever possible. Scripture lifts up the personhood of the unborn (e.g., Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:44). The early church consistently spoke against abortion and infanticide, which was a common practice among the Romans. Increasingly early pre-term deliveries and pre-natal surgeries are demonstrating that the developing child is a separate life from the mother and in need of care and advocacy. While acknowledging that there are difficult and exceptional cases to consider, we believe United Methodism does best when it advocates on behalf of the lives of unborn children and supports the lives of women in crisis pregnancies.

<i>Pet 60698</i>	<i>Page 313</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Pet 60743</i>	<i>Page 314</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Pet 60744</i>	<i>Page 315</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Pet 60746</i>	<i>Page 315</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Pet 60747</i>	<i>Page 316</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>
<i>Pet 60908</i>	<i>Page 316</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>

These petitions contain proposed language changes to ¶ 161J in the Social Principles that would more specifically define the circumstances under which abortion might be morally justified. The most important change would add the word “physical” in the phrase “conflicts of life with life” to clarify that the circumstance envisioned is a life-threatening one, not a lifestyle decision. Amendments include advocating that, “whenever the unborn child may be capable of surviving outside his or her mother’s womb, every reasonable effort should be made to preserve both lives.” With the increasing advancement of medical technology, babies are viable outside the womb at an earlier point in the pregnancy. This means that late-term abortions have the potential of delivering a viable baby. Such children’s lives should be preserved whenever possible. Amendments also commit the church to diminishing the high abortion rates and ground sexuality education in Christian teaching. Other amendments call for replacing the mother’s “well-being” with “physical health.” Such a broad term as “well-being” could cover any reason to justify abortion, from economic concerns to problems with family or the father to simple convenience. The taking of a life ought to be justified by more severe circumstances. Other amendments advocate for laws in civil society protecting the right of health care professionals not to participate in abortion. Persons who entered the health care field to save lives should not be compelled to take them. The committee should take all of the proposed amendments it can accept and combine them into one petition for approval.

<i>Pet 60745</i>	<i>Page 315</i>	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Support</i>
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This petition decries the targeting of unborn children with disabilities for abortion. The rising trend of aborting babies with disabilities contradicts our declaration that people with disabilities are of equal and sacred worth.

Pet 60249	Page 327	Responsible Parenthood	Oppose
Pet 60748	Page 331	Deletion	Support
Pet 60749	Page 331	Responsible Parenthood	Support
Pet 60750	Page 331	Responsible Parenthood	Support
Pet 60751	Page 331	Responsible Parenthood	Support
Pet 60752	Page 331	Responsible Parenthood	Support

The resolution on “Responsible Parenthood” has been used to justify continued advocacy in favor of abortion. The resolution rejects the belief that life begins at conception, allows for abortion when the pregnancy poses serious problems concerning the health or mental capability of the mother or child, advocates for legalized abortion with the only restriction being preventing gender selection abortions, believes that women have “a right to control their own bodies” (which includes the right to abort their unborn child) despite the evidence that the child is not part of the woman’s body, but is a separate life growing within her, opposes parental consent requirements for minors obtaining abortions, classifies abortion as a “reproductive health service” (which euphemistically characterizes the ending of a pregnancy as reproductive health), and calls upon United Methodist-related health care institutions to offer “a full range of programs ... for reproductive health services” (including by implication, abortion). These positions are contrary to the more binding statement found in the Social Principles ¶ 161J, which offers only reluctant approval of abortion and lists a number of circumstances in which we oppose abortion. Either this resolution should be deleted entirely (by approving Petition 60748) or statements on abortion should be edited out of the resolution. There is enough good material on true family planning that the resolution would be helpful without any mention of abortion. We state in the Social Principles that abortion is not an acceptable means of birth control, so abortion ought not to be included in a resolution on family planning. Alternatively, the non-bolded petitions above offer some suggested amendments to the older version of Resolution 2025 that could be adopted. However, those amendments do not cover all the problematic passages in the newly revised version of Petition 60249.

Pet 60755	Page 332	Readopt Resolution	Support
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This petition readopts an important resolution raising concerns about the deliberate targeting of unborn baby girls for abortion, which is a widespread problem in much of the world.

