

Chapter 2

The Constitution (continued)

General Organization

¶200

A. Annual Conferences

Annual conferences are the normative Free Methodist organization at the regional level that provides for reasonable spans of care for ministers and congregations, as well as the structure for effective kingdom expansion. Each annual conference in the Free Methodist Church shall be a member of a general conference.

B. General Conferences

The general conferences are the governing bodies of the Free Methodist Church. Each general conference shall consist of at least one annual conference or may, when necessary, make alternative provision for caring for annual conference functions as provided for in ¶220.B. (See details in ¶220-222).

C. World Conference

The Free Methodist World Conference exists to co-ordinate the visions of the general conferences by facilitating communication and harmonious relationships among the leaders of the general conferences. It also facilitates the resolution of constitutional issues. (See details in ¶230). Additionally, the World Conference encourages its member general conferences to work together with neighboring annual and/or general conferences to partner in ways that fulfil the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations.

D. Council of Bishops

The Council of Bishops constituted of the bishops of the general and provisional general conferences exists for the purpose of fellowship, mutual counsel and accountability and the extension of the kingdom of God through Free Methodist ministries as outlined in ¶240.

Restrictive Rules and Methods of Amendment of the Common Constitution of Free Methodism

¶210

The Preamble, Articles of Religion, Membership Covenant, General Organization, Restrictive Rules and Methods of Amendment of the Common Constitution of Free Methodism (§100-240) together constitute the Common Constitution of Free Methodism. This Common Constitution of Free Methodism shall be binding upon all general conferences and shall be part of each *Book of Discipline*.¹

These provisions may be translated into various languages and dialects, including colloquial and idiomatic English, provided the meaning is not changed. Paragraphs 100 to 240 inclusive, except for §213 may be altered, changed, or revoked only by concurrent approval of two-thirds of the aggregate votes cast thereon in all the general conferences as provided for in §230.B. Paragraph 213 may not be amended or changed in any way.

- ¶211 Proposals to amend §100-212 and §220-240, whether by a two-thirds majority vote of a general conference or by a two-thirds majority vote of the Free Methodist World Conference, are provided for in §230.2. Proposals shall be referred to the World Conference Executive Committee. It shall then supervise the referendum voting on the proposed amendment(s) in all the general conferences according to the provisions of §230.B.
- ¶212 No general conference of the Free Methodist Church may enact on its own, either by vote of the general conference or by concurrent vote of its general and annual conferences, any order, policy, or legislation that conflicts with, changes, subtracts from, or adds to:
- A. The Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, any condition or standard of membership, any standard or rule of doctrine, as set forth in §100-160, or
 - B. Any part of §220-240 or any rule of government so as to do away with substantially equal (meaning within one) lay and ministerial representation on boards and committees (except for the Council of Bishops), or to do away with an itinerant (conference appointed) ministry, or the general superintendency; but
 - C. Any such change as designated in A and B preceding may be made only by the procedures set forth in §210-211 above.
- ¶213 No general conference of the Free Methodist Church nor all of the general conferences of Free Methodism by any procedure or method whatever (including deletion or amendment of this paragraph, number 213), shall have the power to deprive ministerial or lay members under discipline of the right of trial by an impartial committee, or the right of appeal.

¹ or its equivalent

General Conferences

¶220

A. Guiding Principles

The Free Methodist Church recognizes the need to preserve unity in faith and fellowship, yet allow for the distinctive characteristics of nation, language, and culture. Therefore it provides for the Free Methodist churches of one or more nations to be organized into a general conference provided that the requirements of ¶222.A are met and maintained. When ongoing spiritual, political, economic or cultural realities make the formation of a general conference inadvisable, these areas may continue as annual conferences or provisional general conferences.

A general conference may encompass more than one nation, but there shall be no more than one general conference in a nation. Any exception to this principle requires approval by the World Conference.

When it becomes necessary for a general conference to elect more than one bishop, the bishops, once elected, shall be formed into a Board of Bishops. Each bishop shall then be assigned to a region, and, where applicable, each shall be granted legal representative status for the assigned region according to the laws of the nation and the bylaws of the general conference.

B. Status

Existing general conferences must continue to meet the requirements of ¶222 to retain general conference status.

