



**INTER-AGENCY SEXUAL ETHICS TASK FORCE**  
**UM SEXUAL ETHICS**

The Interagency Sexual Ethics Task Force of The United Methodist Church has developed 13 devotions to be used in United Methodist ministries based off of our [Code of Conduct principles](#).

We encourage you to listen to our audio version on your preferred platform at [UMSexualEthics.org/Devos](https://UMSexualEthics.org/Devos) and to download this written version for congregational use.

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Devotion 1 – Guiding Principle: Love

Code of Conduct Principle: God is love. IF we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is made complete in us.

Scripture Reading: I John 4;12

**The Foundation of our Conduct**  
**By Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton**

*Devotion*

In one of the most beautiful and oft-quoted verses of scripture, the Apostle Paul wrote that love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” It is a love that “never ends.” (I Corinthians 13: 7-8a). It was a love that Paul had come to know as a former persecutor turned disciple of Jesus Christ. Because of the amazing presence of God’s grace, Paul knew what the power of love could do.

A love that bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things is a love that enables us to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is what makes the love of our neighbor possible. This is the essence of what the writer of I John is saying. If we love one another without compromise, the presence of God is sparked within us. And, as a result, everything we do is an outgrowth of love and God begins to be perfected within us.

Every component of a United Methodist Code of Conduct flows from this foundational understanding. When God abides within us and God’s love is made complete in us, we will understand what it means to love one another. Dignity, respect, integrity, kindness, justice, and accountability are all branches on the tree of love. These core principles are not possible without the root of love firmly planted within. Because of love, this conduct rises in our consciousness and becomes a non-negotiable priority for how we love one another.

To commit to a code of conduct is not easy. It takes intentionality, prayer, and the support of others. Most of all, it takes love. And when it works, and it does work, it is a never-ending love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.”

May it be so!



Devotion 2 – Guiding Principle: Dignity

Code of Conduct principle: Every person is to be treated with dignity as persons made in the image of God.

Scriptural Reading: Genesis 1:26, CEB

**Humanity and Dignity**  
**By Bishop Ruby Nell Estrella**

*Devotion*

As a woman and clergy, I have witnessed how God journeyed with faith communities to uphold the dignity of all people. Our United Methodist faith affirms that “all persons are of sacred worth.” When God said, “Let us make humanity in our image,” it defines the sacred worth of human family entrusted with the stewardship of the whole of creation. With this, we experience God's oneness and our humanness in relation to others and the world.

Our collective actions manifest God's presence in the world. It must be shared for good of all and is good only when shared by all. When even one person's dignity is violated by oppression, abuse, discrimination and other evils in the society, we also suffer and lose our dignity. Pope Francis wisely said, “Human dignity is the same for all human beings; when I trample on the dignity of another, I am trampling on my own.” When the fullness of life and the right to enjoy and care for the whole of creation is diminished, our own dignity is diminished as well.

As a community of believers, the church should defend and uphold the dignity of all persons. Ministries, opportunities, voice, and vote should be afforded to both women and men. To transform the world for Christ, let us nurture and protect our shared humanity towards fullness of life and dignity — where men and women, young and old are safe, heard, free from fear, discrimination, and violence; have equal access to food, health, rest, and opportunities; and enjoy full and equal participation in tables where decisions are made - that all may sing to God's shalom, dance to life abundant, and lead with respect and dignity.

*Prayer*

Our loving God, You created us in your image to uphold the dignity of the human family and care for the whole of creation. Help us be faithful. Amen!



Devotion 3 – Guiding Principle: Respect

Code of Conduct Principle: Every person is due to be treated with respect as we seek to treat others and we desire to be treated.

Scriptural Reading: Matthew 7:12

By Rev. Jeff Campbell

*Devotion*

Jesus' teaching to treat others as we treat ourselves is critical for life; Jesus says this sums up everything said in the law and by the prophets. Let that sink in. How we treat ourselves and one another is foundational to living as God intends. What makes this truth a summary of everything in the law and everything said by the prophets? Could it be that this teaching recognizes the divine imprint in every human being? Because God created you and created me, we should give one another our full attention, our full respect, and in doing so God will use us for the good of one another. Without the foundation of respect for one another, we may miss something very important that God is offering for us and through us. But like trust, respect can be both earned and lost. If you do not live up to my expectations, if you harm me or abuse your position or power, my respect for you will be lessened, or broken. Jesus speaks to this as well just a couple chapters earlier; when we fall short and lose respect for one another, we must set aside our offering and our worship (Matthew 5:24) and seek to restore the respect God intends between us. This is not always easy, but Jesus says it is important enough for our daily living, that we should pause our act of worship and seek reconciliation before continuing. Through daily practice of prayerful respect of all, and awareness when we fall short, may we experience the deeper truth that God intends for our interactions with one another.