Pet 60837	Page 325	Withdraw from Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice	Support
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This petition mandates withdrawal from RCRC, which is a pro-abortion lobbying coalition. It supports legal abortion and opposes all restrictions upon it. This is contrary to our United Methodist position on abortion, since we explicitly affirm the value of unborn life, oppose partial birth abortion, gender selection or eugenics abortion, and we favor parental notification and consent for abortion in young girls (which RCRC opposes). RCRC’s “Prayerfully Pro-Choice: Resources for Worship” even promotes the use of religious rituals to bless abortion clinics for doing “God’s work” and “holy work.” RCRC’s positions are so different from United Methodist positions that we should not be part of this coalition. Our involvement with RCRC has not influenced them to moderate their position. It has only allowed them to attach our United Methodist name to their secular policy agenda.

Pet 60838	Page 356	Deletion	Support
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This petition deletes Resolution 3204, Support for the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice. It essentially gives unqualified support to RCRC. We should not support a coalition that has views so different from our United Methodist understanding (see above under Petition 60837).

- Pet 60681 Page 317 Ministry to Those Who Have Experienced Abortion Support
This petition advocates for the church to continue ministry to all women in crisis pregnancy situations, including those who terminate a pregnancy. The church should offer compassionate, non-judgmental ministry to all.
- Pet 60707 Page 322 Children as God's Gift Support
This petition reminds us that children are a gift and blessing from God. It expresses concern about the declining birthrates in some countries that burden aging populations and may even lead to depopulation of some areas.
- Pet 60252 Page 359 UM Response to US Hospital Mergers Oppose
This petition expresses concern about the merger of hospitals in the U.S. that could be depriving persons of access to emergency contraception and abortion services. We believe the concern over abortion access should be left out of this resolution. Hospitals are not needed for contraceptive services, and we should not be lobbying for greater access to abortion.

ADOPTION

- Pet 60885 Page 317 Adoption Oppose***
Adoption can provide a safe and healthy environment for children lacking parents or family to care for them. While acknowledging that adoption by non-traditional families can sometimes be superior to a foster family situation, we believe that it is preferable to place children in healthy heterosexual families. Children flourish best when they have parents of both genders. Same-sex adoptive couples by definition deprive children of a parent of one gender. The children are thus lacking in modeling and experience in relating to the parent of one gender.
- Pet 60398 Page 326 Adoption in a Global Context Support
This petition strengthens a good resolution encouraging adoption.

EUTHANASIA AND SUICIDE

- Pet 60690 Page 325 End of Life Options Oppose***
This petition calls upon the UM Church to support the "Death with Dignity Movement." This movement favors the ability of persons to end their own lives, often with the assistance of a doctor. Suicide is not the answer to end-of-life suffering. We do not have the right to actively end our own lives—a role that belongs only to God. The introduction of assisted suicide opens the door to all kinds of abuse, as the nation of Belgium is learning, where many elderly persons are having their lives ended without their informed consent or without adequate safeguards. This petition runs counter to existing statements in our Resolutions opposing suicide.
- Pet 60848 Page 396 Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia Support***
This new resolution effectively lays out a life-affirming Christian approach to end-of-life issues. It stresses the "sacredness and importance of all life ... including for the very sick, the terminally ill, the depressed and despairing, the disabled and mentally impaired." We need to advocate on behalf of life, not open the door to more intentional death in society.
- Pet 60470 Page 356 Faithful Care for Persons Suffering and Dying Support
This petition rewrites an existing resolution with a focus on providing the best physical and spiritual care for persons who are suffering and dying. This nuanced and balanced resolution can provide effective guidance and advocacy for the provision of effective care.

Pet 60454 Page 388 Suicide: A Pastoral Response Support
 This petition is a comprehensive resolution on suicide and the church's ministry. It is balanced and biblically grounded, with compassion and care for all persons.

Pet 60794 Page 317 Suicide Oppose
 This addition to the Social Principles singles out suicide among LGBT youth, rather than focusing on all youth suicide. There are many risk factors accounting for youth suicide, and we should not focus on just one of them. We would accept this petition if the second half of the first sentence were removed.

GENDER

Pet 60793 Page 302 Gender Support
 This petition is a cautious and compassionate response to gender confusion in our society. It advocates loving and godly counsel that emphasizes the sacredness of the human body.

