

**A Prayer for Human Relations**

Based on 1 Samuel 3:1-10 by Safiyah Fosua, GBOD

Speak, Lord,  
For your children are listening  
For a word of encouragement, for a word of instruction  
About how we ought to live in these troubled lands.

Speak, Lord,  
For your children are listening,  
As we drift off to sleep in down-covered beds  
    In marble palaces  
Or in sawdust padded pallets  
    On dusty floors.

We are listening, rich and poor  
We are listening, young and old  
For a word from you that will heal our lands.

Eternal God,  
Lover of our souls, we come to you this morning hungering for something from you that will change the rest of our lives. We come hungering for honesty instead of corruption; for generosity instead of greed; we come hungering for integrity instead of intrigue. We come hungering for our neighbors to be fed and for all to have enough honest work to provide for the basic needs of their families. We come this morning hungering for righteousness to flow like rainwater and for the justice like an ever-flowing stream described by the prophets.

We come hungering and we come listening for your words to us, describing how we can participate in your great work of re-creation. We come listening for ways that we can become part of the solution and not part of the problem. We come listening in fear and trembling, praying that we will have the courage to respond and act if we hear a clear word of instruction from you.

Speak, Lord, for your children are listening... *(Silence)*

**Amen.**

**Message: What We Believe**

**What do you believe?**

What we believe is central to our identity and the way we live our lives; what we think, say and do. There’s an expression, “The way we worship shapes what we believe and what we believe shapes the way we worship.” It doesn’t matter whether it’s Bishop Hagiya, our District Superintendent Jan Wiley, your pastor, members of our congregation or community, or even Oprah who’s asking “what do you believe?”

You’re the one who decides and then acts. Beliefs are something we all learn, challenge, re-learn and revise every day of our lives.

**Our beliefs have a powerful and far-ranging impact on each of us, our families and our community.** Today, is an important reminder of the power of spiritual beliefs, as we honor Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. whose faith changed the world. We are grateful for his life, ministry and the impact he continues to have. Through Rev. King, God began a movement to change what is unjust.

**What we believe shapes our lives: morally, spiritually & physically.**

We act according to what we believe and what we believe is shaped by the way we act. Our beliefs really do determine what we do with our lives. After all, if we don’t believe in a cause or a person or a job or a phenomenon or a God or a world view, then we won’t give any attention or credibility, once our initial interest wears off. That’s why fads are short-lived. Does anyone still buy pet rocks or chia pets?

**Today we’re focused on what we, as United Methodists, believe about our relationship with others.** We’re impacted by our common beliefs and shared experiences. That’s natural in a community of people who are in life-changing relationships with God, other people and creation. Our Social Creed is a basic statement of the truths we believe and follow. It’s a summary statement, supported by a set of Social Principles which are found in our Book of Discipline (or Practice).

**One note: our Social Creed is not a binding law of our church.**

It’s not at the same level of importance as fundamental Christian beliefs, such as our belief in Jesus as our Savior, the Son of God. Our community of faith lifts the social creed up as a model of how we take

risks interpreting God’s love, taking a stand and calling others to respond, even when the areas are complex or controversial.

**The Social Creed is a statement of how God’s love for the world is active and engaged, seeking justice and peace with compassion.**

You can’t do good and resist evil and injustice if you’re passive, isolated or a couch potato. Following Jesus means following the narrow path he set, being transformed by God’s Spirit and, as we’re changed, serving God by serving others. That’s what it means to be a disciple, to be one who follows, imitates Jesus and learns from the Holy Spirit.

**Our Social Creed calls us to be more than observers.** We’re called to care enough about other people’s lives and the world we live in to think and take action. John Wesley showed us the way by how he lived. He didn’t believe in standing apart from others with a private, personal faith. No! John, along with his brother Charles and Susanna, left the pulpit of the Anglican Church to go out into the streets, markets and fields, bringing the Word of God and Christian way of living and caring for others to craftsmen, laborers, mine workers and all who worked for a daily living. Through the Wesley’s, God began a movement to show us how to live lives of practical faith and love.

**Methodism wasn’t born out of a crisis of theology, but a crisis of mission.** Wesley challenges us to live our personal beliefs by working with others for common, social causes founded in God’s love and care. It’s a practice Methodists contribute to the local and global church: all are invited to participate. We are not exclusive. We work freely and openly with other Christians and faiths as we care for our neighbors.

**Since the Wesleyan movement began, Methodists have been getting involved with other people’s lives and with political and social struggles.** Our mission calls us to go into our local community and serve as we are gifted and able. Our beliefs and practices also span our nation and call us to reach out to all the nations of the world. This is how we’re called to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

**The change is both personal and social.** Jesus changed the world everywhere he went, turning unjust and oppressive systems upside down

through the power of radical, transforming love. We continue Jesus’ work today when we show radical hospitality and openness to others.

**Please join me now in reading the United Methodist Social Creed out loud.** [pause] I invite you to turn to the person seated next to you and briefly share one thing that speaks to you from this statement of what we believe. Is there an element of what you read that resonates with your heart, mind and spirit? Have you had a recent experience of God’s love that relates to our social creed? Take a few minutes to share with one another what attracts you. [pause]

**Thank you for sharing.** I invite you to continue the discussion after the service as you gather with other members, guests, your family or friends. When we share our experiences of God’s love together, we’re all inspired, refreshed and we build each other up.

**I invite you to put the Social Creed someplace where you’ll see it this week:** on your mirror at home or on a desk or the refrigerator, some place where you can’t miss it. When you see it, reflect and meditate on what you believe. Think and pray about your faith, your identity and the ways your belief calls you to live in a meaningful and active way.

**At the heart of our Social Creed is our commitment.** We commit ourselves to the rights, dignity of others and to improving the quality of life for all people, regardless of any social, economic, political or material differences we may have. Jesus taught us to “*Love our neighbors as ourselves.*” Our social creed is a clear statement of our devotion to God. Let us return God’s grace by showing our love for others, no matter how difficult or challenging it may be. May God begin a movement in our community through grace and love.

I pray you will find God’s grace filling your heart, mind and spirit with love and gratitude this Sabbath and on Martin Luther King Day. Amen.

***United Methodist Social Creed\****

We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God’s gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts to idolatrous ends.

We affirm the natural world as God’s handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.

We joyfully receive for ourselves and others the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage, and the family.

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all persons.

We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the glory of God and the good of themselves and others and in the protection of their welfare in so doing; in the rights to property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and responsible consumption; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.

We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to the rule of justice and law among nations, and to individual freedom for all people of the world.

We believe in the present and final triumph of God’s Word in human affairs and gladly accept our commission to manifest the life of the gospel in the world. Amen.

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\* Source: 2012 Book of Disciplines, [www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-social-creed](http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-social-creed)

**Psalm 148 (NRSV)**

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his host! Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars! Praise him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He established them forever and ever; he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed. Praise the LORD from the earth, you sea monsters and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and frost, stormy wind fulfilling his command! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Wild animals and all cattle, creeping things and flying birds! Kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all rulers of the earth! Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted, his glory is above earth and heaven. He has raised up a horn for his people, praise for all his faithful, for the people of Israel who are close to him. Praise the LORD!

**Micah 6:6-8 (NRSV)**

“With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?