

Antisemitism violates United Methodist Doctrine

In January of 2020, Governor Bill Lee signed a bill permitting religious adoption agencies that received state funding to deny the facilitation of foster or adoption placements on the basis of their written moral or religious beliefs. In December of 2021, the Holston United Methodist Home for Children filed a federal lawsuit against the Biden Administration claiming that anti-discriminatory legislation was a violation of First Amendment rights because it would force the agency to sacrifice their religious beliefs to maintain federal funding. In January of 2022, the Holston United Methodist Home for Children denied a Jewish couple the state-mandated training and home study required to become foster parents. The Holston United Methodist Home for Children is no longer affiliated with the United Methodist Church but still operates under the guise of the denomination. The name and the actions of the agency misrepresent and violate the doctrines of the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church has historically positioned itself at the forefront of ecumenical relations and was one of the founding members of the World Council of Churches which began in 1948. The primary work of the Council of Churches was the Social Creed which was drafted directly from the United Methodist Social Creed (1916). This creed's statement on Methodist relations with other religions is "We condemn all overt and covert forms of religious intolerance, being especially sensitive to their expression in media stereotyping. We assert the right of all religions and their adherents to freedom from legal, economic, and social discrimination."¹ (The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016; rights of religious minorities) The current theology of the Church is dedicated to ensuring the rights and inclusion of all people regardless of their religious background. While this specific clause was added more recently, the social creed and attitude of inclusion within the church dates back to 1908. This original social creed emphasizes the necessity of members of the church to contribute to righteousness in their community and to show love to all of God's creation regardless of their belief in Christianity.

The 2016 *Book of Resolutions*, written on the foundation of the *Book of Discipline*, serves as the current guideline for the behavior of those who classify and advertise themselves as United Methodists and represents the official positions of the United Methodist Church. The *Book of Resolutions* calls Methodists to "be obedient to our own call to witness and be loving and neighborly to persons of other faith communities."(295) The "United Methodist Guiding Principles for Christian-Jewish Relations"(297) details the commission of United Methodists to condemn and repent for all acts of antisemitism

¹ Reist, L. Fitzgerald, Brian K. Milford, and Brian O. Sigmon, eds. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church. Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016.

where the global Christian Church has stood complicit. “It is essential for Christians to oppose forcefully anti-Jewish acts and rhetoric that persist in the present time in many places. We must be zealous in challenging overt and subtle anti-Semitic stereotypes and bigoted attitudes”.(302) The Holston United Methodist Home for Children, while no longer affiliated with the United Methodist Church, advertises itself as United Methodist and therefore is obligated to follow the written doctrine as long as they proclaim themselves as such. As the home directly violated the commission of the Church and the Great Commandment, to love thy neighbor as thyself, they denounced the mission of the United Methodist Church and neglected the instruction of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, to “Do no harm.” and to “Do good.”

The Holston United Methodist Home for Children continues to falsely represent itself as a body of the United Methodist Church. In our baptismal vows, we promise to “resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves.” Such flagrant discrimination and anti-semitism have no place in our society, let alone with a connection to the UMC. Holston Home for Children should not be able to operate under a United Methodist name, as it is now, but the issue is far greater than two words. The United Methodist Church must, in order to live up to its values, ensure that branches of the Church cannot be using the UMC’s name and funds to propagate prejudiced beliefs.

The General Conference should call for the removal of “United Methodist” from the name of the Holston Home because it falsifies the values of the Church and perpetuates harm to other Abrahamic faiths under the false name of the denomination. As United Methodists, we are called to do no harm. The actions of the Holston United Methodist Home for Children are harming both the global Jewish Community and the Christian doctrine that they are undermining. Paul the Apostle called the early church to hold the law of the Old Testament near to them and to love those who follow it. He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

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