HUMAN SEXUALITY

The church's balanced, compassionate, and biblically faithful position on the practice of homosexuality has been reaffirmed by ten General Conferences over 40 years. Despite vociferous disagreement by some parts of the church, it still represents the majority opinion of the grass roots church membership worldwide. Changing the church's position to allow same-sex weddings and/or the ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexuals would separate our church from 2,000 years of the church's consensus teaching and from 95 percent of world Christians today. It would also provoke separation of The United Methodist Church, forcing those who could not in good conscience live with the progressive position to leave the church. It is important to maintain clear lines of accountability to what our church has taught for 44 years and continues to require today. We oppose any efforts to remove or weaken our church's standards. Instead, we support efforts to strengthen accountability to our church's standards.

Pet 60882 Page 302 Sexual Orientation Oppose
 This petition adds "sexual orientation" as a "gift from God," implying that God creates people with various sexual orientations. This claim is not proven by science and is contrary to our scriptural understanding.

<i>Pet 60819</i>	<i>Page 302</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60820</i>	<i>Page 303</i>	<i>A Third Way - Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60821</i>	<i>Page 303</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60823</i>	<i>Page 304</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60826</i>	<i>Page 305</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60830</i>	<i>Page 307</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60831</i>	<i>Page 307</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60833</i>	<i>Page 308</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60834</i>	<i>Page 308</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60883</i>	<i>Page 310</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60903</i>	<i>Page 310</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60977</i>	<i>Page 312</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 61041</i>	<i>Page 312</i>	<i>Human Sexuality</i>	<i>Oppose</i>

The above petitions all in different ways delete the sentence that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Petitions 60830 and 60903 also permit pre-marital sexual relations and potentially even polygamy.

Pet 60824	Page 304	Human Sexuality	Oppose
Pet 60827	Page 306	Human Sexuality	Oppose
Pet 60828	Page 306	Human Sexuality	Oppose
Pet 60829	Page 307	Human Sexuality	Oppose

These petitions delete the “incompatible” statement and also insert “agree to disagree” language.

Pet 60825	Page 305	Human Sexuality	Oppose
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This petition relegates our definition of marriage to a “tradition” rather than to Scripture and makes it more open to same-sex marriage.

Pet 60835	Page 309	Human Sexuality	Oppose
Pet 60944	Page 311	Human Sexuality	Oppose
Pet 60836	Page 309	Human Sexuality	Support

These three petitions all attempt to rewrite ¶ 161F in a more balanced and general way. Petition 60835 leaves out all mention of homosexuality, while affirming sexual relations only within monogamous marriage between one man and one woman. Petition 60944 is more explicit in giving persons rights based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression, but leaves out all mention of the church’s stance on homosexuality and does not affirm that sexual relations are only within marriage. Petition 60836 is the same as 60835, with an added sentence enumerating the sexual expressions that are contrary to God’s design (sex before marriage, adultery, polygamy, and same-sex relations). We thus prefer 60836, if the decision is made to rewrite ¶ 161F. Otherwise, we encourage keeping the language as it is now. It seems that it would weaken our stance on sexuality to rewrite the paragraph and not mention the most controversial aspect of sexuality that we are dealing with.

Pet 60822	Page 304	Human Sexuality	Support
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This petition adds some crucial theological understandings to the basis for our position on sexuality and its place within marriage.

Pet 60884	Page 313	Sexual Harassment	Oppose
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This petition adds to the categories under which we oppose discrimination – “gender identity” and “sexual orientation.” While we oppose sexual harassment, we also oppose using the categories added. Including “gender identity” as a category is an implicit affirmation that a person’s gender is based on one’s own feelings, rather than biological reality, and that gender can be changed (all of which we do not accept). Opening the door on discrimination related to sexual orientation creates legislative enactments that contradict our stance that same-sex relations are contrary to God’s will.

Pet 60778	Page 322	Equal Rights	Oppose
Pet 60887	Page 322	Right to Marry	Oppose

These petitions endorse same-sex marriage and civil unions, contradicting our position against these in other places in the *Discipline*. Even when the laws or values of the societies surrounding our churches differ from our church’s values, our church should not spread any confusion about how it understands marriage.

Pet 60892	Page 327	Adoption in a Global Context	Oppose
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This amendment to an existing resolution adds support for policies enabling single persons, unmarried cohabiting persons, and same-sex couples to adopt children on an equal basis with heterosexual married parents. While acknowledging that adoption by persons in non-traditional

families can sometimes be superior to a foster family situation, we believe that it is preferable to place children in healthy heterosexual families. Children flourish best when they have parents of both genders. Single adoptive persons and same-sex adoptive couples by definition deprive children of a parent of one gender. The children are thus lacking in modeling and experience in relating to the parent of one gender. Unmarried cohabiting couples often lack the long-term stability and safety of married heterosexual couples. We believe preference in adoption should be given to qualified monogamous heterosexual married couples.