*Prayer*

Dear God, help me be more aware of my interactions with others. Increase my respect for each person. Help me set aside all distractions and focus fully on those you have placed in front of me. Amen.



Devotion 4 – Guiding Principle: Integrity

Code of Conduct Principle: We know that when our hearts are tested God is pleased with integrity.

Scriptural Reading: 1 Chronicles 29:17

**Matters of the Heart**  
**By Sally Vonner**

*Devotion*

I am sure that other Baby Boomers can relate to this phrase, “your word is your bond.” This was spoken to me by my mother and father, often. It was their way of saying be true to your commitments, obligations, actions, and values, or more simply, be honest and truthful, have integrity. Also, it was their belief that what flows from your mouth reflects your heart.

In this passage, David offers a similar warning that integrity is a matter of the heart. As I reflected on the passage in relation to our United Methodist Code of Conduct, integrity, or uprightness, is key. Integrity is the glue, the integral conduct, that bonds us to living out all the codes. Integrity should be the code that requires us to step back, reflect before we act in a way that is not representative of who we are as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We must be truthful about our intentions, respectful of boundaries and ensure we do not harm others by actions of deceit and manipulation.

Integrity and ethics go hand in hand. Both reflect our behavior and morals. In the context of the church, sadly there is a history of good people, professed disciples of Jesus, whose behaviors and loss of moral compass result in sexual misconduct. Such misconduct disrupts and harms in ways that are indescribable. Commitment to upholding integrity, being truthful and accountable to each other in the body of Christ is a heart matter. Rest assured; the test of the heart is involved. I pray that your word and bond to your baptismal vows to resist evil (anything that separates you from God and union with other believers), will set you free to choose love, dignity, respect, kindness, justice, and integrity. May it be so.

*Prayer*

Loving God, thank you for your grace, love and invitation to be followers of Jesus Christ. May we embody doing no harm to ourselves and other believers. Amen.



Devotion 5 – Guiding Principle: Kindness

Code of Conduct Principle: We are to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven us.

Scriptural Reading: Ephesians 4:32

**A Kind and Compassionate Spirit**  
**By Rev. Greg Burgquist**

*Devotion*

As I prepare for General Conference one more time, I am imagining the things we will say to each other. We will talk about things that truly matter and things that do not matter as much as we suppose. We will talk with passion regarding our deeply held beliefs and share the simple stories of family and faith. At times, we will say just the right thing, and at other times, we will miss the mark. We have much to say to each other, but we must also consider the way we say the things we say. I pray that as these important conversations emerge during our time together in Charlotte and beyond, we embrace them with a kind and compassionate spirit.

So, I pray that ...

- I will listen genuinely to the opinions of others and remember that my opinions are partial, imperfect, and incomplete.
- I will express myself not only in a respectful manner, but also with an open mind, a humble heart, and a vulnerable spirit.
- I will engage in healthy dialogue that is mutual and communal, leading to a collective wisdom for which we all long.
- I will be open to change and trying new things, even changing my own mind for the good of the whole.
- I will advocate for just and loving relationships, especially in times of disagreement or conflict, resisting any form of intimidation or manipulation.
- I will forgive and ask for forgiveness, giving up all hope for a better past and focusing on the new expression of United Methodism God is calling forth.
- I will be kind!

*Prayer*

Loving God, help us to listen to you and each other with a kind and compassionate spirit – forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God has forgiven us. Amen.



Devotion 6 – Guiding Principle: Justice

Code of Conduct Principle: We know that we are required to act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly.

