

THE CERTIFIED ADVOCATE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM UNITED NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY

Friends and colleagues—advocates in formation, partners in public witness, and companions in the enduring work of justice, peace, and healing the nations: We gather in what I call a **kairotic moment**—not merely a moment in chronological time, but a season charged with moral urgency and political consequence. It is a moment marked by both jubilation and concern: jubilation for what multilateral cooperation has made possible in the aftermath of two World Wars, decolonization, and the slow, contested expansion of global norms for human dignity and human rights, peace and security, and sustainable development; and concern because those cooperative gains are increasingly contested, weakened, and, in some contexts, deliberately undermined.

At the United Nations' 80th-anniversary commemoration at **Methodist Central Hall in Westminster, London**, the United Nations Secretary-General warned that *powerful forces are lining up to undermine global cooperation*, even as he reminded the world that *humanity remains strongest when it stands as one*. That this warning was delivered from a Methodist pulpit was neither accidental nor merely symbolic. It reflects a longstanding theological intuition within our tradition: Christian discipleship cannot remain indifferent to the public ordering of the world without forfeiting its integrity

A Ministry Situated in the Public Square

I am grateful for your presence in this **Certified Advocate Development Program** not because you have arrived with all the answers, but because you have committed yourselves to disciplined engagement in the public square. You are here because you already recognize something essential: for United Methodists, faith that does not engage public life is not neutral—it is incomplete.

John Wesley's insistence that there is **"no holiness but social holiness"** was not a sermonic exaggeration. It was an operational claim about how grace takes shape in the world. In Wesley's account, personal faith matures into public responsibility. Discipleship necessarily implicates the social, civic, economic, and political arrangements that shape human flourishing and human suffering. That implication is a summons to witness to the power of the Gospel in the public square.

The United Nations and International Affairs Ministry of the General Board of Church and Society operates precisely in this space—at the intersection of **theological conviction and public responsibility**. Its purpose is not to sacralize institutions but to relate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the structures and systems that order human life, so that reconciliation in Christ is expressed as **personal, social, and civic righteousness**.

What I offer today, therefore, is neither an advocacy technique alone nor a devotional reflection. It is a **policy-oriented theological briefing**—an invitation to consider joining a cohort program that helps United Methodists engage with multilateral institutions, particularly the United Nations, as an expression of ethical responsibility, ecclesial vocation, and mature public discipleship, translating into faithful witness to the liberating and transforming message of the Gospel, which the social teachings of our church embody.

Ethical Multilateralism in a Kairotic Age

Multilateralism is often framed in technocratic or procedural terms—as diplomacy, treaty-making, or institutional coordination among states. Properly understood, however, it is something deeper: a **moral architecture**. It structures shared responsibility when unilateral action proves insufficient, destabilizing, or destructive.

Despite its limitations, multilateralism remains humanity's most sustained experiment, grounded in the conviction that **sovereignty need not negate solidarity**, that borders must not nullify human dignity, and that the fate of one people is inextricably bound to the fate of all. The question before us today is not simply whether existing institutions are efficient or inefficient, but whether international relations will be governed narrowly by competitive national interest or **reimagined as a cooperative responsibility to people, planet, and future generations**.

Ethical multilateralism does not romanticize cooperation. It recognizes fractures, power asymmetries, and failures. Yet it rejects the cynicism that treats domination as inevitable or violence as normal. Instead, it insists that peace, development, and the protection of creation are **shared public goods** that individual states cannot secure alone.

The Oikoumene: Beyond the Absolutizing of the Nation-State

The Christian tradition offers an indispensable corrective to the absolutization of the nation-state through the category of the **oikoumene**—the whole inhabited earth. Before it becomes an ecumenical slogan or a political ideal, it is a theological affirmation: **all creation exists under the sovereign lordship of God**.

This vision does not erase nations, nor does it deny political difference. It relativizes them. Nations remain moral actors, but they are not ultimate authorities. Power is real, but it is accountable. Sovereignty is converted from domination into stewardship exercised within a wider moral horizon that includes all peoples and the integrity of creation itself.

