

The Free Methodist Church USA

2023
Book of Discipline



“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock
of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.
Be shepherds of the church of God,
which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Free Methodist Church USA 2023 *Book of Discipline*

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Foreword

This 2023 *Book of Discipline* presents the history, theological roots, and global contemporary mission of the Free Methodist Church USA (FMCUSA). It is the ecclesiastical and organizational manual of the church. It includes the Common Constitution (chapters 1 & 2) of the global Free Methodist Church, of which the FMCUSA is a founding member.

The FMCUSA meets every four years for celebrative worship, to align ourselves with our mission and vision, to address critical issues, and to listen to the Spirit's leading for the future. In keeping with the Methodist tradition these meetings are called a "General Conference."

In July of 2023 the FMCUSA celebrated its 39th General Conference in Orlando, Florida. Ministerial and lay delegates from the annual conferences of the United States and annual conferences of mission origin, together with the bishops, gathered under the banner of "Igniting A Spirit-Fueled Movement." One responsibility of the General Conference is that it processes any changes to the Book of Discipline, and reviews previous changes which have been approved by its Board of Administration. Those changes are included in this 2023 edition.

We commend this book to you, not as a dry reference volume, but as a contemporary expression of how this part of the Body of Christ both inspires and organizes itself for effective ministry under the direction of the Holy Spirit, as together with other Christian traditions we live and serve our Lord in the neighborhoods of our world.

– The Editors

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* Although the Church’s corporate name is The Free Methodist Church of North America, by action of the Board of Administration (April 2011) the Church now does business as The Free Methodist Church USA.

Mission Statement

“To love God, love people, and make disciples.”

Vision Statement

“To bring wholeness to the world through healthy, biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.”

Introduction

Purpose and Character of the Free Methodist Church

The Free Methodist Church is best understood within the framework of the biblical concept of the church, the perspective provided by its historical heritage, and its commitment to meeting human need.

The Biblical Concept of the Church

It is clear from Scripture that the church is of God and for people. It is His creation. Christ is its head. The church is the people of God chosen for a purposeful partnership in accomplishing the will of God on earth. More than 80 metaphors, word pictures, relating to the church appear in the New Testament. Each portrays a more profound reality than does the picture it brings to mind. The pictures together make clear the nature and mission of the church. Paul speaks of the church as “body,” “building,” and “bride.” The most inclusive and perhaps the most significant metaphor is “body of Christ.” The redeemed are spoken of as “members of the body.”

What is the profound truth that the many word pictures convey? God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – takes a redeemed people into partnership to share in His activities and to realize His purposes. The church is the organic, corporate instrument God has chosen to remake people and Society. It has a mission of holy love. The church exists to produce Christlikeness in all people and their institutions. Thus our mission may be described as participation with God in bringing holiness and love to bear upon the sins, hurts, and needs of all people. This description of our mission is both individual and social. It points to a social relationship of all people to God and to each other described in Scripture as “the kingdom of God.”

The metaphors of the New Testament are made emphatic by the greatest portrait of all – the Incarnation, God made flesh. The church, enlightened by the Incarnation, continues the teaching and the ministry of its Lord on earth.

When the church is acting under the headship of its Lord and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it continues the story begun in the book of Acts. Many are its wonderful achievements since the first century, and many more may yet be realized in the unfolding drama of the acts of the Holy Spirit through redeemed people.

The New Testament reminds us that the church visible is not the church ideal. Because the church is a divine-human partnership, sharing not only in the holy love of its founder but in the blemishes of its humanity, it is ever in need of renewal. God takes the same risk

with the church in redemption as He did when He granted people freedom in creation. Just as God, the Holy Spirit, used the hands of the Apostle Paul in “special miracles” so He can use His church today. The results will be the same – the Word of the Lord will grow mightily and will prevail (Acts 19:11 and 20).

Historical Heritage and Perspective

Free Methodists consider the story of the church in the book of Acts and the other New Testament writings as their primary heritage. Generation after generation derives from this record their main source of direction and renewal. Followers of God have wrestled with issues both old and new throughout the centuries just as they do now. The entire history of the church is instructive for us.

Free Methodists claim a line of evangelical descent spelled out in large terms as follows: They trace their spiritual heritage through men and women of deep personal piety in all ages who have shown that it is possible to maintain the glow of spiritual fervor in the midst of paganism, apostasy, and the oftentimes corruption of the established church.

The lineage of the Free Methodist Church begins with the people of God in the Old and New Testaments, and includes influences and contributions from the multitude of renewal movements in western Christianity: Wycliffe and the German Moravians (from whom Wesley learned the concept of “the witness of the Spirit”); the sixteenth-century Reformation with its many counterbalancing renewal movements, not the least of which were the Arminian correctives (which taught that Christ’s salvation was for all humankind without limit, but that it must be freely chosen); the Catholic-Anglican tradition; the English Puritan influence; the Methodist tradition; and the ensuing vigorous nineteenth-century holiness movement. God has used these and others across the ages to make the unchanging Christian gospel known more clearly. In sum, Free Methodists identify with the flow of history of the Christian church while maintaining distinctive evangelical and spiritual emphases.

The contributions from church history may be detailed as follows: The Reformation heritage is reflected in their commitment to the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and life, and to salvation by grace through faith.

The Catholic-Anglican heritage appears in their concern for church order and appreciation for liturgical form. Their emphasis on the essentials of the faith allows for their openness towards differing views on such subjects as modes of baptism and the millennium.

The Methodist heritage is shown in theological, ecclesiastical, and

social concerns articulated by the Reverend John Wesley and his associates in the eighteenth century and reaffirmed through the holiness movement of the nineteenth.

