

# Resolutions Proposed to the 2018 Business Session of the Charis Fellowship

## Prepared by the Social Concerns Committee

### Civility in Government and in Professional and Personal Life

Genuine civility moves past simple politeness or pragmatic concerns and sees those with whom we disagree as full equals before God. It enables us to hold the respectful dialogues without which democratic decision-making is impossible. Civil people approach their government institutions with awe and gratitude. Civility is both the duty not to do harm and the duty to do good.

Civility cares for one's own identity, needs and beliefs without degrading others in the process. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one's preconceptions, and asking others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of stopping to listen even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements.

God's "Common Grace" (the gifts and abilities he bestows to all mankind) enables all people to practice civility. God's "Regenerative Grace" enhances the ability of Jesus' followers to treat others rightly.

**Meaningful civility begins at the top—communication by the White House and Executive Branch, by members of Congress, and other government officials, whether federal, state or local.** The tone set by leaders, and (when appropriate) rejected by leaders, will affect political and personal discourse throughout the country.

We look with alarm at the deterioration of communication, especially good face-to-face communication, in today's political climate. Therefore, we call on political leaders to be honest and respectful in their political rhetoric, and to duly honor other political leaders in spite of political differences and flaws. We urge communication that truthfully focuses on issues and avoids harmful *ad hominem* characterizations of people.

**Meaningful civility must also exist in the news media and in personal communications, especially in the use of social media.** Commentators and reporters must separate facts from rumor and opinion and strive for helpful and wholesome communication at all times. Social media must be used with honesty and care. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Ephesians 4:29). "Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19). Our churches need to teach and model this continually. Communicators should strive for "Golden Rule Communication."

We condemn all acts of incivility, including outright violence and destruction, and denying others their constitutional right to free speech and freedom of association and assembly.

Sources: *Civility* by Stephen L. Carter (Harper Perennial, 1998); Institute for Civility in Government

### Immigration

Recognizing that:

- a. All people are made in the Image of God,
- b. Respect for the rule of law is essential in a civil society,
- c. Secure borders are the right and need of every nation,

- d. Israel was frequently reminded by God that she should show mercy to the immigrant because she, too, was once an oppressed and exploited people,
- e. The prophets in Scripture demanded special compassion to the exploited and vulnerable, including the "alien in the land",
- f. Our nation is populated by people from a multitude of cultures and lands, and
- g. The presence of undocumented immigrants in this country (and in our churches) is a fact and a complex issue not easily resolved,

(1) We therefore call on our churches to give prayer, thought, discussion and action toward addressing the problem of the undocumented immigrant in a God-honoring way. On this issue we must "Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly" (Micah 6:8).

(2) We recognize the divisive and controversial nature of this debate and we encourage dialogue in the churches that is respectful, open-minded and solution-focused.

(3) We further call on our churches to be the "reconciling presence of Christ" in the midst of a broken system that creates rancor, resentment, racism, selfishness, fear, exploitation, danger and disregard for law.

- (4) We call on our society and elected leaders to rise above political posturing and rancor to work toward a solution on immigration that:
- a. Respects the God-given dignity of every person,
  - b. Rejects the nativism that ignores the love of God for all and our country's history of immigration and openness to the foreigner, as captured in the words enshrined on the Statue of Liberty,
  - c. Protects the unity of the immediate family and seeks the best interests of native-born children of undocumented immigrants,
  - d. Respects the rule of law,
  - e. Holds employers accountable for ensuring the legal status of workers,
  - f. Creates secure national borders,
  - g. Ensures fairness to taxpayers,
  - h. Develops a generous and fair "guest worker" program,
  - i. Protects all immigrants from exploitation and violence, and
  - j. Establishes a pathway toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents or citizens—a pathway that both achieves justice and loves mercy.

We recognize that meaningful solutions to this problem are not easily reached. We also recognize the solutions must come through a determined will to reach them and must not be ignored time after time, year after year.