1. Existing general conferences experiencing a serious threat to viability due to physical or moral calamity, to war or to economic crisis, may propose interventions or substantial organizational adjustments. The World Conference Executive Committee is authorized to make interim rulings on such proposals. These rulings shall then be submitted to the World Conference for confirmation.
2. In the event that it is reported to the World Conference Executive Committee that a general conference no longer fulfills the requirements of ¶222, the World Conference Executive Committee shall arrange for an assessment of the situation and may use members of the Council of Bishops to make the assessment.
 - a. If the assessment does not sustain the need for action, the matter shall be dropped.
 - b. In the event that action is required, the World Conference Executive Committee shall provide counsel and may use members of the Council of Bishops to assist the general conference in remediation.
 - c. If remediation is successful, the matter shall be dropped.
 - d. In cases of persistent inability to meet the requisite conditions, the general conference may request, upon a majority vote of the general conference, to be returned to provisional general conference status or annual conference status;

in which case the World Conference Executive Committee shall take action on the request and make assignment to a general conference. Should the general conference not take appropriate actions as above, the World Conference Executive Committee shall submit the matter, with recommendation, to the World Conference for vote.

C. Amendments

Proposals to amend the Common Constitution of Free Methodism as defined in ¶210 may be initiated by a general conference as provided for in ¶230.B.

D. Relationship to the World Conference

Each general conference shall recognize the role of the Free Methodist World Conference as set out in ¶230.

1. Each general conference shall be represented in the World Conference as defined in ¶230.D.1.
2. Each general conference shall ensure that the World Conference president has a copy of its current *Book of Discipline*² containing all its legislation, orders, and policies. If a question should arise concerning the agreement of any item therein with the Common Constitution of Free Methodism, the procedures of ¶230.C shall be applied.
3. A general conference or its Board of Administration may refer to the World Conference Executive Committee, as a representative coordinating body, any problem that may arise with another general conference involving boundaries, recognition of credentials, and other inter-jurisdictional matters. The World Conference Executive Committee shall limit its involvement to the giving of counsel and assistance with mediation. If no solution satisfactory to both general conferences is reached, the matter shall be referred to the next sitting of the World Conference and its ruling shall prevail.
4. The Board of Administration of a general conference may appeal to the World Conference Executive Committee (see ¶230.G) for counsel to assist with the resolution of conflicts within its general conference. The World Conference Executive Committee shall limit its involvement to the giving of counsel and assistance with mediation. If no solution satisfactory to the conflict is reached, the matter shall be referred to the next sitting of the World Conference and its ruling shall prevail.
5. A general conference may not, under any circumstances, vote to leave the denomination and/or join another denomination. It may not vote to change its name with the intention of becoming a new denomination. Any action to do either of the above shall be deemed illegal and shall result in action by the World Conference to suspend the general conference, to reorganize the loyal elements within the area of that general conference, to declare all other ministers and members to be withdrawn from the Free Methodist Church and to ensure that assets are retained by the Free Methodist Church.
6. Where possible, general conferences shall work together with neighboring annual and/or general conferences and/or Free Methodist mission agencies to develop groups such as area fellowships.³ Their purpose is to provide inspiration, spiritual counsel, mutual encouragement, vision casting and strategic planning to better reach the world with the gospel through Free Methodist ministries.

²or its equivalent

³or its equivalent

These partnership organizations shall operate under constitutions suited to their particular vision and mission. These constitutions and any changes thereto must be approved by the World Conference Executive Committee and ratified by the World Conference. Such World Conference approved entities shall be granted one honorary seat at the regular sitting of the World Conference.

E. Church Name

No church or other organization may use the name “Free Methodist” without the express permission of the Free Methodist World Conference, a general conference, or authorized Mission agencies/associations of a general conference. Wherever the use of the name “Free Methodist Church” is impossible or impractical, a general conference, or in the interim of its sessions, its Board of Administration, may authorize an adaptation of the church’s name, subject to the approval of the World Conference.

¶221 Provisional General Conferences

- A. One or more annual conferences may petition the general conference to which they belong for status as a provisional general conference. This intermediate developmental stage provides for the mentoring of indigenous leaders who appreciate the interdependent nature of the international church with its systems of mutual dependence and accountability and who will grow by exercising gifts, graces and authority under the leadership of the sponsoring general conference and its bishop.