Theologically, they are committed to the Wesleyan-Arminian affirmation of the saving love of God in Christ. Through prevenient grace He seeks to bring every individual to Himself but grants to each the responsibility of accepting or rejecting that salvation. Salvation is a living relationship with God in Jesus Christ, giving the believer a legal position of righteousness, and therefore affirming the security of all who continue in fellowship with Him. Along with the Arminian emphasis on the universal offer of salvation, John Wesley rediscovered the principle of assurance through the witness of the Holy Spirit. He declared a scriptural confidence in a God who is able to cleanse the hearts of believers from sin here and now by faith, fill them with the Holy Spirit, and empower them for carrying out His mission in the world. John Wesley wrote of himself and his brother Charles, "In 1729 two young men in England, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 they saw, likewise, that men are justified before they are sanctified; but still holiness was their object. God then thrust them out to raise up a holy people."

Ecclesiastically, the Methodist heritage is continued in Free Methodist organization. At its most basic level, Free Methodists organize as local churches and have named them "societies." In so doing, they follow early Methodist practice and designate the local church as a transformed and transforming Society. The local church constitutes a "Society" different from the societies of the world. Thus, in the pages that follow, we use the term "Society" to refer to Free Methodist churches in their local settings.

There are lines of responsibility connecting local, district, conference, and denominational ministries. Small groups of believers are accountable to one another for growth in Christian life and service. Free Methodists are concerned for the whole church, not just the local congregation. They value the leadership of bishops, superintendents, pastors, and lay leaders who provide counsel and direction to the church.

Born at a time when representative government was being developed by free societies, the Free Methodist founders reaffirmed the biblical principle of lay ministry. Free Methodists recognize and license unordained persons for particular ministries. They mandate lay representation in numbers equal to clergy in the councils of the church.

Socially, from their early days, Free Methodists displayed an awakened conscience characteristic of the early Wesleyan movement. Their outspoken action against the institution of slavery and

the class distinction inherent in the rental of pews to the wealthy demonstrated the spirit of true Methodism. Although issues change, the sensitive social conscience remains, evidenced by continuing, active participation in the social concerns of the day.

During the nineteenth century, the holiness movement, arising in American Methodism but spreading through other nations and denominations, called Christians to deeper levels of relationship with God and greater concern for the needs of hurting humanity. Within this context, the Reverend Benjamin T. Roberts and other ministers and laypersons in the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in western New York raised a protest against theological liberalism, unhealthy compromise on pressing social issues, and loss of spiritual fervor.

Between 1858 and 1860, a number of these leaders were excluded from the Methodist Episcopal Church on various charges and allegations. In reality, the primary issue was their proclamation of the basic principles of Methodism, especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification. Appeals made to the General Conference of May 1860 were denied. Those excluded could not join any other Methodist body, for there was none that agreed with them on the issues on which they were thrust out. Therefore, the Free Methodist Church was organized by a convention of lay members and ministers which met at Pekin, Niagara County, New York, on August 23, 1860. The first General Conference met on the second Wednesday of October, 1862, at Saint Charles, Illinois.

The Free Methodist Church, since its inception, continues to expand around the world through missionary outreach, the development of additional general conferences, and a coordinating world organization.

The Needs of Persons

Free Methodists are committed to the task of understanding the most important needs of persons, institutions, and varying cultures so that it may minister meaningfully and redemptively to them. In the high priestly prayer of Jesus Christ, He called upon believers to live in this world actively and intelligently in order that the world might be led both to “know” and to “believe.”

Free Methodists are aware of the demonic forces in the world which debase people, pervert the good, and lead people and institutions to ruin. They attempt to help people by restoring personal meaning in a time of depersonalizing developments. Free Methodists openly rebuke anything in law, persons or institutions which violates the dignity of persons created in the image of God. They are committed to taking advantage of opportunities where as individuals, societies,

conferences, and a denomination they can minister healing and redemptive helpfulness in the world.

Distinctive Principles

Free Methodists seek to express the concept of the church of Jesus Christ, their historical perspective, and the needs of persons in specific principles and commitments.

Free Methodists today seek to continue the mission of first-century Christianity which was recovered by John Wesley and the early Methodists who declared they existed “to raise up a holy people.”

Free Methodists are a fellowship of Christians in earnest to get to heaven and committed to working in the world for the salvation of all people. They place their commitment to Christ and His church above all others. They keep themselves free from alliances that would compete for their highest loyalty and from all that would encumber and compromise their effective witness to the Trinitarian faith and the believer’s dependence upon the grace of God. The Christian denies self, takes up their cross daily, and follows Jesus. They conform to all the will of God as made known in His Word, and believe the conditions of salvation are the same now as they were in the days of the apostles.

In doctrine, Free Methodists’ beliefs are the standard beliefs of evangelical, Arminian Protestantism, with distinctive emphasis on the scriptural teaching of entire sanctification as held by John Wesley.

In experience, Free Methodists stress the reality of an inner cleansing and power that attests the doctrine of entire sanctification, both in the inward consciousness of believers and in their outward life.

Their worship is characterized by simplicity and freedom of the Spirit, untrammled by elaborate ritual.

Free Methodists maintain a life of daily devotion to Christ that springs from inward holiness and separates the Christian from the world, even while he/she lives in the world. They believe the best way to keep worldliness from invading the church is for the church to invade the world with redemptive purpose.

They practice a complete consecration of every power and possession to the service of God and all people everywhere. They believe so strongly in the mission of the church that they are committed to responsible stewardship in finance. Therefore they do not need to resort to commercial efforts to support the cause of Christ.

Free Methodists recognize that God gives spiritual gifts of service and leadership to both men and women. Since male and female are both created in the image of God, that image is most fully reflected

when both women and men work in concert at all levels of the church. Therefore, all positions in the church are accessible to any whom God has called.

Free Methodists sense a special obligation to preach the gospel to the poor. The provisions of the gospel are for all. The “glad tidings” must be proclaimed to every individual of the human race. God sends the true light to illuminate and melt every heart. Jesus set the example. Of His ministry it was reported, “The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.” This preaching to the poor was the crowning proof that He was the one who should come. In this respect the church must follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Free Methodists are committed to the New Testament ideals of simplicity and modesty as a style of life. They wish to call attention, not to themselves, but to their Lord.

