SMU Values/United Methodist Values

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**Introduction**

The following list provides a summary of United Methodist values that serve SMU’s values as a church affiliated university. The terms overlap, but each has a distinct function and significance. They rest on fundamental convictions about reality as a whole and about the nature, purposes and actions of God. They are theologically-grounded convictions, following the guidance of John Wesley, leader of the movement that gave birth to The United Methodist Church. They also reflect commitments that United Methodists share with other Christian denominations, but are couched in terms that invite people of other religious tradition or no particular faith to consider and apply according to their particular world view or philosophy.

The primary sources for United Methodist beliefs and values are found in the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith and the Social Principles. (2016 Book of Discipline, pp. 65-77, 105-146) Because of SMU’s religious affiliation, within the university, Christianity in general and United Methodism in particular should have its voice, values and commitments to be heard. Those values are always open to challenge, but they bear particular, intentional consideration.

**Core United Methodist Values**

**Wholeness** - Wholeness refers to a comprehensive view of reality and a commitment to exploring all the dimensions of the good for human flourishing.

Wholeness in a Christian sense refers to individual and collective embodiment of the character of Christ as illustrated, for example, by the fruit of the Spirit; by fulfilling the law in loving God supremely and loving neighbor as oneself. In a Wesleyan framework, wholeness is understood as Christian perfection (or being made perfect in love, having the mind of Christ and walking as Christ walked). It is also termed holiness.

How is wholeness understood from the viewpoints of other faith traditions?

If we take religious faith seriously, students need opportunities to explore this value from specific religious perspectives. Christian students need help understanding and applying a Christian doctrinal and ethical framework. Jewish students need the same opportunity from a Jewish perspective, as do Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other students. Secular students need an opportunity to think about how they would conceive of wholeness from a perspective in keeping with their views of reality.

(This value relates to the personal congruence and social responsibility learning domains.)???

**Purpose** - Purpose refers to the importance of embodying/living intentional, well-conceived, goal-directed activities that transcend material, instrumental, utilitarian aims. Students should be able to describe their sense of purpose in light of their basic beliefs.

In a Christian frame, purpose ultimately is established by Christ and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. All of life is encompassed by Christ’s commission to the church, to make disciples of all nations and to embody the reign of God on earth. It speaks directly to vocation (calling). However, this value also indicates the difference between those with a materialist view of reality and those who see reality as ultimately personal, rooted in a personal God who created the heavens and the earth.

(This value relates to the amplified capacity and personal congruence learning domains.)???

**Integrity** - Integrity refers to consistency of character (moral courage) according to an articulated set of ethical principles.

In a Christian frame, integrity involves commitment to Christlike character and the renewal of the image of God in human beings. It includes honesty, but also wisdom and discernment. Its ultimate point of reference is the justice associated with God’s reign, so personal integrity participates in justice. Ultimately, the domains of the personal (individual) and the social inhere inhere in one another.

(This value relates to the courageous leadership and personal congruence learning domains.)

**Discipline** – Discipline refers to consistency in good, healthy, habits. It involves reflective awareness of one’s routines and the ability to evaluate and change as needed.

In the Christian framework, doing and knowing always inhere in each other. The division of theory and practice as separate domains is a form of dualism incompatible with Christianity. Practices and the habits of Christian discipline help to shape understanding, character, and commitment to the common good. This point relates to the axiom that pedagogy is a form of discipleship or apprenticeship.

(This value relates to the holistic wellness and amplified capacity learning domains.)

**Faithfulness** – Faithfulness refers to keeping promises to others, to trustworthiness and honesty. This value relates to responsibility to the community/common good.

In a Christian frame, faithfulness is not possible apart from God’s faithfulness and steadfast love as the source of all human faithfulness. In other words, since all people are created in God’s image, human faithfulness expresses divine faithfulness. Of course, this point would be controverted by those who do not God, but from a Christian point of view, it is indubitably true.

(This value relates to the personal congruence learning domain.)

**Trust** refers to epistemic charity, a willingness to listen carefully to other people’s arguments and take them as they present themselves. It exemplifies a benefit-of-the-doubt attitude.

In a Christian frame, this value is rooted in the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself. It is further connected to the conviction that all people are created in God’s image. Humans of all kinds share this common (theological) origin and this fact is the source of our commitment to the common good while also recognizing diversity and honoring individual expression.

(This value relates to the global consciousness and amplified capacity learning domains.)

**Joy** - This value refers to a disposition toward life that transcends temporary feeling states. Using a term from spirituality literature, it could be called equanimity.

In a Christian frame, this value relates to the hope grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the paradigmatic sign that God ultimately conquers evil and establishes justice. Joy is a by-product of this hope.

(This value relates to the holistic wellness domain.)