Pet 60832 Page 308 Human Sexuality Support

This petition opposes forced education in public schools that “normalizes sexual lifestyles that are in contrast to the traditional teachings of the Church.” The petition calls for parental notification and consent prior to such instruction. Public school students should not be compelled to experience instruction that violates biblical moral values.

Pet 60451 Page 385 Global Health and Rights: Eradicating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence AMEND and Support

This strong and comprehensive resolution addresses the problem of violence against girls and women, with many specifics and concrete recommendations. Amendments are needed to #8: add “life-affirming” reproductive health-care services; and #10: “Provide comprehensive sexuality education consistent with Christian sexual ethics.”

Pet 60777 Page 321 Equal Rights Support

This petition clarifies wording and includes strong condemnation against “violence, coercion, ridicule, stigmatization, or marginalization directed toward individuals who self-identify as either homosexual or former homosexual or as LGBT or ex-gay.” It is important to include protections for persons who have left homosexual practice alongside those who continue in it. Both are subject to victimization.

Pet 60897 Page 332 Church to Be in Ministry to Persons of All Sexual Orientations Support

The amendments to this resolution strengthen it by adding biblical content and linkages to similar statements in our *Discipline*. The ministry described here is congruent with our position on the practice of homosexuality.

Pet 60801 Page 332 Prohibit Homosexual Marriage Oppose

While this petition takes a traditional viewpoint toward marriage and sexuality, it improperly attempts to use a resolution to legislate church law. The prohibitions contained in the petition are already stated in the legal parts of the *Book of Discipline*. These amendments to Resolution 2041 are not needed.

Pet 60893 Page 333 Readopt Resolution Oppose

Pet 60899 Page 333 Opposition to Homophobia and Heterosexism Oppose

The first petition readopts the resolution as is, while the second rewrites the resolution. We object to being characterized as homophobic or heterosexist simply because we uphold biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality. This is not the way to foster dialog within our church, with mutual respect for differing opinions. The traditional biblical stance is not born out of prejudice, but out of respect for the way God created us to live and his wisdom for how we are to best experience human flourishing.

Pet 60841 Page 395 Reducing Harm for LGBTQ Children and Youth No Position
 There are many good suggestions in this resolution. However, we oppose the use of the categories “gender identity” or “gender expression.” These are an implicit affirmation that a person’s gender is based on one’s own feelings, rather than biological reality, and that gender can be changed (all of which we do not accept). We further question the statistic that 40 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ. We believe this petition could be rewritten in a way that honors traditional views about homosexuality and transgenderism, while still accomplishing the goal of reducing harm.

Pet 60898 Page 398 Rights of All Persons Oppose
 This resolution exaggerates the level of religion-based persecution of LGBTQ persons. Its statements and recommendations are overly broad and would in effect indict The United Methodist Church’s current opposition to same-sex marriage and the ordination of practicing homosexuals. It does not balance the need for ensuring civil rights with the need to ensure religious freedom. Finally, its triumphalist tone is out of place when addressing as sensitive and complex an issue as this.

Pet 60845 Page 395 Holiness and the Human Body Support
 This petition is a new resolution that outlines historic Methodist beliefs about the sanctity of the human body. This includes proper understanding of the role of sex, but the resolution goes beyond that to caring for the body and appreciating the impact that our lifestyle choices have on our bodies and on the lives of others. This positive statement is a good start toward a more comprehensive theology of the human body.

MARRIAGE

Marriage has always been the joining of a man and woman in a covenantal relationship. Christian marriage takes on the added significance of showcasing the image of God through complementary genders (Genesis 2) and symbolizing the union of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5). In the face of attempts by secular society to reinvent or redefine marriage according to human whim, the church needs to stand fast on the eternal truth of God’s word and its teaching on marriage. We oppose any attempt to redefine marriage, such as the four petitions below.