These distinctives of the Free Methodist Church from its origin are still living issues. In every era and every land these distinctives are the witnesses of the church, needing utterance clear and strong that they may be heard and heeded amidst the world’s confusing and misleading voices.

The Free Methodist Way

FREE METHODISTS ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A KINGDOM PEOPLE. Yet throughout church history God has raised up distinct movements like ours to enrich the larger Body of Christ. Building on the legacies of John Wesley and B.T. Roberts, but always discerning where God is moving today, our identity is shaped by values that are both historical and aspirational. Of the many values we hold dear, these five lie at the heart of our movement. We view them as a whole, each one bringing necessary balance to the others. In a time of rising polarization in our nation, we resist the pull toward both fundamentalism and theological liberalism not out of a spirit of compromise, but from a radical commitment to what Wesley called “the middle way.” It is a path that takes the whole gospel seriously and continually calls us to “both/and” convictions in an “either/or” world. We call it *The Free Methodist Way*.

Life-Giving Holiness

GOD’S CALL TO HOLINESS was never meant to be a burden, but a gift that liberates us for life that is truly life by delivering us from the destructive power of sin.

All who are born again are made right with God by the finished work

of Jesus Christ and called to experience the fullness of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Forgiven and filled, we approach life with confidence that we are acceptable to God even as He continues to transform our character and behavior to become more and more like Jesus. Life-giving holiness, then, is the fruit of full surrender to the loving reign of God over every aspect of our lives, establishing within us love that is truly love.

Leaving behind the legalism that once hindered our movement, *The Free Methodist Way* invites every believer to embrace the transforming work of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to love and serve God and others in joyful obedience.

Love-Driven Justice

LOVE IS THE WAY WE DEMONSTRATE GOD’S HEART FOR JUSTICE by valuing the image of God in all men, women, and children, acting with compassion toward the oppressed, resisting oppression, and stewarding creation.

We devote ourselves to our founders’ deep convictions around matters of injustice as they took their stand against the evils of slavery, the oppression of the poor, the marginalization of women, and the abuse of power in the church. Our heart for justice continues and expands today, fueled by God’s holy love for the unborn, the vulnerable, oppressed, marginalized, and people of all races and ethnicities.

The Free Methodist Way is not only to realize a better Society, but that all may be reconciled to God and one another in ways that reflect God’s just character.

Christ-Compelled Multiplication

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST — the message He proclaimed, the life He lived, and the ministry He modeled — set into motion a redemptive movement destined to fill the whole earth.

Jesus’ approach to discipleship was primarily a relational one in which He poured His life into a few with the full expectation that they would follow His example. His aim was not merely the transmission of information, but the transformation of lives by empowering those who followed Him to do what He had been doing. His mission is now our mission. We believe this redemptive movement of multiplication applies to every believer and should permeate our Free Methodist culture at every level: the found reaching the lost, disciples making disciples, leaders developing leaders, churches planting churches, and movements birthing movements.

The Free Methodist Way is to see God’s kingdom expand exponentially

as ordinary people are equipped by God's power to do extraordinary things.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

FROM THE BEGINNING, GOD'S INTENT WAS TO HAVE A PEOPLE FROM EVERY NATION, CULTURE, AND ETHNICITY, united in Christ and commissioned to carry out his work in the world.

Today we celebrate the beauty of a multicultural and multiethnic church both in the U.S. and in over 100 countries around the world. In the U.S., we cling to the promise that we have been made one in Christ even as we dedicate ourselves to becoming a more diverse church that looks like the kingdom of God. Globally, we continue to send missionaries to other nations even as we rejoice that the nations are increasingly coming to us. Freely sharing our own gifts and resources, we are also challenged and inspired by the faithfulness, perseverance, ceaseless prayer, theological insights, and spiritual wisdom of our international brothers and sisters. Without question, we are better together.

The Free Methodist Way aspires to move beyond colonialism and ethnocentrism in favor of a collaborative partnership in God's global work in anticipation of the day when a great multitude from every tongue, tribe, people, and language makes up the eternal throng before the throne of God (Rev. 7:9).

God-given Revelation

WE HOLD UNWAVERINGLY TO OUR CONVICTION that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and our final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Drawing on our Wesleyan heritage of engaging with Scripture through the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience, we keep Scripture primary. While the church will always be tasked with authentically communicating and applying biblical truths with sensitivity to cultural dynamics, we do not subjugate the Bible's timeless truths to cultural norms or social trends.

The Free Methodist Way is to fully align our lives and our movement on the unshakeable foundation of God's Word.

Chapter 1

The Constitution of the Free Methodist Church

Preamble

¶100 In order that we may wisely preserve and pass on to posterity the heritage of doctrine and principles of Christian living transmitted to us as evangelicals in the Arminian-Wesleyan tradition, insure church order by sound principles and ecclesiastical polity, and prepare the way for evangelization of the world and the more effective cooperation with other branches of the church of Christ in the advancement of Christ's kingdom, we, the ministers and lay members of the Free Methodist Church, in accordance with constitutional procedure, do hereby ordain, establish, and set forth the following as the Constitution of the Free Methodist Church.

Articles of Religion – God

The Holy Trinity

¶101 There is but one living and true God, the maker and preserver of all things. And in the unity of this Godhead there are three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are one in eternity, deity, and purpose; everlasting, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness.

The Son – His Incarnation

¶103 God was Himself in Jesus Christ to reconcile people to God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, He joined together the deity of God and the humanity of humankind. Jesus of Nazareth was God in flesh, truly God and truly human. He came to save us. For us the Son of God suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried. He poured out His life as a blameless sacrifice for our sin and transgressions. We gratefully acknowledge that He is our Savior, the one perfect mediator between God and us.