A provisional general conference receives a measure of jurisdictional authority and autonomy to develop unique mission and vision statements, and to interpret and apply the *Book of Discipline** within its culture under the leadership of its suffragan bishop as it carries out the mission of the church.

Achieving the following standards will allow the Board of Administration of the sponsoring general conference to authorize the formation of the requested provisional general conference:

1. Evidence of spiritual depth and maturity in integrity and leadership.
2. A membership growth pattern spanning several years.
3. Evidence of being both an evangelistic and a sending church with plans to reach to a different tribe or people group.
4. Demonstrated loyalty to the doctrines and practices of the Free Methodist Church as set forth in its *Book of Discipline*.⁴
5. Evidence of ability to understand, articulate and commit to the biblical and theological tenets of the Wesleyan-Arminian doctrine.
6. Development of its own draft of a *Book of Discipline** including the Common Constitution of Free Methodism and organizational structures essential to their culture and size, according to guidelines set forth by the general conference to which it belongs.

7. Adequate financial strength and stability with annual audits.
 8. Normally, a minimum of 3,000 adult members and 20 elders.
 9. Nomination of a suffragan bishop who shall be mentored by a bishop from the sponsoring general conference.
- B. Contractual agreements with any Free Methodist mission agency or association with regard to mission personnel and properties shall remain in force until renegotiated with the mission agency or association and/or its sponsoring general conference.
 - C. When it can be demonstrated that the above prerequisites are met, a formal petition may be presented to the Board of Administration of the sponsoring general conference. It shall have the power to authorize the formation of a provisional general conference, approve the draft of the *Book of Discipline*⁵ and elect a suffragan bishop. The/A bishop from the sponsoring general conference shall consecrate the new suffragan bishop at a mutually agreeable time.
 - D. A provisional general conference may continue in this status indefinitely, as approved by the Board of Administration of the sponsoring general conference.
 - E. Provisional general conference status may be withdrawn by the board of administration of the sponsoring general conference due to any significant regression from these established standards or due to a failure of adequate leadership for any reason.

¶222 New General Conferences

- A. A new general conference may be authorized by the sponsoring general conference when the provisional general conference seeking such status has adopted the provisions of the Common Constitution of Free Methodism which are binding for all general conferences as defined in ¶210, as a part of its constitution and *Book of Discipline** and has been recommended by the Board of Administration of the sponsoring general conference on the grounds that the following standards are satisfied:
 1. An effective, financially sustainable organizational structure at all levels;
 2. A systemic plan to mentor pastors in the discipleship of new converts, in the nurture and development of healthy church members and in the equipping of lay workers;
 3. A systemic plan to discover and train ordained ministers (~~deacons and~~ elders or their equivalents);
 4. Normally, a minimum of 5,000 adult members and 30 elders;
 5. A systemic plan to multiply churches locally and globally (or at least to new people groups);
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6. Refinement of the draft of the *Book of Discipline*⁶ for approval by the Board of Administration of the sponsoring general conference, including mission and vision statements with published copies available to all clergy and all ~~local churches~~ societies;
 7. Communication capabilities across the provisional general conference;
 8. Evidence of responsible stewardship of life and possessions including the proper management of funds and annual audits and reporting to their own Board of Administration or provisional general conference;
 9. The existence of a property-holding body or bodies as required by local laws;
- B. Contractual agreements with any Free Methodist mission agency or association with regard to missions personnel and properties shall be renegotiated to reflect the new relationship between the new general conference and the mission agency or association and/or the sponsoring general conference.
 - C. When it can be demonstrated by a committee composed of the supervising bishop, the suffragan bishop and two lay members of the provisional general conference Board of Administration that the above prerequisites are met, a formal petition may be presented to the sponsoring general conference. It shall have the power to authorize the formation of a new general conference and the election of a bishop or bishops.
 - D. Autonomy of the new general conference from the sponsoring general conference is final following a ceremony led by a bishop of the sponsoring general conference at a duly called sitting of the provisional general conference. Following this ceremony, while the delegates are assembled, the new general conference may convene to conduct important or urgent business as an autonomous member of the World Conference.

The World Conference

¶230

A. Purpose

The Free Methodist World Conference exists to facilitate communication and harmonious relationships among the leaders of the general conferences and the area fellowships* and to facilitate the resolution of constitutional issues.

