

# Follow Christ with TWO FEET OF CHRISTIAN COMPASSION

"O mortal, what  
does the Lord  
require of thee  
but to  
do justice,  
love mercy, and  
walk humbly  
with your God."

— Micah 6:8

The weight of Christian compassion rests evenly upon both acts of mercy and acts of justice. Keeping mercy and justice efforts in balance brings both immediate healing and long term systemic change. The harm caused to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons (LGBT) and their families must be addressed with both mercy and justice.

**Acts of Mercy** – Caring for physical and spiritual immediate needs of those hurt by injustice or calamity.

**Social service** addressing immediate **physical** needs: giving money for food to a homeless sexual minority youth that has been rejected by their family, calling 911 or rushing a "bashed" LGBT person to the hospital for medical attention,

**Social service** addressing immediate **spiritual** needs: praying with lesbians who have breast cancer or for persons affected by HIV/AIDS, taking communion to a hospice, listening nonjudgmentally to life stories of pain and rejection, reading scripture accounts with LGBT persons of God's love for all and Christ's participation with the marginalized.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me  
because he has anointed me to  
preach good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim  
release to the captives and  
recovery of sight to the blind,  
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable  
Year of the Lord." – Luke 4:18-19

**Acts of Justice** – working to change the harmfully oppressive political, economic, or cultural system.

**Social Education** – stories in local news media and church newsletters, teach church school classes, worship bulletin inserts, essay contests, workshops, seminars, literature table displays, etc.

**Social Witness** – Verbal or written proclamation for justice – prayer vigil, fast or public demonstration, etc.

**Social Action** – Activity aimed at changing part of society's behavior or organization, writing or visiting Representatives or other action designed to influence the decision-making process.

**The Harper's Bible Dictionary** defines **JUSTICE** as being a chief attribute of God... and God a sure defender of the poor and oppressed with imitation being a requirement for God's people. Many social justice scriptures use the English word "**righteousness**", but a better translation would be "**justice**."

# Mercy and Justice

Below is a basic chart to help clarify the distinction between works of mercy and works of justice.

| <b>Mercy..... Social Service</b>  | <b>Justice..... Social Change</b>   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Scriptural Reference:</b><br/>           Good Samaritan Story</p> <p>The Gospel story does not attempt to survey the causes of highway banditry. The Samaritan provides temporary and immediate relief.</p> | <p><b>Scriptural Reference:</b><br/>           Exodus Story</p> <p>Moses does not ask for food and medicine for the Jewish slave-labor force. He challenges the institutional system.<br/>           Message: "Let My People Go."</p> |
| <b>Private, individual acts</b>   | <b>Public, collective actions</b>   |
| <b>Responds to immediate need</b>   | <b>Responds to long-term need</b>   |
| <p><b>Provides direct service:</b><br/>           food, clothing, shelter</p>   | <p><b>Promotes social change in institutions</b></p>  |
| <b>Requires repeated actions</b>  | <b>Resolves structural injustice</b>  |
| <p><b>Directed at the effects of injustice:</b><br/>           symptoms</p>   | <p><b>Directed at the root causes of social injustice</b></p>   |
| <b>Examples:</b>  |   |
| <p>Homeless shelters, food pantries, clothing drives, emergency services</p>  | <p>Legislative advocacy, changing corporate policies or practices, congregation-based community organizing.</p>   |

*"Charity (mercy) will never be true charity (mercy) unless it takes justice into account ... Let no one attempt with small gifts of charity to exempt themselves from the great duties imposed by justice."*

Pope Pius XI, Divini Redemptoris , #49

### From the UM Social Principles 162 H:

Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to supporting those rights and liberties for homosexual persons.

We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims where they have shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney, and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships that involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law.

### From the UM Book of Resolutions #50:

United Methodists are called upon:

1. to refrain from signing petitions and to vote against measures that advocate the denial of basic human and civil rights to anyone;

2. to educate congregation and community alike about the position of the United Methodist Discipline on civil rights and its broad applications; and

3. to stand against any political or physical acts that deny human and civil rights and the sacred worth of all persons.

4. to advocate for initiatives which would prohibit job and housing discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity throughout the world; and

5. to advocate for initiatives which provide for extra penalties for crimes which are expressly committed for the purpose of harming someone based solely on their race, color, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, or disability.

**Beware.....** If you only do acts of **mercy** and do not deal with the root causes of injustice, you may be complicit in providing “**maintenance ministry**”, preventing the “**prophetic ministry**” that brings about restoration, healing, and community under God.

...If you only do acts of **justice**, you end up disconnected from the real lives of people and their hopes and needs.