Scriptural Reading: Micah 6:8

### **Justice – Our Covenantal Relationship Or Covenantal Relationship**

**By Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo**

#### *Devotion*

Justice or Just Us? Many times, we are motivated to advocate for justice when it directly impacts us. In some instances, justice might not be popular because it goes against the dominant cultural view. Justice is not about “just us”; it's about fostering the right social relationships among our siblings based on God's understanding of what is right and appropriate. Our silence or bystander position will continue to perpetuate harm; thus, we must respond to our higher calling from God to act justly. Our covenantal relationship with God prohibits any behavior that seeks to take something rightfully belonging to another or engages in actions that dehumanize our siblings. Justice entails restoring broken relationships into right relationships that honor God and recognize the Imago Dei in our siblings.

The prophet Micah addresses the covenant people, highlighting the fundamental issue of understanding what God requires of us. Micah responds to their inquiries by emphasizing that what matters to God is our personhood, character, and behavior. Micah presents a positive perspective for living within a covenant relationship with God and each other. Our acts of justice should be motivated by a spirit of mercy, which solidifies our covenant with God and ensures solidarity among us. Our relationship and love for the Divine influence our commitment to covenant life, fostering healthy interpersonal relationships that honor God.

The pursuit of justice demands our attentiveness to living according to God's will rather than determining what is best solely from our perspective. When we align ourselves with God's will, we walk humbly because our actions stem from love for God and our siblings, motivating us to what is right – even when it's not the popular choice. Can we fully embrace our covenant with God and each other, embodying justice in our thoughts, words, and actions?

#### *Prayer*

Holy one, you invite us into covenant relationship, help us to be justice seekers so that we can continue to grow in our love for you and each other. Amen



Devotion 7 – Guiding Principle: Accountability

Code of Conduct Principle: We are called to hold each other accountable, submitting to each other in love.

Scriptural Reading: Ephesians 5:21

**Justice vs. Mercy**  
**By Dawn Wiggins Hare**

*Devotion*

In another life, before I was elected as General Secretary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, I served as a Circuit Court Judge. In determining conflicts between and among parties, I performed legal analysis; I didn't just toss a coin. First, I would determine the facts by listening to the testimony from witnesses and analyzing the evidence. Then I would apply the applicable law to determine the verdict...meaning literally "to determine the truth."

Truth is necessary for the establishment of integrity within a system, in the development of trust between and among people, and in the building of relationships and community. Ours is a community of faith, and concepts of "truth" and "trust" and "relationships" are not a "one and done" goal. These are continuing, intentional decisions made on a daily, hourly, and sometimes minute by minute basis.

I once had a criminal defendant before me in court who said "Judge Hare, I have one request. If you find me innocent, please give me justice, but if you find me guilty, please show me mercy." There is so much wisdom in his humorous words. He trusted the system. He trusted me in that moment. "Yes, and", he fully understood the importance of accountability for the integrity of systems and in the relationships of our communities. This is the same wisdom that is needed in our church and in our world.

We often say that the work of GCSRW is to provide a wellness check in challenging The UMC to live in right relationship with one another and seek beloved community. "Yes, and" challenging the church to include women and to self-monitor our language and conduct towards one another reminds us to be accountable to ourselves, to our community, and to God.

*Prayer*

Dear Spirit of Wisdom, guide us to be persons of truth, builders of trust, and seekers of relationships with integrity, helping us to hold ourselves and others accountable to our beloved community, The United Methodist Church.





Devotion 8 – Guiding Principle: Justice

Code of Conduct Principle: We know that we are required to act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly.

Scriptural Reading: Micah 6:8

**By John Hill**

*Devotion*

As the prophet Micah professes, justice is a requirement for living a righteous faith. Our personal experiences of God should be reflected in how we see, treat, and advocate for each other. When we participate in the harm of another by engaging in or tolerating sexual misconduct, we not only violate our call to love, we fail to honor the divine image that God has woven into each of us.

Similarly, pursuing and sustaining justice is how we collectively participate in the Kingdom of God – such that all members of God’s human family may flourish. When we create or perpetuate systems that enable abuses of power and objectify and commodify the body of one for the gain of another, we misrepresent God’s will and God’s intention for a healthy and thriving society. Justice is a personal commitment to a collective effort.

As we uphold our sacred covenant with one another, this pursuit of justice calls us to disrupt harmful norms and practices that we have failed to interrogate: turning a blind eye; covering up wrongs people have done because they sit in positions of power; not believing victims. These acts perpetuate harm and erode trust in our individual relationships and institutions.