In harmony with this purpose its responsibilities shall be:

1. To provide for worldwide fellowship among Free Methodist bodies and regularly convene a global assembly of representatives of the Free Methodist bodies for coordination and planning of worldwide ministries;
2. To encourage the expansion of the Kingdom of God by the Free Methodist Church in existing conferences and in new fields through evangelism that is in harmony with Wesleyan doctrine and practices;

3. To assume legislative and judicial authority in matters relating to the Free Methodist Constitution as defined below;
4. To monitor the integrity of every Free Methodist institution under the provisions of the Common Constitution of Free Methodism (see ¶210) and of the *Book of Discipline*⁷ of the institution's general conference;
5. To maintain and administer an international scholarship fund for the development of Free Methodist leaders grounded in biblical theology and Wesleyan doctrine.

B. Legislative Authority

The World Conference has the authority to supervise the voting of the general conferences on all matters pertaining to referenda according to the following provisions:

1. Proposals to amend the constitution (except for ¶213) may be initiated by a two-thirds majority vote of a general conference or by a two-thirds majority vote of the Free Methodist World Conference when it is meeting in session. Proposals shall then be circulated as referenda under the supervision of the World Conference Executive Committee to be voted on by all general conferences.

A two-thirds aggregate vote of all general conferences shall be required for approval of referenda. If a general conference has a structure not constituted of the equivalent of one ministerial and one lay member for every 600 full members, its vote results shall be adjusted to have the weight of two votes per 600 members.

2. When a general conference can not assemble to vote and report back to the World Conference Executive Committee within four years of the time the World Conference Executive Committee has circulated a referendum, rather than surrendering its right to vote on the said issue, its Board of Administration may vote in its place. Votes taken by a board of administration shall be reported as the corresponding proportional number of votes of its general conference. The two-thirds aggregate vote shall be based on the votes reported within the four years allowed.
3. When the voting has been completed, the World Conference Executive Committee shall officially declare the results of the vote to all the general conferences by written notice and it shall be in effect as of that date.

C. Judicial Authority

The Free Methodist World Conference shall be responsible for maintaining compliance with the provisions of the Common Constitution of Free Methodism which are binding for all general conferences as defined in ¶210, and with deciding interjurisdictional matters between general conferences, and internal conflicts within a general conference as defined in ¶220.D.4 and ¶220.D.5.

The World Conference has the following judicial authority over the general conferences. Its duties shall be:

1. To review, through its Executive Committee, the legislation, orders, and policies of all the general conferences and to investigate all actions that are alleged to not be in

compliance with the provisions of the Common Constitution of Free Methodism which are for all general conferences as defined in ¶210.

- a. When the World Conference Executive Committee determines that an action of a general conference is in conflict with the Common Constitution of Free Methodism, the general conference shall upon receiving written notice, discontinue the action in question.
 - b. Upon written request, if so authorized by a two-thirds vote of the general conference or its Board of Administration, an appeal may be made to the World Conference within one year of the written notice being received.
 - c. The delegates and bishop(s) of a general conference or general conferences, whose case or cases come before the World Conference shall, after having presented their evidence, refrain from voting on the issue in which they have direct interest.
 - d. If the appeal is upheld by a simple majority of the votes of the World Conference, the general conference may resume the action.
 - e. In the event the appeal is denied by a simple majority of the votes of the World Conference, the action by the general conference found in violation must be permanently discontinued and its effects shall be considered null and void.
 - f. If upon written notice, the general conference whose action has been called into question should refuse to abide initially by the World Conference Executive Committee's ruling to discontinue an action as provided for in ¶230.C.1.a or later by a World Conference decision to permanently discontinue an action as provided for in ¶230.C.1.e, the World Conference or its Executive Committee shall be empowered to suspend the general conference and to provide, at its discretion, for the reorganization of the loyal elements of the Free Methodist Church within the area of that general conference, and to declare all other ministers and members to be withdrawn from the Free Methodist Church.
2. To decide any matter that may arise between general conferences involving boundaries, recognition of credentials, and other inter-jurisdictional matters according to the provisions of ¶220.D.3.
 3. To assist with the resolution of conflicts within a general conference according to the provisions of ¶220.D.4.

D. Organization and Structure

1. Voting delegates

Voting delegates to the World Conference shall form a body of substantially equal representation of lay and ministerial members according to the following formula:

- a. All bishops of general and provisional general conferences shall be delegates. One lay delegate shall be elected for each bishop.
- b. A general conference with one bishop and 50,000 members shall be entitled to one additional ministerial delegate and one additional lay delegate.