The Son – His Resurrection and Exaltation

¶104 Jesus Christ is risen victorious from the dead. His resurrected body became more glorious, not hindered by ordinary human limitations. Thus He ascended into heaven. There He sits as our exalted Lord at the right hand of God the Father, where He intercedes for us until all His enemies shall be brought into complete subjection. He will return to judge all people. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The Holy Spirit – His Person

¶105 The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, He is one with them, the eternal Godhead,

equal in deity, majesty, and power. He is God effective in Creation, in life, and in the church. The Incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ were accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He continues to reveal, interpret, and glorify the Son.

The Holy Spirit – His Work in Salvation

¶106 The Holy Spirit is the administrator of the salvation planned by the Father and provided by the Son's death, resurrection, and ascension. He is the effective agent in our conviction, regeneration, sanctification, and glorification. He is our Lord's ever-present self, indwelling, assuring, and enabling the believer.

The Holy Spirit – His Relation to the Church

¶107 The Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church by the Father and the Son. He is the church's life and witnessing power. He bestows the love of God and makes real the lordship of Jesus Christ in the believer so that both His gifts of words and service may achieve the common good and build and increase the church. In relation to the world He is the Spirit of truth, and His instrument is the Word of God.

The Scriptures

Authority

¶108 The Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. It bears unerring witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. As attested by the early church and subsequent councils, it is the trustworthy record of God's revelation, completely truthful in all it affirms. It has been faithfully preserved and proves itself true in human experience.

The Scriptures have come to us through human authors who wrote, as God moved them, in the languages and literary forms of their times. God continues, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak through this Word to each generation and culture.

The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, His creation, His people, His one and only Son, and the destiny of humankind. It also teaches the way of salvation and the life of faith. Whatever is not found in the Bible nor can be proved by it is not to be required as an article of belief or as necessary to salvation.

Authority of the Old Testament

¶109 The Old Testament is not contrary to the New. Both Testaments bear witness to God's salvation in Christ; both speak of God's will for His people. The ancient laws for ceremonies and rites, and the civil precepts for the nation Israel are not necessarily binding on Christians today. But, on the example of Jesus, we are obligated to

obey the moral commandments of the Old Testament.

The books of the Old Testament are: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

New Testament

¶110 The New Testament fulfills and interprets the Old Testament. It is the record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is God's final word regarding humankind, sin, salvation, the world, and its destiny.

The books of the New Testament are: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

Humankind

Free Moral Persons

¶111 God created human beings in His own image, innocent, morally free, and responsible to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. By the sin of Adam, humans as the offspring of Adam are corrupted in their very nature so that from birth they are inclined to sin. They are unable by their own strength and work to restore themselves in right relationship with God and to merit eternal salvation. God, the Omnipotent, provides all the resources of the Trinity to make it possible for humans to respond to His grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. By God's grace and help people are enabled to do good works with a free will.

Law of Life and Love

¶112 God's law for all human life, personal and social, is expressed in two divine commands: love the Lord God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. These commands reveal what is best for persons in their relationship with God, others, and Society. They set forth the principles of human duty in both individual and social action. They recognize God as the only Sovereign. All people as created by Him and in His image have the same inherent rights regardless of gender, race, or color. All should therefore give God absolute obedience in their individual, social, and political acts. They should strive to secure to everyone respect for their person, their rights, and their greatest happiness in the possession and exercise of the right within the moral law.

Good Works

¶113 Good works are the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ, but works cannot save us from our sins nor from God's judgment. As expressions of Christian faith and love, our good works performed with reverence and humility are both acceptable and pleasing to God. However, good works do not earn God's grace.

Salvation**Christ's Sacrifice**

¶114 Christ offered once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No other satisfaction for sin is necessary; none other can atone.

New Life in Christ

¶115 A new life and a right relationship with God are made possible through the redemptive acts of God in Jesus Christ. God, by His Spirit, acts to impart new life and put people into a relationship with Himself as they repent and their faith responds to His grace. Justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification, and restoration speak significantly to entrance into and continuance in the new life.

Justification

¶116 Justification is a legal term that emphasizes that by a new relationship in Jesus Christ people are in fact accounted righteous, being freed from both the guilt and the penalty of their sins.

Regeneration

¶117 Regeneration is a biological term which illustrates that by a new relationship in Christ, one does in fact have a new life and a new spiritual nature capable of faith, love, and obedience to Christ Jesus as Lord. The believer is born again and is a new creation. The old life is past; a new life is begun.

Adoption

¶118 Adoption is a filial term full of warmth, love, and acceptance. It denotes that by a new relationship in Christ believers have become His wanted children freed from the mastery of both sin and Satan. Believers have the witness of the Spirit that they are children of God.

Sanctification

¶119 Sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit renews His people after the likeness of God, changing them through crisis and process, from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

As believers surrender to God in faith and die to self through full

consecration, the Holy Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart to God, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives.

Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves.

Restoration

¶120 Christians may be sustained in a growing relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord. However, they may grieve the Holy Spirit in the relationships of life without returning to the dominion of sin. When they do, they must humbly accept the correction of the Holy Spirit, trust in the advocacy of Jesus, and mend their relationships.

Christians can sin willfully and sever their relationship with Christ. Even so, by repentance before God, forgiveness is granted and the relationship with Christ restored, for not every sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit and unpardonable. God's grace is sufficient for those who truly repent and, by His enabling, amend their lives. However, forgiveness does not give believers liberty to sin and escape the consequences of sinning.

God has given responsibility and power to the church to restore penitent believers through loving reproof, counsel and acceptance.

The Church

¶121 The church is created by God. It is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head. The Holy Spirit is its life and power. It is both divine and human, heavenly and earthly, ideal and imperfect. It is an organism, not an unchanging institution. It exists to fulfill the purposes of God in Christ. It redemptively ministers to persons. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that it should be holy and without blemish. The church is a fellowship of the redeemed and the redeeming, preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments according to Christ's instruction. The Free Methodist Church purposes to be representative of what the church of Jesus Christ should be on earth. It therefore requires specific commitment regarding the faith and life of its members. In its requirements it seeks to honor Christ and obey the written Word of God.