### Protection of Human Life

Human life is sacred before God and receives his explicit protections in Scripture. Human life is precious and deserving of protection from conception through death. Abortion and legalized "mercy killing" are contrary to the Bible's pro-life ethic. While those who are terminally ill deserve appropriate medical care, including palliative care and pain management, medically assisted suicide is not a moral option.

## Definition of Marriage

When Jesus taught on marriage (Mark 10:6-9) he said (1) “God made them male and female” (Genesis 1:27) and (2) “the two will become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Thereby, a new bond is formed intended for a lifetime (Mark 10:8-9). Without the two realities of “male and female” and covenant union, no true marriage bond has been created. Jesus spoke to oppose the easy divorce culture of his time. His words continue to be relevant to that and as a critique of new definitions of marriage.

We affirm, based on Jesus’ teaching and the broad teaching of Scripture, that marriage is intended by God as a life-long covenant between one man and one woman.

## Gender Identity

While gender identity has been a topic in academic and political circles for some time, we note with concern the sudden change in the popular understanding of gender.

We also recognize that biblical teaching on gender is not vague nor is it a casual side issue in scripture. Gender is connected to God’s creation and our humanity. “God created man in his own image...male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). This is foundational and non-negotiable.

We must understand societal trends but must not yield to a cultural understanding of gender superficially based on civil rights. This issue must be addressed from a biblical foundation. This discussion will help us discover how we can shape the specifics of our understanding of scripture and shape our role in a society that is ever more distanced from biblical understanding.

Furthermore, we must see the challenge secular thinking on gender identity poses for inculcating biblical values to our children and for religious liberty. We must withstand pressures against churches and religious institutions to abandon biblical beliefs and practices in favor of secular ones.

## Religious Freedom

We express grave concern over the erosion of genuine religious liberty around the world and even in the United States. Anti-blasphemy laws, violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt, and ISIS-inspired violence in the Middle East are major concerns.

We affirm Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a strong and useful statement on religious liberty: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

Current challenges to religious freedom include intrusion of government into the hiring standards of religious institutions, loss of certification and/or accreditation to religion-based educational institutions and requiring religious institutions to provide insurance coverages that violate their core convictions.

Religious freedom includes the right of religion-based institutions (churches, schools, hospitals, charities and others) to operate free of government coercion in practicing their beliefs. This includes the right

of religion-based institutions to set doctrinal and moral expectations for their participants and employees (not just for their ministers).

Religious liberty must extend beyond the walls of the church (“freedom of worship”) to include the freedom of all religious people (not just clergy) to live out their beliefs in their personal, public and vocational lives.

Through our prayers, education and activism, we commit ourselves to opposing religious persecution and protecting religious liberty in our nation and throughout the world.

## Law Enforcement In Society

We live in a free and open society made up of sinful men and women. Since sinful people are involved, regulation and controls must be in place to protect members of society, including the most vulnerable. Law Enforcement is one of those controls.

Law Enforcement must go into places and situations that most of society does not want to even know about. Law Enforcement Officers leave their own families at all hours of the day and night to protect society from those who desire to take advantage of society and even hurt or kill societal members.

“Every Person is to be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except from God. (Romans 13:1). God has ordained and appointed civil authorities at all levels of governments in every nation. These civil authorities include Law Enforcement.

Law Enforcement Officers are servants of God, accomplishing the mission of protecting and preserving society and its members. This mission may require the use of deadly or near deadly force to protect the law enforcement officer or others from death or serious harm. While it is painful and difficult for Law Enforcement Officer to use deadly force, they are trained and prepared to do so when necessary.

The Church is called by God to be the lighthouse in society, which includes support of God’s appointed ministers. Thus, the Church must lead our communities in support and appreciation of Law Enforcement. However, this does not mean blind support regardless of the facts and circumstances. Law Enforcement Officers make mistakes, some even commit crimes, and these must be held accountable. The church must recognize this and caution society not to castigate every Law Enforcement Officer because of the wrongs of a few.

## The Social Concerns Committee

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