

1 **RESOLUTION 2017 - 23**
2 **RESOLUTION TO 2017 ANNUAL CONFERENCE SESSION**
3 **Resolution on Religious Liberty and Free Political Speech by the Church**
4 **Presented by the Executive Committee of the Eastern PA Evangelical Connection**
5

6 **WHEREAS**, The United Methodist Church recognizes that the Church “should continually
7 exert a strong ethical influence upon the state” (*The 2016 Book of Discipline, The Social*
8 *Principles: ¶164 The Political Community: B) Political Responsibility*); that “the rightful
9 and vital separation of church and state, which has served the cause of religious liberty,
10 should not be misconstrued as the abolition of all religious expression from public life”
11 (*¶164 The Political Community: C) Church and State Relations*); and that the prophetic
12 aspects of preaching are to be protected, so that the preacher is not muzzled in the pulpit,
13 stating, “Bishops and cabinets shall commit to and support open itineracy and the
14 protection of the prophetic pulpit and diversity.” (2016 *BOD* ¶338);
15

16 **AND WHEREAS**, it is the prophetic heritage of both Israel and the Church that its
17 prophets, apostles, and preachers have sometimes been called upon by God to correct
18 and rebuke the governing civil and religious authorities, “speaking truth to power,” e.g.,
19 Nathan and King David, Elijah and King Ahab, Jeremiah and Shemaiah, Thomas More
20 and Henry VIII, etc.; our Lord Jesus himself having called King Herod, “that fox” (Luke
21 13:32); this heritage also being part of the history of the Methodist Church in America,
22 such as in preachers who endorsed Abraham Lincoln before and during the Civil War;
23

24 **AND WHEREAS**, freedom of religion, speech and the press are among the first principles
25 of freedom in the United States Constitution, enshrined as the First Amendment in the Bill
26 of Rights, which declares, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of
27 religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech or of
28 the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the government
29 for a redress of grievances;
30

31 **AND WHEREAS**, the laws of the United States have forbid preachers from preaching
32 about, endorsing or opposing political candidates and government officials since the
33 passing in 1954 of the Johnson Amendment (the Johnson Amendment changed the U.S.
34 tax code to prohibit all 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing
35 political candidates; it restricts the speech of non-profit, tax-exempt organizations,
36 including churches, to provide they cannot “participate in, or intervene in (including the
37 publishing or distribution of statements), any political campaign on behalf of or in
38 opposition to any candidate for public office”);
39

40 **AND WHEREAS**, the Johnson Amendment both prohibits the free exercise of religion
41 and abridges the freedom of speech of the Church, especially as touching ethical and
42 political matters to which the Church has a prophetic duty to speak;
43

44 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference calls
45 upon the Joint Houses of Congress and the President of the United States to act

46 together to repeal the Johnson Amendment as written; and to conduct hearings to
47 address the protection and strengthening of free speech rights for all citizens.

48
49 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference affirms the
50 need for instruction about religious free speech rights by its members and employees,
51 both laity and clergy; the Conference shall therefore provide some form of instruction for
52 laity and clergy in the exercise of Constitutionally protected speech, with emphasis upon
53 instruction for children and vulnerable youth;

54
55 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference directs the
56 Conference Secretary to send copies of this resolution, as passed, within 90 days of the
57 close of the 2017 Annual Conference to the following (6) persons: President Pro
58 Tempore of the U.S. Senate, Senator Orrin G. Hatch, the Secretary of the U.S. Senate,
59 Julie E. Adams, U.S. Senators Robert P. Casey, Jr. and Patrick J. Toomey of
60 Pennsylvania, the Speaker of the U.S. house of Representatives, Rep. Paul D. Ryan,
61 and to the President of the United States, Mr. Donald Trump. [The presenters of this
62 resolution are willing to assist in its mailing, either by post or electronically at the discretion
63 of the Conference Secretary.

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65 **Person Responsible for Presenting Resolution:** Rev. Dr. Christopher Fisher