In a spirit of repentance, may we be led to reorient our lives and practices. May we learn to hold each other accountable in our desire to sustain justice. May we seek the Lord’s guidance to shed light on norms and practices that we have overlooked. May we be enlivened by our collective journey of pursuing justice, loving justly, and walking humbly with our God.

*Prayer*

Loving God, grant us the desire to sustain justice. Hold us accountable when we choose to turn a blind eye. Help us to honor your Divine image in our neighbor.



Devotion 9 – Guiding Principle: Kindness

Code of Conduct Principle: We are to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven us.

Scriptural Reading: Ephesians 4:32

**By Roland Fernandez**

### **Devotion**

#### *Devotion*

Kindness is one of the first moral lessons we are taught. We tell children, “Be kind to others.” Kindness, we say, is an important means to show love. We exhort children and adults alike to practice “random acts of kindness.” Who then can oppose Paul’s advice to the Ephesians to “be kind,” especially when, as Paul does, one links kindness with compassion and forgiveness?

Yet there is a dark side to kindness. When we emphasize kindness for the weak but not the strong, kindness can be a code word for submission. Kindness and forgiveness can be rhetorical weapons to encourage women, people of color, and others with less power not to confront the misdeeds of the powerful. “You just need to forgive and be kind,” some are told when they complain that others have treated them with malice, injustice, and abuse. This version of kindness papers over but does not treat deep wounds. It is an unkind understanding of kindness!

Are we better off, then, being unkind in the face of an unkind world? No. Paul is still right. We should be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. But such kindness is not rooted in deference to the powerful or unwillingness to confront injustice. Instead, kindness is rooted in who God is and who God has called us to be. Paul reminds us that “In Christ, God has forgiven us.” God’s nature is loving kindness, a commitment to generosity and joy, despite the misdeeds of others. And God calls us to make loving kindness the center of our identity so that we too make be filled with generosity and joy, regardless of what unkind actions we experience from others. Ultimately, choosing kindness is about claiming who God has made us and called us to be, an identity that cannot be taken away.

#### *Prayer*

God, help us be kind to others, regardless of who they are, as you are kind to us. Let our kindness express the best you call us to be. Amen.



Devotion 10 – Guiding Principle: Integrity

Code of Conduct Principle: We know that when our hearts are tested God is pleased with integrity.

Scriptural Reading: 1 Chronicles 29:17

**Integrity of the Heart**  
**By Rev. Dr. Kabamba Kiboko**

*Devotion*

In 1 Chronicles 29:17, David prays, “I know, my God, that you test the heart and are pleased with integrity. All these things I have given willingly and with honest intent. And now I have seen with joy how willingly your people who are here have given to you.” (NIV)

David’s understanding of integrity is deeply connected to the relationship with God, underlining the importance of integrity of the heart. God looks at our actions and examines our motivations, sincerity, and the honesty of our intentions. It’s a reminder that our external actions, no matter how grand, are of little significance if they are not matched by a heart of integrity.

David’s joy in witnessing the willingness and integrity of his people's offerings to God speaks volumes about leadership as well. It shows us that leading with a heart of integrity inspires others to act similarly.

In our daily lives, we are constantly faced with choices. Some of these choices test our integrity.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you define integrity in your life?
2. When have you experienced a test of integrity, and how did you respond?
3. In what areas of your life do you feel challenged to maintain integrity, and how can you overcome those challenges?
4. How can you cultivate a heart of integrity in your daily interactions and decisions?

*Prayer*

Lord, we thank you for the gift of integrity. Grant us wisdom to navigate life's challenges with integrity. May our hearts be a testament to your goodness in Jesus' name.



Devotion 11 – Guiding Principle: Respect

Code of Conduct Principle: Every person is due to be treated with respect as we seek to treat others and we desire to be treated.