<i>Pet 60783</i>	<i>Page 300</i>	<i>Definition of Marriage</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60784</i>	<i>Page 301</i>	<i>A Third Way - Marriage</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60785</i>	<i>Page 301</i>	<i>Marriage</i>	<i>Oppose</i>
<i>Pet 60786</i>	<i>Page 301</i>	<i>Equality in Marriage</i>	<i>Oppose</i>

PERSECUTION

Pet 60709 ***Page 320*** ***Solidarity with Persecuted Christians*** ***Support***
 It is important to make a public statement in our Social Principles of standing with our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The ability to practice our faith without hindrance from civil authorities is one of the bedrock freedoms in a free society. In the U.S., our religious freedom has been recently called into question by court decisions legalizing same-sex marriage. These petitions aim to protect religious freedom generally and also specifically in relation to our beliefs about marriage and sexuality. They protect The United Methodist Church’s ability to believe and promote our biblically-based beliefs.

Pet 60704 **Page 317** **Protections for Religious Adoption Agencies** **Support**
 This petition advocates legal protection for religious adoption agencies who, because of religious conviction, only place children with married heterosexual parents.

Pet 60853 **Page 321** **Protections for Religious Believers and Others** **Support**
 This petition advocates for legal rights of religious believers and others to espouse traditional, male-female marriage and the value of chastity.

Pet 60309 Page 383 Religious Freedom: Grounded in Love Support
 This petition is a good resolution explaining and defending the need for religious freedom in general. It has good biblical grounding and clear definitions. It needs a clarifying amendment regarding participation in same-sex weddings being a religious freedom issue.

Pet 60942 Page 399 Religious Liberty Oppose
 This petition has some good statements about religious liberty, but it goes too far in promoting same-sex marriage and restricting religious liberty in preserving our views in favor of traditional marriage. Petition 60309 is to be preferred.

ALCOHOLISM

Pet 60464 Page 338 Alcohol and Other Drugs Support
 This petition strengthens an important resolution on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug addiction.

BIOETHICS

Pet 60225 Page 318 Bioethics Support
 This petition adds a new section on bioethics, emphasizing that we cannot treat any human life at any stage as a mere commodity. It supports embryo adoption programs that make available for adoption frozen embryos not needed for research. In this newly expanding field, it is important to formulate solid moral principles to provide guidance.

Pet 60401 Page 350 Human Cloning Support
 This petition amends Resolution 3182 and strengthens our call for a ban on the use of cloning for making embryos for research experiments or stem cells. In this time of advancing biological technology, it is important to maintain moral boundaries on that technology. Human life is not to be used as a commodity.

BULLYING

Pet 60199 Page 299 Bullying Support
 Pet 60682 Page 300 Bullying Oppose

These two petitions are alternative ways of adding a new section to the Social Principles on bullying. Petition 60199 is clear and concise, with concrete recommendations. It gives a brief theological foundation and enumerates the behavior that is considered bullying. Petition 60682 lacks any theological foundation and lacks a definition of bullying. Some of the recommendations from 60682 could be incorporated into 60199.

FAMILY

Pet 60854 Page 300 Mothers and Fathers Support
 Sociological research has demonstrated the unique contributions to family life of mothers and fathers. While not limiting either mothers or fathers to a certain rigid role, each makes a vital contribution to raising healthy children. This contribution should be recognized.

Pet 60661 Page 300 Family Oppose
 This petition's amendments to the Social Principles have the effect of minimizing the importance of parents and family for all children. We ought to be strengthening and encouraging parents and families, not minimizing their contribution toward the raising of children. No matter what adults are charged with raising a child, they are serving as that child's parents. That relationship is unique and worthy of mention.

HOMELESSNESS

Pet 60688 Page 319 Homelessness AMEND and Support
 This petition adds a new section to the Social Principles on homelessness. As a global statement, we recommend deleting the sentence giving statistics for LGBTQ homelessness in the U.S. It is the only statistic in the paragraph and therefore out of place. The causes of homelessness are listed, and the church's ministry to the homeless is lifted up as being important.

PORNOGRAPHY

Pet 60164 Page 299 Pornography Support
 Pet 60706 Page 302 Internet Pornography Support
 These two petitions add a new section to the Social Principles on pornography. Petition 60164 is a comprehensive, balanced examination of the issue, including a clear definition of pornography. Petition 60706 notes the pervasiveness of Internet pornography, making it available to millions of people in a much more easily accessed format. We suggest adding 60706 into 60164 for a more complete statement. In this time when up to 40 percent of people regularly access pornography, it is essential for the church to speak out more forcefully on this topic.

Pet 60167 Page 334 Readopt Resolution Support
 This petition urges the readoption of Resolution 2082, Prevention of the Use of Pornography in the Church.

Further information on these and other issues facing the 2016 General Conference may be found on the RRC website: www.methodistcrossroads.org