From this perspective, ethical multilateralism is not a threat to sovereignty. It is **sovereignty disciplined by covenant**—bound to the flourishing of life, restrained by justice, and oriented toward peace.

Justice, Kindness, and Humility as Public Criteria

The prophetic triad articulated in Micah—**justice, kindness, and humility**—serves here not merely as a set of personal virtues but as public criteria for evaluating policy, institutions, and international arrangements.

Justice interrogates power: who holds it, how it is exercised, and who bears its costs.

Kindness centers on vulnerability, insisting that the measure of policy is not efficiency alone but safety, dignity, and inclusion for those most exposed to harm.

Humility recognizes the finitude of human institutions—states, markets, and systems of governance—and resists idolatry that treats them as self-justifying or salvific.

These criteria have concrete implications. They call into question economic arrangements that normalize vast inequality, security strategies that privilege coercion over prevention, and political systems that treat certain lives as expendable. They demand that international cooperation be judged not by rhetoric but by outcomes that sustain life.

Our UN and International Affairs ministry is about these and so much more. This underscores the fundamental assertion in our church's social teachings that all systems—social, economic, political, and cultural—established by human beings fall short of God's fullness and justice and are therefore subject to God's sovereign Lordship.

Creation, Covenant, and the Common Good

Creation theology intensifies the imperatives that point to the dignity of human beings but also the integrity of God's creation. "*The earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it*" establishes a covenant not only between God and humanity but also between humanity and the rest of creation. In an age of ecological instability, multilateral engagement becomes unavoidable.

No single nation can stabilize planetary systems alone. Environmental degradation, climate disruption, and resource depletion reveal the limits of isolated sovereignty. Development divorced from ecological integrity is not progress—it is a deferred crisis. Ethical multilateralism therefore demands **intergenerational responsibility**, stewardship of land and water, and accountability for the common good.

Our UNIA work gives full attention to environmental justice by engaging with the UN and governments on climate change. Notably, the contribution of **indigenous knowledge and wisdom** on protecting God's creation—people, the planet, and the entire cosmos—is critical to our work.

United Methodist Social Principles as Glocal Civic Formation

It is precisely here that the **United Methodist Social Principles** must be reclaimed—not merely as aspirational statements, but as **resources for glocal civic formation**.

They articulate a coherent moral vision that affirms human dignity, the indivisibility of human rights, peace with justice, political responsibility, economic accountability, and care for creation.

These principles train United Methodists to read budgets as moral documents, laws as expressions of ethical judgment, and public policy as theological speech about whose lives matter. Their globally consultative and connectionally received character models the posture required for ethical multilateralism: **local discernment paired with shared responsibility**.

In this sense, United Methodist contextual connectionalism serves as an **ecclesial analog to transformative multilateralism**—a way of holding together diversity, accountability, and shared mission across contexts. Our connectionalism is a potent form of multilateralism that extends beyond nation-state constructs into Gospel-infused understandings. We witness to nation-states at the UN with this in mind.

The Book of Resolutions and Peace

Alongside the Social Principles, the **United Methodist Book of Resolutions**, particularly the resolutions “The United Methodist Church and Peace,” provides a normative framework for public witness. Peace, as articulated there, is not a pacifist abstraction. It is a disciplined moral orientation that insists that peace is inseparable from justice; reconciliation from accountability; and security from the rule of law. This resolution includes our advocacy for disarmament, multilateral cooperation, democracy and freedom, world trade, economic justice, sustainable development, peace research, and more.

To confess that *Christ is our peace* is to reject political realism stripped of ethical constraint. It calls advocates to engage conflict and security seriously, while prioritizing prevention, restraint, and the dignity of every human life.

Imagine with me what the world—its communities, societies, and peoples—would be like if the phrase inscribed on a poster produced by the Peace and Justice Center in Marin, California, became true: **“At the table of peace shall be bread with justice.”** What a just and peaceful world we would have, indeed!