The Language of Worship

¶122 According to the Word of God and the custom of the early church, public worship and prayer and the administration of the sacraments should be in a language understood by the people.

The Holy Sacraments

¶123 Water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the

church commanded by Christ. They are means of grace through faith, tokens of our profession of Christian faith, and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen, and confirm our faith.

Baptism

¶124 Water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord, signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant of grace as circumcision was the symbol of the old covenant; and, since infants are recognized as being included in the atonement, they may be baptized upon the request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. They shall be required to affirm the vow for themselves before being accepted into church membership.

The Lord's Supper

¶125 The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. To those who rightly, worthily, and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves.

Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken, and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

Last Things

The Kingdom of God

¶126 The kingdom of God is a prominent Bible theme providing Christians with both their tasks and hope. Jesus announced its presence. The kingdom is realized now as God's reign is established in the hearts and lives of believers.

The church, by its prayers, example, and proclamation of the gospel, is the appointed and appropriate instrument of God in building His kingdom.

But the kingdom is also future and is related to the return of Christ when judgment will fall upon the present order. The enemies of Christ will be subdued; the reign of God will be established; a total cosmic renewal which is both material and moral shall occur; and the hope of the redeemed will be fully realized.

The Return of Christ

¶127 The return of Christ is certain and may occur at any moment, although it is not given us to know the hour. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies concerning His final triumph over all evil. The believer's response is joyous expectation, watchfulness, readiness, and diligence.

Resurrection

¶128 There will be a bodily resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrected body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable. The Resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of resurrection unto life to those who are in Him.

Judgment

¶129 God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in accordance with the gospel and our deeds in this life.

Final Destiny

¶130 Our eternal destiny is determined by God's grace and our response, not by arbitrary decrees of God. For those who trust Him and obediently follow Jesus as Savior and Lord, there is a heaven of eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence. But for the finally impenitent there is a hell of eternal suffering and of separation from God.

Scriptural References

¶131 The doctrines of the Free Methodist Church are based upon the Holy Scriptures and are derived from their total biblical context. The references below are appropriate passages related to the given articles. They are listed in their biblical sequence and are not intended to be exhaustive.

God

The Holy Trinity (see ¶101)

Genesis 1:1-2; Exodus 3:13-15; Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1-3; 5:19-23; 8:58; 14:9-11; 15:26; 16:13-15; 2 Corinthians 13:14.

The Son – His Incarnation (see ¶103)

Matthew 1:21; 20:28; 26:27-28; Luke 1:35; 19:10; John 1:1, 10, 14; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 2:17; 9:14-15.

The Son – His Resurrection and Exaltation (see ¶104)

Matthew 25:31-32; Luke 24:1-7; 24:39; John 20:19; Acts 1:9-11; 2:24; Romans 8:33-34; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews

1:1-4.

The Holy Spirit – His Person (see ¶105)

Matthew 28:19; John 4:24; 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:13-15.

The Holy Spirit – His Work in Salvation (see ¶106)

John 16:7-8; Acts 15:8-9; Romans 8:9, 14-16; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; Galatians 4:6.

The Holy Spirit – His Relation to the Church (see ¶107)

Acts 5:3-4; Romans 8:14; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; 2 Peter 1:21.

The Scriptures

Authority (see ¶108)

Deuteronomy 4:2; 28:9; Psalm 19:7-11; John 14:26; 17:17; Romans 15:4; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 4:12; James 1:21.

The Scriptures – Authority of the Old Testament (see ¶109)

Matthew 5:17-18; Luke 10:25-28; John 5:39, 46-47; Acts 10:43; Galatians 5:3-4; 1 Peter 1:10-12.

The Scriptures – New Testament (see ¶110)

Matthew 24:35; Mark 8:38; John 14:24; Hebrews 2:1-4; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 1 John 2:2-6; Revelation 21:5; 22:19.

Humankind

Free Moral Persons (see ¶111)

Genesis 1:27; Psalm 51:5; 130:3; Romans 5:17-19; Ephesians 2:8-10.

Law of Life and Love (see ¶112)

Matthew 23:35-39; John 15:17; Galatians 3:28; 1 John 4:19-21.

Good Works (see ¶113)

Matthew 5:16; 7:16-20; Romans 3:27-28; Ephesians 2:10; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; Titus 3:5.

Salvation

Christ's Sacrifice (see ¶114)

Luke 24:46-48; John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:8-11; Galatians 2:16; 3:2-3; Ephesians 1:7-8; 2:13; Hebrews 9:11-14, 25-26; 10:8-14.

New Life in Christ (see ¶115)

John 1:12-13; 3:3-8; Acts 13:38-39; Romans 8:15-17; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 3:9-10.

Justification (see ¶116)

Psalm 32:1-2; Acts 10:43; Romans 3:21-26, 28; 4:2-5; 5:8-9; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Philippians 3:9.

Regeneration (see ¶117)

Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 5:24; Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10; Titus 3:4-5; 1 Peter 1:23.

Adoption (see ¶118)

Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 1:5-6; 1 John 3:1-3.

Sanctification (see ¶119)

Leviticus 20:7-8; John 14:16-17; 17:19; Acts 1:8; 2:4; 15:8-9; Romans 5:3-5; 8:12-17; 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 12:4-11; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 5:23-24; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 10:14.

Restoration (see ¶120)

Matthew 12:31-32; 18:21-22; Romans 6:1-2; Galatians 6:1; 1 John 1:9; 2:1-2; 5:16-17; Revelation 2:5; 3:19-20.

The Church

The Church (see ¶121)

Matthew 16:15-18; 18:17; Acts 2:41-47; 9:31; 12:5; 14:23-26; 15:22; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 11:23; 12:28; 16:1; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:9-10; 5:22-23; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 3:14-15.

The Language of Worship (see ¶122)

Nehemiah 8:5, 6, 8; Matthew 6:7; 1 Corinthians 14:12-14.