**Love/Acceptance** - Love refers to positive regard and commitment to the well-being of other people. (We cannot be whole people without loving others as God loves us.) It is more of a disposition than a feeling. It encompasses friends and enemies alike. It necessarily involves commitment to just relations and societies.

In a Christian frame, love and acceptance are based on the view that all people are created in God’s image, therefore objects of God’s love. The command to love God and neighbor are intimately connected. Jesus adds love of enemy as a practice that his followers are to embody.

(This value relates to the global consciousness and social responsibility learning domains.)

**United Methodist Beliefs that Ground These Values**

The values listed above are derived from my reflections as a United Methodist scholar on basic Wesleyan and Methodist theological themes. They can be understood either in specifically Christian and United Methodist (Wesleyan) ways and provide a starting point for reflection from other religious and non-religious perspectives. The university should provide support for students across the religious and secular spectrum, but in doing so, it should not minimize or marginalize the particular beliefs and practices of the sponsoring body.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. (Paragraph 120, 2016 Book of Discipline, p. 93) A university affiliated with The United Methodist Church must be able to explain how it serves the church’s mission through its particular role of developing knowledge and educating students. The United Methodist Church believes deeply in non-coercion and cherishes the freedom for each person to come to one’s own conclusions about deeply held values. (We believe this freedom and responsibility are aspects of the image of God in all people.) For this reason, we avoid requiring religious practices or imposing United Methodist teachings.

But also, importantly, a university affiliated with The United Methodist Church should not treat the engagement of such questions as minor and optional for becoming well-educated. They lie at the heart of what it means to be well-educated. Therefore, a United Methodist school needs to consider the tensions between active support of the church’s mission and enthusiastic welcome of a religiously diverse group of students, faculty and staff. How does it promote freedom of inquiry *and* support for the denominational mission?

Recognizing the dual purpose in a non-sectarian approach to higher education, I turn to specific United Methodist beliefs that provide the foundation for the list of values delineated in this document. They include:

(1) a view of reality rooted in a transcendent and immanent Triune God as Creator, Sustainer and Guide of all that is. All the values find their source and significance in the one, true God, all-good, all-knowing, of love, justice, mercy and faithfulness.

(2) United Methodist values also necessarily include a view of human beings as created in God’s image. The *imago Dei* provides the ground for upholding and defending human dignity, social order and just relations and practices. While upholding individual freedom, we recognize the inescapably social dimension to human nature. In scriptural terms, recognizing all people as made in God’s image calls for loving God *and* neighbor (broadly understood) in practical ways.

While we recognize the fundamental goodness of creation, we also confess the power of sin/evil that distorts goodness and to which all people succumb. Human beings are inclined to self-interest and self-advantage over others that creates conflict in social relations. A realistic understanding, not only of human finitude, but also of human sin, is a crucial part of developing an integral set of moral principles in keeping with United Methodist values.

(3) A third and final foundational United Methodist belief that grounds the list of values delineated above has to do with human flourishing. It builds on a fundamental belief that all Christians share, which is that God is incarnate in Christ for the salvation of the world and the renewal of all things. A United Methodist understanding of this view of justification by grace through faith is that Christ has come for the healing of human beings, as individuals and as societies. “Healing” is understood holistically, in every dimension of human life.

From this starting point, John Wesley argued that the doctrine of Christian perfection envisions the fulfillment of all that God has in mind for the human race. Here lies the United Methodist ground for human wholeness and flourishing. (He also had a vision for cosmic renewal that embraces all academic fields.) “Perfection” is a troublesome word, because in today’s usage, it implies flawlessness, which no one claims. Wesley (and Methodists) used the term in its scriptural sense, which means to grow to fullness, to maturity, to become all that God intends.

Wholeness, then, understood with this Wesleyan reference, stands as the value that encompasses all other values. Purpose stems from the view of God as personal and active in relations with humanity. In a Christian and Wesleyan or Methodist vein, purpose speaks to seeking God’s will in all things. Integrity, faithfulness, courage and discipline are virtues that reflect commitment to wholeness. One cannot flourish (one cannot serve God or the common good well) without these virtues. The final two values, joy and love, are essential concomitants to the commitment to wholeness.

Again, the values listed above can be engaged and pursued from a range of religious systems and perspectives. Whether actively religious or secular in mindset, students can use these values as reference points to consider who they are, what they value, and how they plan to grow into the persons they envision themselves to be. At the same time, the university bears the obligation to provide space for students, faculty, and staff to interpret these values “Christianly,” especially from a United Methodist/Wesleyan perspective, and to provide all interested parties the opportunities to think and practice along those lines. This work calls for wisdom and discernment, but it also is the “value added” dimension of college that students need and expect to experience.