## Justice Stumbling Blocks

Congregations have a tendency to be heavy on acts of mercy and reluctant to work for justice. **WHY?**

- **No Instant gratification** –We don’t challenge ourselves to take the time on issues that will not produce immediate results.
- **Fear** of challenging authority or the wealthy and powerful institutions and conventional wisdom, what the scripture calls “**the principalities and powers**”—strong pressure to conform (see *Engaging The Powers*, by Walter Wink)
- **Answers involve complexities**, hard work and hard study and may cause us to examine our own hold on the status quo.
- **Believe it’s too big**, overwhelming; insecurity about one’s own capabilities to change structures in society

## Recognizing the Difference Between (An Exercise)

...**Acts of Mercy** – Name “Justice” counterparts

- Volunteer at a shelter for battered persons
- Offer personal support to a parent with an LGBT child
- Write a personal check to a ministry charity
- Give your pocket change to person in need
- Join care team for a person with HIV/AIDS
- Personally offer support to bereaved LGBT partner
- Refuse to laugh at heterosexist humor
- Engage an LGBT person in reciprocal family sharing
- Throw anniversary party for LGBT neighbors
- Send note of appreciation to LGBT clergy
- Reach out to those harmed by unjust doctrine
- Pick up a display table flyer for another who is afraid to

...**Acts of Justice** – Name the “Mercy” counterparts

- Help pass a hate crimes bill
- Start a parents’ support group
- Advocate for more money for advocacy groups
- Create “off the street” program for LGBT youth
- Lobby for abstinence-plus complete sexual education
- Change company policy including LGBT family leave
- Speak up publically when demeaning humor is used
- Use positive LGBT examples when you teach or preach
- Lobby for equal marriage rights for LGBT couples
- Demonstrate at church trials upholding unjust rules
- Write resolutions/start petitions to remove unjust doctrine
- Create an inclusive table display for annual conference

The continuum from Mercy to Justice exists within a larger spectrum from Intolerance, through Tolerance to Inclusion or as Henri Nouwen named it as a spiritual movement that moves from Hostility to Hospitality.

### **Outright Hostility (Complete Rejection)**

Individuals often report a visceral negative body response or revulsion to LGBT persons. This “yuk” factor is often attributed to a “spirit warning” instead of cultural indoctrination.

Comments at this stage may include “Line them up against the wall and shoot them. They are all going to hell anyway.” Such comments also come from the pulpit. LGBT persons will often experience rejection by church, family, and friends. This may lead to LGBT teens on the street struggling for survival.

### **Cloaked Concern (Connection with Agenda)**

At this level, LGBT are forced to change their sexual orientation or live a life of abstinence or be rejected from the fellowship.

Comments at this level include: “Love the sinner; hate the sin.” And may involve a commitment to “Save their soul since they don’t know what is best for them.”

Transforming ministries, though discredited by research, continue to be pushed upon LGBT persons. Reparative Therapy and Electroconvulsive Therapy often lead to long term damage of the LGBT person physically, spiritually, and relationally sometimes resulting in suicide.

### **Silence (Enforced Closetedness)**

This “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy seeks to create harmony by denying truth. Silence is employed as a tool of oppression. Silence ultimately means that something is too bad too evil to even mention as in “the love that dare not speak its name.”

Comments include “Let’s just not talk about it” or “Why do you have to be so in our face?” “Don’t say the word AIDS at the funeral service!”

Integrity is sacrificed in invisibility as covenant partners go to separate family homes for holidays.

### **Modified Silence (Awareness creates Tension)**

Blatant heterosexism and discrimination against those LGBT persons affected by HIV/AIDS or breast cancer starts to create internal distress. Persons will quietly be against violence from homophobia and heterosexism and decry murder, rape, bashing, property damage, verbal harassment or child abandonment.

### **Mercy 1—Harm Reduction (undercover)**

Individuals may confidentially support a parent or sibling or heterosexual spouse of an LGBT person. They may join care team for an ill LGBT person. Everything is still done in private. Though the person may refuse to participate in stereotyping humor, they will not stop it.

### **Mercy 2—Harm Reduction (word of mouth network)**

Church begins to offer support groups for parents and family members of LGBT persons, or for grieving families that include LGBT persons.

Church may start general education on many justice issues of which one may be heterosexism or do the “UM Studies Homosexuality” curriculum. Sermon examples may begin to include “safe” LGBT references. May only know of this network if you are a part of the congregation.

### **Justice 1—Narrow Hospitality**

Church holds public prayer vigil for LGBT church member who was “bashed” and offers educational opportunities/panels specific to LGBT discrimination. LGBT persons and their families share their stories alongside other families of the congregation.

Church or class may begin or actually become a reconciling community and publicly send letters to their DS and Bishop. In worship, both same-gender parents participate as the baby is baptized.

### **Justice 2—Open Hospitality**

This step may involve a Press Release to local media about becoming a reconciling community; and if a prayer vigil is held, it is announced to media.

Participants begin to work for change by writing, creating witnesses and planned actions to derail injustice. A deepened commitment to justice is aware of the interlocking injustices (sexism, racism, classism, etc.)

Challenges grow to change the system inside and outside the church.



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[www.ipj-pjp.org](http://www.ipj-pjp.org)

*We are United Methodists of all sexual orientations and gender identities called in faith to be the inclusive church of Jesus Christ!*