The Holy Sacraments (see ¶123)

Matthew 26:26-29; 28:19; Acts 22:16; Romans 4:11; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-26; Galatians 3:27.

Baptism (see ¶124)

Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-17; 9:18; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5; John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:27-29; Colossians 2:11-12; Titus 3:5.

The Lord's Supper (see ¶125)

Mark 14:22-24; John 6:53-58; Acts 2:46; 1 Corinthians 5:7-8; 10:16; 11:20, 23-29.

Last Things

The Kingdom of God (see ¶126)

Matthew 6:10, 19-20; 24:14; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:19-23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-25; Philippians 2:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12; 2 Peter 3:3-10; Revelation 14:6; 21:3-8; 22:1-5, 17.

The Return of Christ (see ¶127)

Matthew 24:1-51; 26:64; Mark 13:26-27; Luke 17:26-37; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 1:7; 19:11-16; 22:6-7, 12, 20.

Resurrection (see ¶128)

John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 51-57; 2 Corinthians 4:13-14.

Judgment (see ¶129)

Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 11:31-32; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Romans 2:15-16; 14:10-11; 2 Corinthians 5:6-10; Hebrews 9:27-28; 10:26-31; 2 Peter 3:7.

Final Destiny (see ¶130)

Mark 9:42-48; John 14:3; Hebrews 2:1-3; Revelation 20:11-15; 21:22-27.

Membership

Privileges and Requirements

¶150 The privileges and requirements of full membership in the church are constitutional, and changes therein may be made only by amendment according to ¶210-213. Nothing shall be included in the membership ritual that is contrary to the following definitions of requirements and privileges of membership.

¶151 The requirements of full membership are:

- A. Christian baptism, confession of a personal experience in regeneration, and a pledge to seek diligently until sanctified wholly if that experience has not been attained;
- B. acceptance of the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and matters of church government as written in the *Book of Discipline*;¹
- C. a covenant to support the church, to live in fellowship with the members thereof, to be an active participant in the ministry of the church, and to seek God's glory in all things;
- D. approval of membership by the local Board of Administration and the candidate's public declaration of membership vows.

¶152 The rights of full membership are:

- A. participation in the sacraments and ordinances of the church;
- B. eligibility to vote and hold office upon reaching the age designated by the general conference;
- C. trial and appeal if charged with failure to maintain the requirements of membership, with the specific provision that joining another religious denomination or sect shall of itself sever membership in the church without trial.

¶153 Church membership may be terminated only by:

- A. voluntary withdrawal (including permission to withdraw under complaint);

¹ When not in conflict with local laws in matters of church government. See our expectation for membership instruction in these things in ¶6110.C relative to lay and clergy transfer members.

- B. joining another religious denomination or sect or a secret order;
- C. expulsion after proper summary proceeding or trial and conviction;
- D. persistent neglect of church relationship by a member, which in effect is voluntary withdrawal.

Membership Covenant

Privilege and Responsibility

- ¶154 Membership in the church is a high privilege and responsibility. We believe the Covenant required of members is consistent with the teaching of the written Word of God. Faithfulness to the covenant is evidence of the individual member's desire to sustain a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord, to bring glory to God, to advance the cause of God on earth, to preserve the unity of the Body of Christ, and to cherish the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church.
- ¶155 When a member does not keep his/her covenant and habitually violates his/her vows, it is the responsibility of minister and members to point to the failure and to seek in love to restore the member. If, after these steps have been taken, the member does not keep his/her commitments, he/she must be dealt with in accord with the due processes of the Church.
- ¶156 Members of the Free Methodist Church, trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of the other members of the Church, make the following confession and commitments as a covenant with the Lord and the Church.

The Confession and Commitment

We confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. By faith, we walk with Him. We commit ourselves to know Him in His full sanctifying grace.

As Regards God

- ¶157 As God's people, we reverence and worship Him.

We commit ourselves to cultivate habits of Christian devotion, submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship, and partaking of Holy Communion;

We commit ourselves to observe the Lord's Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal, and service;

We commit ourselves to give our loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

As Regards Ourselves and Others

¶158 As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs.

We commit ourselves to be free from activities and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same;

We commit ourselves to respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God;

We commit ourselves to strive to be just and honest in all our relationships and dealings.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

As Regards the Institutions of God

¶159 As a people, we honor and support the God-ordained institutions of family, state, and church.

We commit ourselves to honor the sanctity of marriage as the union of one male and one female in holy love, and the family they form;

We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ;

We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and we pray for all who lead.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

As Regards the Church

¶160 As God's people, we express the life of Christ in the world.

We commit ourselves to contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love, and understanding in all our relationships;

We commit ourselves to practice the principles of Christian stewardship, for the glory of God and the growth of the Church;

We commit ourselves to go into our world and make disciples.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

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 coordinate 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

¹ Or its equivalent.

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.B. 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.

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 interjurisdictional 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

² Or its equivalent.

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.

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*⁴ within its culture under the leadership of its suffragan bishop as it carries out the mission of the church.

³ Or their equivalent.

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*⁵ 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

⁴ Or its equivalent.

⁵ Or its equivalent.

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*⁶ 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 (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);
 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 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

⁶ Or its equivalent.

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

⁷ Or its equivalent.

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 cannot 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.3 and ¶220.D.4.

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 interjurisdictional 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.
 - c. A general conference with one bishop and 100,000 members shall be entitled to two additional ministerial delegates and two additional lay delegates.
 - d. 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 fellowships⁸ 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.
 5. The Commissions of the World Conference shall be:
 - a. Global Impact: Mission to every tongue and tribe, nation, and people (Revelation 7:9).
 - b. Special Ministries: Development, medical, and relief.
 - c. Leadership Development: Theological education, scholarships, and leadership training.
 - d. Constitutional Matters: Area Fellowship Constitutions, Referendums, World Conference Constitutions, Constitutional Compliance.

⁸ Or its equivalent.

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.

⁹ Or its equivalent.

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

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*¹⁰ 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.