The Book of Resolutions and Globalization, Human Dignity and Human Rights

Another crucial resolution in the Book of Resolutions addresses Globalization and Its Impact on Human Dignity and Human Rights. It names globalization as a moral crossroads—capable of advancing shared well-being, yet too often deepening inequality, displacement, and exclusion.

The resolution calls the Church to sustained engagement across clearly defined arenas of human-rights work, including Children’s Rights, Migrant Workers, Indigenous

Peoples, Impunity, Religious Liberty, Peacebuilding and a Culture of Peace, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

These arenas remind us that human rights are universal and indivisible and that economic and political systems must be accountable to human dignity. I invite you, as cohorts, to join this work of advocacy and collaboration—bearing United Methodist witness to reorder globalization toward justice, dignity, and the flourishing of all God’s people.

A Wesleyan Witness in Multilateral History

This tradition of social witness and public engagement is not new. The inaugural session of the United Nations General Assembly convened on **January 10, 1946**, at Methodist Central Hall in London. The **Church Center for the United Nations**, dedicated in 1963 under the leadership of the General Board of Church and Society, stands as a living symbol that faith belongs where power is negotiated and exercised. Together with the United Methodist Building in Washington, DC, these sites testify to a Wesleyan conviction that **justice is the public expression of love**.

John Wesley’s declaration that “**the world is my parish**” rejected confining mission and responsibility to inherited geographic or jurisdictional boundaries. In our time, that conviction calls for a faithful and necessary extension: **the world is my parish, and my parish is glocal**—a recognition that the local and the global form a single moral horizon for Christian witness.

The recent approval of **regional connectionalism** by the General Conference deepens this Wesleyan impulse by strengthening the Church’s capacity for contextual mission and credible advocacy while remaining tethered to shared doctrine, values, and accountability. This convergence of global vision and local grounding equips United Methodists to engage institutions and address transnational challenges with coherence and integrity. This is what **international affairs** mean for our UNIA ministry.

Contextual Connectionalism in a Glocal World

United Methodist connectionalism equips us for this moment. It is neither centralized uniformity nor isolated localism, but **relational accountability across contexts**. In a glocal world, the local and the global arrive together.

Contextual connectionalism requires that local realities inform **global advocacy** and that global commitments shape local discipleship. Solidarity becomes mutual rather than paternalistic; responsibility becomes shared rather than delegated.

The Isaiah Circle: Formation for Transformative Multilateralism

Within this framework, the **Isaiah Circle** is neither an affinity group nor a discussion forum. It is a **space for formation** for **practitioners of public faith**. Its prophetic name recalls Isaiah’s diagnosis that truth stumbles in the public square—not because

knowledge is absent, but because power distorts it. The Circle prepares advocates to recognize kairotic moments and to act with courage, humility, and accountability in the **glocal public square**.

The Circle promotes and protects what I call **access to the premises and the promises of the United Nations** and the multilateral system. By access to the premises, we mean the ability to participate in person, with access to physical premises and venues of multilateral meetings. By access to the promises, we mean access to the substantive agenda of the UN and the broader multilateral system, so that we can bring a specific United Methodist perspective to it. It also entails collaborating with other civil society representatives, including faith-based actors, in carrying out our UN ministry.

Explicit Expectations for This Cohort

Participation in the Certified Advocate Development Program entails responsibility. You are called to center peace with justice in every advocacy context; to defend ethical multilateralism even as you press it toward reform; to translate the Social Principles and Book of Resolutions into policy-relevant language; and to practice contextual connectionalism that honors difference without fragmenting responsibility.

These are acts of **public discipleship** as much as they are prophetic witness in church and society. They are our contribution to realizing the guiding vision offered by our Council of Bishops: to **"love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously."**

Toward a Common Oikoumene

We do not choose whether we are interdependent. We choose whether we will **practice interdependence responsibly**. Ethical multilateralism offers a way to harmonize national responsibility with global obligation.

To bear faith in the world today is to bind **power to principle, sovereignty to service, and national civics to global responsibility**, so that people and planet may yet flourish together under the sovereign lordship of God.

Thank you, and I look forward to your certification and to your joining the Isaiah Circle.