Scriptural Reading: Matthew 7:12

**By Rev. Jeff Campbell**

*Devotion*

Jesus' teaching to treat others as we treat ourselves is critical for life; Jesus says this sums up everything said in the law and by the prophets. Let that sink in. How we treat ourselves and one another is foundational to living as God intends. What makes this truth a summary of everything in the law and everything said by the prophets? Could it be that this teaching recognizes the divine imprint in every human being? Because God created you and created me, we should give one another our full attention, our full respect, and in doing so God will use us for the good of one another. Without the foundation of respect for one another, we may miss something very important that God is offering for us and through us. But like trust, respect can be both earned and lost. If you do not live up to my expectations, if you harm me or abuse your position or power, my respect for you will be lessened, or broken. Jesus speaks to this as well just a couple chapters earlier; when we fall short and lose respect for one another, we must set aside our offering and our worship (Matthew 5:24) and seek to restore the respect God intends between us. This is not always easy, but Jesus says it is important enough for our daily living, that we should pause our act of worship and seek reconciliation before continuing. Through daily practice of prayerful respect of all, and awareness when we fall short, may we experience the deeper truth that God intends for our interactions with one another.

*Prayer*

Dear God, help me be more aware of my interactions with others. Increase my respect for each person. Help me set aside all distractions and focus fully on those you have placed in front of me. Amen.



Devotion 12 – Guiding Principle: Dignity

Code of Conduct Principle: Every person is to be treated with dignity as persons made in the image of God.

Scriptural Reading: Genesis 1:26

**Of Sacred Worth**  
**By Dr. Ashley Boggan**

*Devotion*

And then God said, "Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness..." (NRSV). As I reread this passage, something new stood out to me. In Genesis, the author proclaims to us the diversity of humanity through the use of a plural to describe God's image: "in OUR image." Whomever authored Genesis is not stating that only men, only women, only white persons, only heterosexual persons, or only cisgender persons are made in God's image, but ALL are made in the collective, chaotic, beautiful, and awe-inspiring images of God. This is incredibly comforting -- God shows up for us in whatever way we need God to. As I connect this with the word 'dignity' (which comes from the Latin 'dignus' and means "worthy"), I'm reminded that as United Methodists, we hold that we are of sacred worth, of sacred dignity. This is precisely because of the varied reflections of God's likeness in each and every one of us. In order to truly celebrate God, we must celebrate that diversity and live into that form of Kingdom.

In our Wesleyan understanding of bearing God's image, we tend to focus on the practical. Not what does God look like, but what does God do in this world? As Wesleyans, we emphasize God's love of ALL persons, creatures, and beings over all else. In order to be dignified and live into this image of God, we must be OF LOVE in the world. And this love is not a static love, but an active one that seeks out the lost and least and embraces them for who they are. For that is what it means to bear the likeness of God and to be dignified.

*Prayer*

Collective, creative, chaotic, and caring God, may you continue to make us, shape us, form us, and remold us over and over again in your image. May you continually remind us that your image has no finite definition. And may you walk with us as we step out bravely into this world in your love. Amen.



Devotion 13 – Guiding Principle: Love

Code of Conduct Principle: God is love. If we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is made complete in us.

Scriptural Reading: 1 John 4:12

**The Gift of Love**  
**By Bishop Tracy S. Malone**

*Devotion*

The greatest gift the people of faith can give to each other and to the world is the sharing of God’s extraordinary love. There is no greater force at work in our lives or in the world that can bring about healing, hope, peace, and transformation than the power of God’s love. Inside every human heart is a desire to know they are loved, and it is God’s intention for every human being to know how deep God’s love is for them.

In 1 John 4:12 it says, “God is love. If we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is made complete in us.” How we love each other and our neighbors is the most credible witness to how the love of God abides in our hearts. Can we authentically say that we love God with all of our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength if we do not love each other and our neighbors as we love ourselves? God is love, and God has placed this holy calling to love on each of our lives. As the body of Christ our mission is always to practice loving one another well, and when we do God’s love is being perfected in us. As we grow in God’s grace and God’s love grows in us we become more loving, patient, kind, hospitable, gentle, forbearing, and joyful. (Galatians 5:22) And as we become greater witnesses of God’s love in the world there can be more peace, justice, healing, and hope. (Micah 6:8)

Love is our mission! How is God’s love showing up in your life? How is God’s love manifested in how you see and understand your neighbor? How is God’s love calling you to love better, to love deeper, to love well?

*Prayer*

Lord, we thank you for the gift of your unconditional love. May your love be perfected in us as we genuinely love and extend hospitality toward one another. May it be so!