



**Free Methodist Church USA
39th General Conference
RESOLUTION**

INSTRUCTIONS:

Complete requested information, adding additional pages as necessary. Save and e-mail completed form to your Annual Conference office.

INTRODUCED BY: Study Commission on Doctrine

ANNUAL CONFERENCE NAME: _____

WRITTEN BY: Rev. Benjamin D. Wayman, Ph.D.
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General Conference Secretary - OFFICE USE ONLY

Resolution No. 307

Received Date: 12/16/2022

Resolution Committee Grade: _____

BOA Consideration: _____

GC Consideration: _____

RELATED TO PARAGRAPH - 3222

Referred to Ministry Team Number:

SUBJECT OR TITLE: The Criminal Justice System

Final Vote: Yes No

WHEREAS: The Free Methodist Church values the worth of all humans, stating in the *BOD* ¶ 3221 that we will do so “regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, color, socio-economic status, disability, or any other distinctions (Acts 10:34-35) and will respect them as persons made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection”, and

WHEREAS we believe and state in that same paragraph that Christ “ministered to all without distinction and His death on the cross was for all (John 3:16; Romans 5:8)”, and

WHEREAS that same paragraph declares, “We are therefore pledged to active concern whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, depersonalized, enslaved or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10)”, and

WHEREAS in *BOD* ¶ 3222 entitled “The Sanctity of Life” we give guidance regarding reproductive technology (¶ 3222.A), abortion (¶ 3222.B), euthanasia (¶ 3222.C), and “other ethical dilemmas”, particularly pertaining to issues rising from advances in medical technology (¶ 3222.D), all under the stated conviction about “the inherent worth of human life”, and

WHEREAS this same paragraph counsels that “Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law of the state”, and

WHEREAS in our statements on “The Sanctity of Life” we say in ¶ 3222.B “that human life, whether in vitro, mature or senile, is sacred because life exists in relation to God”, and

WHEREAS in our statements in ¶ 3222.C we say that we “must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living” and that “there is no such thing as a ‘useless’ life” and that “the value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God who loves us”, and

WHEREAS the *BOD* ¶ 3221.A. speaks specifically “with regard to poverty” and *BOD* ¶ 3221.B speaks specifically “with regard to racism”, and

WHEREAS the criminal justice system does not treat persons equally across racial and other divides, disproportionately impacting the poor and persons of color,¹ and

WHEREAS the criminal justice system is often treated as an unbiased implementation of justice, research shows this to be false,² and

WHEREAS we believe that love covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8) and that God desires that none should perish but that all should come to repentance and a life of faith (2 Peter 3:9), and

WHEREAS the criminal justice system is not designed to guide persons into genuine confession, repentance, and restoration to new life, and

¹ For example, an October 21, 2021 resolution adopted by the APA Council of Representatives states, “The criminal justice system produces glaring racial and ethnic disparities for people of color, compared to White people, through more aggressive policing and prosecution, increasing the likelihood that people of color plead guilty and are convicted by judges and juries, are detained and imprisoned for longer periods of time (Kovera, 2019), and experience a host of negative educational, economic, health, and mental health consequences as a result (Bor et al., 2018; Bryant-Davis et al., 2017; Burke et al., under contract; Stevenson et al., 2020). “Role of Psychology and APA in Dismantling Systemic Racism Against People of Color in U.S. (<https://www.apa.org/about/policy/dismantling-systemic-racism>)

² The APA resolution also maintains, “Bias and discrimination can have cumulatively worse impacts at each juncture within the criminal and juvenile justice systems (Hunt, 2015; Kovera, 2019; Stevenson et al., 2020) and are especially pronounced against individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities (Ritchie, 2017).”

WHEREAS in our clear statements on “The Sanctity of Life” we currently take no position on the criminal justice system in this country or any other,

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED:

That the following be included as the new paragraph 3222.D, entitled “Criminal Justice System”:

Section 3222 D: The Criminal Justice System:

A criminal justice system plays an important role in securing peace and order for a society, protecting innocent people from harm, punishing wrongdoers, and delivering some semblance of justice for victims. Such systems, however, do not always perform these tasks justly. While victims of crimes ought to receive special moral attention, victimizers should receive fair treatment, and the opportunity to repent and be rehabilitated.

Although Free Methodists submit to the justice systems of their time and place, we do not unwittingly affirm their understanding of or approach to justice. Such systems should be in a continual process of review and revision toward achieving justice that is equitable and seeks the common good. We especially lament the ways in which such systems incarcerate, target, and treat particular demographics disproportionately. Free Methodists oppose any system that demeans, abuses, depersonalizes, or enslaves human beings, treating them as less than human. We are accordingly committed to justice systems that protect and defend victims of harm without violating the dignity of those punished. God is our Redeemer. It is not the job of the state to redeem those who commit crimes, but the state’s criminal justice system must conscientiously preserve space, time, and humane conditions for the restoration of all to human community. The church, including the Free Methodist Church, plays a central role in this restorative aspect of justice through our chaplains, local church ministries, and similarly focused ministries. Remembering that all people are created in the image of God and for fellowship with God, Free Methodists will actively pursue criminal justice system reforms that recognize and protect the dignity of all persons.