

PRIMARY SOURCE Declaration of the WCTU

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was founded in 1873 to promote the goal of prohibition. In 1902 the WCTU drew up the following declaration. What principles did members of the WCTU support?

We believe in the coming of His kingdom whose service is perfect freedom, because His laws, written in our members as well as in nature and in grace, are perfect, converting the soul.

We believe in the gospel of the Golden Rule, and that each man's habits of life should be an example safe and beneficent for every other man to follow.

We believe that God created both man and woman in His own image, and, therefore, we believe in one standard of purity for both men and women, and in the equal right of all to hold opinions and to express the same with equal freedom.

We believe in a living wage; in an eight-hour day; in courts of conciliation and arbitration; in justice as opposed to greed of gain; in "peace on earth and goodwill to men."

We therefore formulate and, for ourselves, adopt the following pledge, asking our sisters and brothers of a common danger and a common hope to make common cause with us in working its reasonable and helpful precepts into the practice of everyday life:

I hereby solemnly promise, *God helping me*, to abstain from all distilled, fermented, and malt liquors, including wine, beer, and cider, and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same.

To conform and enforce the rationale of this pledge, we declare our purpose to educate the young; to form a better public sentiment; to reform so far as possible, by religious, ethical, and scientific means, the drinking classes; to seek the transforming power of Divine Grace for ourselves and all for whom we work, that they and we may willfully transcend no law of pure and wholesome living; and finally we pledge ourselves to labor and to pray that all of these principles, founded upon the Gospel of Christ, may be worked out into the customs of society and the laws of the land.

from National Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Annual Leaflet, 1902. Reprinted in Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1895–1904: Populism, Imperialism, and Reform, vol.12 in The Annals of America (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), 503.

Discussion Questions

1. What were the WCTU's beliefs and principles?
2. What pledge did members of the WCTU take?
3. Progressive movements in the early 1900s had at least one of these goals: protecting social welfare, promoting moral improvement, creating economic reform, and fostering efficiency. According to their declaration, which goal or goals did members of the WCTU have?