

# United Methodist Women Issue Priorities 2016–2020

## Invitation to Engage

Members of United Methodist Women! You are invited to engage actively in four priority justice issues throughout the 2016–2020 quadrennium. These include:

- *Economic Inequality*
- *Climate Justice*
- *Criminalization of Communities of Color*
- *Maternal and Child Health*

## Our Identity: Integrating What Matters to United Methodist Women

Through engaging in these issues, United Methodist Women will work on linking spiritual growth, mission education, leadership development, service and advocacy in their worship, community and mission work. The issues are entry points for exploring how gender, race and class differentials permeate our society, and for living out the Charter for Racial Justice in our times. Each issue offers opportunities for education, bible study, prayer, service, public witness and advocacy for justice in local communities and at the state, national and global levels.

At the same time, these issues are not separate. Questions of who sets policy for whom, and who determines the flow of resources for whom, permeate all of these issues. At the core is the need to challenge systems of oppression that exclude women, youth and children; persons of color; and communities of color. These systems also criminalize people who cross borders to seek livelihoods, or who challenge entrenched inequalities. We are challenged to explore how these issues come together in the daily headlines, and in the concerns of our own communities.

## Intersectionality of the Issues

When the removal of elected officials in the majority African-American city of Flint, Michigan, enabled a manager to set policy that poisoned the entire city water system, the situation laid bare questions of decision making, economic inequality, corporate power, environmental racism, reproductive health outcomes for women, long-term health concerns for children, lack of protection for undocumented immigrants and concerns for citizens about accessing assistance from police and the national guard, due to deep-seated fears of police racial profiling and abuse. How are these issues coming together in your community? How can you engage locally to address them together?

Following is an overview of the four priority issues for United Methodist Women:



## Economic Inequality

*“We support measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.” (Social Principles, The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2012, pg. 128).*

Growing income and wealth inequality in the United States particularly impacts women and communities of color. While real incomes for the top 1 percent have grown 185 percent over the past 35 years, incomes for the rest of the population have increased an average of only 13 percent. Despite signs of “recovery,” millions have lost homes, pensions and jobs and are less financially secure.

This did not just happen on its own. Our current economic insecurity is the result of specific policy choices that have shifted wealth and income to the top: cuts in taxes for the wealthy and corporate tax cuts, cuts in public services, employer cuts to pensions and health benefits, predatory mortgage lending, stagnant wages alongside rising costs of living, work speedups and shifts from the public to the private sector in everything from schools to roads to the military to prisons, eliminating many unionized public sector jobs.

United Methodist Women can act locally and in national efforts to begin to bridge the inequality gap. An education and action workshop, in partnership with United for a Fair Economy, will enable us to engage more and more members in education, reflection and action. Plan to lead this interactive *Overworked and Undervalued* workshop in your community.

See [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/economic-inequality](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/economic-inequality) for the workshop and education and action ideas. Join the Facebook community: [www.facebook.com/UMWEconomicInequality](https://www.facebook.com/UMWEconomicInequality)

## Climate Justice

*All creation is the Lord’s, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life, and space are to be valued and conserved because they are God’s creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings. God has granted us stewardship of creation. We should meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect. (Social Principles, The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012, ¶ 160, pg. 105)*

### Climate change is not an equal opportunity phenomenon.

While climate change affects everyone, it does not affect everyone equally. The simple truth is that the poorest people in industrialized and developing nations suffer the worst effects of the buildup of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Women and children comprise an estimated 70 percent of the world’s poor.

Women and girls are on the front lines of coping with the impact of climate change because of their economic status and because of the particular roles they play in society. They are also on the front lines of creating alternative strategies and solutions. In developing countries, women and girls often are responsible for the most basic survival needs of their families—like water, fuel and food. When these become more costly or scarce, women and girls’ work increases. At the grass roots level, women are often well positioned to manage risk due to their roles as both users and managers of environmental resources, as economic providers, and as caregivers and community workers.

United Methodist Women calls for sound stewardship of the earth and sound relationships within and between communities, whether local, state, national or international. We work to provide practical, theologically sound tools to guide and inspire your work. These tools were developed to delve into deep intersectional injustices between gender, racial, economic and climate injustice. These include:

- [13 Steps to Sustainability: A Practical Event Planning Guide](#)  
Complete with planning team checklists, evaluation questions, registration questions, sample language for requests for proposals and where to go for help.
- [13 Steps to Sustainability: A Principled Approach to Sustainability](#)  
These 13 principles form the core of the social justice concerns that United Methodist Women has committed to. There are measureable, practical steps to the 13 principles' implementation that have been developed with experts' guidance and experienced national office staff. For inspiration and encouragement, you will find specific questions on the survey as well as [bible studies](#), [videos](#) and an [introduction to sustainability](#).
- [Jurisdictional Guides:](#)  
Contact your trained jurisdictional guide for help and to explore or share additional resources.

For 2016–2017, our adult issue study for Mission U is climate justice, and in 2016 both our youth and our children's study will inform and inspire around this topic. We hope UMW across the country and even around the world will take advantage of this opportunity to further ground our work for the important advocacy and action we need to create together in order to build a good world for both ourselves and our posterity.