A general conference with one bishop and 100,000 members shall be entitled to two additional ministerial delegates and two additional lay delegates.

A general conference shall have no more than six delegates unless it has more than three bishops.

2. Honorary delegates

- a. Each area fellowship⁸ may send one representative.
 - b. Directors of Free Methodist mission agencies and associations and representatives of area fellowships* shall be honorary members with a voice but no vote.
3. The World Conference shall meet at least once every four years. Special meetings may be called by a two-thirds majority of the World Conference Executive Committee. It may authorize a vote on this or on any executive matter by mail, telephone conference call or other electronic means.
 4. The World Conference Executive Committee shall be elected by the World Conference when it meets in session. A Nominating Committee composed of one representative from each general conference shall be elected by the World Conference in the first session of its meetings to submit nominations for officers of the World Conference and also members at large of the World Conference Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee shall include substantially equal lay and ministerial representation.

E. Officers of the World Conference

The officers shall be president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer.

1. The officers shall be members of the World Conference Executive Committee.
2. Officers may serve for two terms. A term is defined as the period between regularly scheduled meetings of the World Conference.

F. The World Conference Executive Committee

The World Conference Executive Committee shall meet at least every two years (preferably in conjunction with the meetings of the Council of Bishops and the World Conference) and shall be composed as follows: President, Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer and three members at large, including the outgoing president. These members shall be elected so as to allow equitable representation worldwide and to provide substantially equal representation of lay and ministerial members on the Executive Committee.

1. The President shall be the chairperson.
2. The World Conference Executive Committee shall present a budget, including a schedule of conference allocations, to the World Conference for approval.
3. The World Conference Executive Committee is amenable for its actions to the World Conference. If a vacancy occurs on the World Conference Executive Committee, the remaining members may elect a person, preferably a delegate to the prior World Conference, to fill the vacant position until the next meeting of the World Conference.
4. A designated World Conference Executive Committee member may represent the World Conference at each area fellowship.⁹

G. Relationship to General Conference Boards of Administration

1. All negotiations between the World Conference (or the World Conference Executive Committee) and a general conference (or any provisional general conference which the general conference is sponsoring) shall be done by the general conference Board of Administration.
2. The chairperson of each general conference board of administration shall be responsible for official correspondence with the World Conference. It shall be the duty of the chairperson to keep the Board of Administration of his/her general conference fully informed of the proceedings of the World Conference.
3. Copies of all official correspondence between the World Conference and any general and/or provisional conference or the respective Board of Administration shall be properly filed and available to the bishop(s) or highest administrative officer(s) of the general conference and to the Board of Administration.

Council of Bishops

¶240

- A. The bishops of the general and provisional general conferences shall together constitute a Council of Bishops for the purpose of fellowship, mutual counsel and accountability and the extension of the kingdom of God through Free Methodist ministries. The council shall normally meet every four years, with its meetings being near the midpoint of the interim between the meetings of the World Conference.
 - B. The Council of Bishops shall elect its own Executive Committee composed of a president, vice president, and secretary who shall be responsible for overseeing its activities.
 - C. Where a general conference has only one bishop, the executive of the Council of Bishops shall assign another bishop to attend the sittings of that general conference to serve as counsel to the presiding bishop. If the assigned bishop observes irregularities in procedure or policy in the general conference, the assigned bishop shall draw this to the attention of the presiding bishop and note this within a report to the World Conference Executive Committee. The assigned bishop shall also preside over the episcopal election.
 - D. If a general conference Board of Administration receives evidence of violation of ordination vows in reference to a bishop of its general conference, the Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops must be notified immediately. The Executive Committee of the Council of Bishops may appoint a representative to monitor and assist with the hearing process as defined by that general conference's *Book of Discipline*.¹⁰
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A ruling that a violation has occurred, and the related discipline, may be appealed to the Executive Committee of the World Conference only on the basis that the process provided in the *Book of Discipline** has not been followed. The Executive Committee of the World Conference may remand the ruling to the general conference or rule that the process was appropriately followed, and that ruling is final.

¶250 **Articles of Organization and Government**

Specific to a General Conference

The 250 paragraphs are reserved for bylaws and statutes peculiar to the general conference's ministry context.