¹⁰ Or its equivalent.

**¶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.

Chapter 3

The Christian Journey

Preamble

¶3000 Members of the Free Methodist Church accept the principles of the Membership Covenant for their maturing life in Christ. Together they commit to obey the teachings of Scripture. Moreover, they receive the church's wisdom as a guide for life. Under the guidance of Scripture and the church's wisdom, they welcome the Spirit's work to make them like Jesus.

The Goal of the Christian Journey

¶3010 The Scriptures affirm that God's purpose for humanity, from before creation, was that we should "be holy and blameless before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Timothy 2:4). God's purpose was far from empty. For, from before creation, His purpose had reality in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God's clear statement of the origin, purpose, and goal that He has for humanity. For "he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

The Christian journey is a part of this plan, which was set forth in Christ. The Christian journey is only possible because of God's eternal purpose, the redemption He made for us in Christ, and the living presence of His Spirit in our lives.

Because of God's plan, the goal of the Christian journey is nothing less lofty than to attain "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christlike maturity. When we enter the life to come, our journey will be complete because we will be like God in an even fuller way than is possible now: "What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

As Free Methodists we affirm with God's Word that the proper goal for our Christian life is this Christlike maturity, which the Bible describes as holiness and righteousness (Matthew 5:6; 1 Peter 1:16). We acknowledge that this is only possible because of the grace that He so richly provides.

This chapter of the *Book of Discipline* describes significant features of the Free Methodist understanding of the Christian journey toward Christlikeness.

As Regards God

¶3100 **In the Membership Covenant our first set of goals relates to the reverence and worship of God. These goals can only be realized by God's grace and power. "As God's people, we reverence and worship Him." (¶157)**

¶3101 Reverence and worship is our response to God's saving acts. This section describes the Free Methodist standard of teaching on the biblical doctrine of salvation. These paragraphs are an elaboration of what is affirmed in the Articles of Religion – Salvation (see ¶¶114-120). They represent our understanding of the clear teaching of Scripture on the process by which God through the activity of His Spirit makes it possible for sinful humans to enter the Christian journey and to grow into Christlike maturity. This "way of salvation" is the path God has laid out for us to begin the Christian journey, and to grow in faith. The way of salvation includes God's gracious initiative for salvation, awakening to God, repentance, trust, assurance, consecration, and sanctification.

¶3102 **God's Gracious Initiative for Salvation**

In love God has graciously provided for the salvation of all humankind. God is love. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was sent by the Father as an expression of God's love for the world. The cross shows the extent of Jesus's love for all. The love of God is further expressed to the world through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Only those who respond in repentance and faith can experience His grace as a redemptive reality.

The Christian life can be consciously experienced because it is a relationship between persons – the personal God and humans made in His likeness. Every person is confronted by this personal God, but the outcome of this confrontation is affected by how each person responds.

God deals with all persons as free and responsible. Therefore, He not only makes His grace available, waiting our free response, but He also reveals Himself and makes known His life to all who put their trust in Him. The redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ is experienced as an awareness of His love and fellowship.

Those who are justified by faith experience the peace of God. When His Holy Spirit comes to the heart, there is joy. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is the assurance of our relationship to God as His dear children.

¶3103 **Awakening to God**

The Scriptures teach that by nature humans are corrupt in every aspect of their beings and have gone far from original righteousness. Added to the depravity common to all because of the Fall, there are the enslaving effects of committed sins. We are

unable in ourselves to come to God, but God in His grace reaches out to every sinner.

God takes the initiative in making sinners aware of their needs, using His Word, the revelation in Jesus Christ, the Gospel proclamation of the church, the witness of individuals, and the circumstances of life. By such means, the Holy Spirit awakens sinners to their needs and to the truth of the gospel (John 16:8, 13). Awakened, they must make a response, either rejecting the call of God or turning to God in repentance and faith.

¶3104 **Repentance and Restitution**

Awakened by the Holy Spirit to their lost condition before God, persons may move toward God. Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), all must repent in order to come into a right relationship with God.

Repentance calls for a sincere and thorough change of mind. To repent is to turn from sin with genuine sorrow and to turn to God in confession and submission. The whole person is involved: mind, feelings, will. Repentance is more than regret for wrongdoing or sorrow at being caught. It is personal sorrow that one has sinned against God. Repentance demands a radical turning from sin and a sincere turning to God.

Sincere repentance leads to moral renewal, often evidenced by restitution – the effort to right one’s wrongs when possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zacchaeus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 3:8). Neither repentance nor restitution saves, however. Salvation is by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

¶3105 **Trust / Faith**

Trust, also known as faith, is utter reliance upon God (2 Corinthians 3:4-5; 1 Timothy 4:10). Trust includes full acceptance of the promises of God, complete dependence on Christ’s sacrifice for salvation, and unconditional commitment to the will of God. God’s grace and blessings are open to those who turn to Him with full reliance on His integrity, love, and power.

Christians experience God’s loving care and guidance as they trust and follow Him (Ephesians 3:12). When they think they are sufficient unto themselves they become frustrated by trying to do for themselves what God wants to do for them. Self-sufficiency is inconsistent with perfect trust (1 Timothy 6:17).

¶3106 **Assurance**

God gives assurance of salvation and peace of heart to all who repent and put their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). The Holy Spirit witnesses to their own spirits that they are forgiven of their sins and adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:16). Christians have peace with God through Jesus Christ because guilt is taken

away and fear of judgment removed (Hebrews 6:11; 10:22). God continues to give assurance to believers through the Scriptures, the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit, and love for and fellowship with other Christians (1 John 3:14).

¶3107

Consecration

God calls His people to set themselves apart to His will and purpose (Romans 6:13; 12:1). Anything thus set apart is said to be consecrated.