For more information, see: [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/climate-justice](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/climate-justice)

## Criminalization of Communities of Color

*“In the love of Christ, who came to save those who are lost and vulnerable, we urge the creation of a genuinely new system for the care and restoration of victims, offenders, criminal justice officials, and the community as a whole. Restorative justice grows out of biblical authority, which emphasizes a right relationship with God, self, and community.” (Social Principles, Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012, pg. 137)*

*“We recognize racism as sin and affirm the ultimate and temporal worth of all persons. We rejoice in the gifts that particular ethnic histories and cultures bring to our total life. We commend and encourage the self-awareness of all racial and ethnic groups and oppressed people that leads them to demand their just and equal rights as members of society.” (Social Principles, Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012, pg. 117)*

In the United States, excessive levels of policing policies and immigration law enforcement are growing incarceration rates. In addition, while there is increasing agreement that the 40-year “war on drugs” and the use of solitary confinement in jails, prisons and detention centers cause deep harm to individuals and communities, reforms to these systems are happening too slowly. Further, all of these mechanisms disproportionately impact persons of color. The United Methodist Church must work to dismantle policies that assume whole groups of people are criminals and encourage public acceptance of the injustice of racial profiling, mass incarceration and disenfranchisement of entire communities demonized as a threatening “other.”

In 2012, 23.9 million Americans, ages twelve and over, of all races and socioeconomic levels had used an illicit drug or abused medication, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse. But the “war on drugs” has not been waged across all races and socioeconomic levels; it has been waged through systemic selective targeting of poor communities of color. Policies like New York City’s “stop and frisk” and “broken windows” have empowered police to detain people without probable cause and make arrests for minor infractions. In the immigration system, roundups targeting migrants mean large numbers of people are swept into the detention and deportation system. During the first term of the Obama administration, two million people were deported. Nearly 500,000 people go through the immigration detention system annually.

United Methodist Women members can engage with these issues:

- Find out more about the criminalization of communities of color by using books from the [Reading Program](#), including *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness* by Michelle Alexander.
- Use the manuals for [Racial Justice](#) and [Immigrant and Civil Rights](#) online.
- View the [webinar](#) on Mass Incarceration on the United Methodist Women's website
- Read and expose others to United Methodist Women's [General Conference resolutions](#) on racial justice and mass incarceration.
- Get more information on the follow via United Methodist Women's partner organizations:
  - Immigrant and Civil Rights: [National Network of Immigrant and Refugee Rights](#), [Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#), [Grassroots Leadership](#)
  - Ending use of Solitary Confinement: [National Religious Campaign Against Torture](#)
  - Police Accountability: [SURJ: Showing Up for Racial Justice](#)
  - Ending the War on Drugs: [Sentencing Project](#)

For more information, see: [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/racial-justice](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/racial-justice)

## Maternal and Child Health

*“Health is a condition of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being. John 10:10b says, ‘I came so that they could have life—indeed, so that they could live life to the fullest.’ We encourage individuals to pursue a healthy lifestyle and affirm the importance of preventive health care, health education, environmental and occupational safety, good nutrition, and secure housing in achieving health. Health care is a basic human right.” (Social Principles, Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2012, pg. 126–127)*

Health care for women and children is at the heart of United Methodist Women today, and has been since the organization was founded in the 1800s. In 1869, Dr. Clara Swain was sent to Bareilly, India, to provide quality medical care to women. Our foremothers made the choice to act to save women's lives. They chose to build hospitals and clinics, to train women and girls to serve as doctors and nurses, and to send missionaries to initiate the work.

Today, United Methodist Women continues to support the health and family needs of women and children around the globe. Women are still dying in childbirth, children continue to die from preventable diseases and many communities have no access to healthcare. From Latin America to Africa to Asia, United Methodist Women works with women worldwide to address access to health care; educational opportunities in medical fields; reproductive health including family planning, cancer screening and healthy childbirth; advocacy for equity in law and services for women and children; workshops for teens at risk, lactating mothers who are HIV-positive, and all mothers.

In the United States, United Methodist Women works to address the inequitable differences in birthweight of babies by race, an outcome of systemic racism. Several United Methodist Women national mission institutions provide maternal health services to improve access to care for underserved populations. Services include prenatal and postpartum care; baby supplies; parenting support; shelter and legal services; and health care. In addition, many deaconesses and home missionaries live their calling to ministries of love, justice and service by working as health care professionals.

United Methodist Women is committed to promoting abundant health for women and children in our local, national and global communities. Here are a few ways that our members may engage in that important work:

- Partner with a National Mission Institution/Community Organization: Contact your local organization to find out how you can support maternal and child health needs, with a focus on high priority zip codes. Organizing a workshop or forum with local faith and community leaders is one way to begin building partnerships and addressing needs in your community.

- Help make reusable feminine hygiene kits for girls: Did you know that girls miss up to 2 months of school every year because they lack proper sanitary menstruation materials? We have partnered with Days for Girls to ask our members to help sew, assemble, or distribute kits around the world. Visit [www.daysforgirls.org](http://www.daysforgirls.org).
- Host a Mother's Day program, event or film screening on the subject of Redefining Motherhood. In this campaign, we invite you to recognize and affirm those who are often stigmatized and excluded from traditional definitions of motherhood. Resources for Mother's Day programs will be available soon on our website.
- Educate yourself and your members on global issues and national trends in maternal and child health. Reach out to your elected officials to advocate for policies that improve the lives of children and their mothers.

For information, see: [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/maternal-child-health](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/maternal-child-health)