All Christians are called to be holy and without blame before God in love (Ephesians 5:27). Christ demands that His disciples follow Him in mind and spirit (Romans 7:24-25). If Christians are to witness effectively in the world, they must be distinguished by righteousness, peace, joy, faith, hope, and love (John 13:35; 14:15; Galatians 5:22-24). God wants a special kind of people for His work (Matthew 16:24; Romans 14:17; 8:6-9; John 17:17; Psalm 100:2). When Christians sincerely follow Christ and listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks in the Scriptures, they should sense this need of cleansing from inward sin. They should desire earnestly to be filled with the love of God and long for a relationship with Christ which will satisfy their deepest inward need and empower them to serve and obey the Lord (Ephesians 5:1-2, 14; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 14:1; Acts 1:8).

Christians, therefore, must consecrate themselves to God and surrender their wills to the will of the Heavenly Father (Matthew 19:21). Those who desire inward sanctification must deny themselves, bear the cross, and follow Christ. Devotion to self is idolatry. A Christian who is divided in loyalty cannot serve God victoriously and steadfastly. Christ must be given preeminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life.

Therefore, to open themselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers must give themselves without reservation to God. They freely yield all to the purposes of God and devote every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than to self (Colossians 3:8-13). Christians cannot be delivered from the dominion of sin if they permit self to reign in their lives. They cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

¶3108

Sanctification

Christ gave himself for the cleansing of His church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 13:12). His disciples are called to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 7:1). Christ provided for believers to be entirely sanctified in the atonement (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:8-10). Accordingly, Paul prayed "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

Sanctification begins with regeneration. It continues throughout the believer's life, as the believer cooperates with the Spirit. A deeper relationship with Christ is possible as the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; 1 John 1:5-2:1).

God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Coming into one's life at conversion, He fills with His unrivalled presence when the Christian's consecration is complete, cleansing the heart and empowering for witness and service (John 3:5; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:3; Acts 1:8). He sheds God's love throughout the heart and life of the Christian (Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:12-13).

Accepting the promise of God by faith, believers enter into a deepened relationship with Christ (2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7). They are enabled to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and their neighbor as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:25-26). They know an inner surrender to all the will of God, and their lives are transformed from inner conflict with sin to glad obedience (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16-25).

Sanctification cleanses Christians from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (1 Peter 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15-20). When they are cleansed, they are not made perfect in performance, but in love (Hebrews 6:1; 12:14; Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:12-13).

¶3110 **“We commit ourselves to cultivate habits of Christian devotion, such as submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship, and partaking of Holy Communion.” (¶157)**

¶3111 **Prayer**

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christlikeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. Prayer should be as conversation, avoiding artificial phrases and tones. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often the circumstances (James 5:16). The Bible teaches that both individual and group prayer are effective for those who are in Christ. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasizes our dependence on God. Both prayer and Bible study should be regular, without becoming mere rituals (Psalm 119:11; 105).

¶3112 **Study of the Word**

The Bible is our source for discovering how we may grow. It is the Christian's "growth manual." It must be taken seriously as the final authority for our lives; therefore, it ought to be read and diligently studied for its meaning. God will speak to growing Christians through its pages if they are listening. The value and meaning of life are found in this book. The prayerful study and

application of Scripture is a means of cleansing and of changing attitudes and behavior.

¶3120 **“We commit ourselves to observe the Lord’s Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal, and service.” (¶157)**

¶3121 **The Lord’s Day**

God makes clear in Scripture by both example and command that one day in seven is to be devoted to worship and rest (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus declared that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). We need a special day in which we turn from our daily work to worship God and to renew body, mind, and spirit. The New Testament reveals that the early church moved from observing the last day of the week – the Jewish Sabbath – to worshipping God in Christ on the first day of the week – the Lord’s day, the day of His resurrection. In keeping the Sabbath principle in a Lord’s Day setting, we participate in corporate worship with the Christian community as the essential activity of Sunday (Hebrews 10:25). We refrain on that day from unnecessary labors and commerce, and recognize that salvation comes not from our own strivings but by grace, as we rest in God (Isaiah 58:13-14; Hebrews 4:9). Pastors and others who must be involved in necessary work on Sunday are encouraged to observe the Sabbath principle on another day.

¶3130 **“We commit ourselves to give our loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment.” (¶157)**

¶3131 **False Worship**

Jesus Christ affirmed the Old Testament commandment, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The worship of any other person, spirit, or thing is idolatry. We abstain from all practices that lead to idolatry. Occult practices, such as spiritism, witchcraft, and astrology must be avoided. Moreover, Christians are to be on guard against the idolatries of the heart – the worship of things, pleasures, and self (1 John 2:16).

¶3132 **Secret Societies**

The Christian’s supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:9; Acts 2:36). In every association Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, as members of the Free Methodist Church we abstain from membership in secret societies.

Those voluntary associations which demand an oath, affirmation, promise of secrecy, or secret password as conditions of membership are to be considered secret societies. In contradiction

to the teaching of Christ and the New Testament, these societies require pledges and vows which bind the future actions of those who join (Matthew 5:34-37). As Christians, therefore, we refuse to swear unreserved loyalty to any secret Society since we see such an allegiance to be in direct conflict with unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. We must keep ourselves free to follow the will of the Lord in all things.

Most secret societies are religious in nature. Prayers are offered, hymns are sung, and members engage in acts of worship before an altar. Chaplains are chosen to lead in worship and to conduct funerals. But the worship of these societies is typically unitarian, not Christian; the religion is moralistic, not redemptive; and the ends are humanistic, not evangelical (Acts 4:12). We refrain, therefore, from membership in all secret societies and when we unite with the Church we resign from active membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

As Regards Ourselves and Others

- ¶3200 **In the Membership Covenant our second set of goals relates to the care of ourselves and others. These goals can be realized only by God's grace and power. "As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs." (¶158)**
- ¶3210 **"We commit ourselves to be free from activities and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same." (¶158)**
- ¶3211 **Self-Discipline**

One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Scriptures instruct us to honor the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). As Christians we desire to be characterized by balance and moderation. We seek to avoid extreme patterns of conduct. We also seek to keep ourselves free from addictions and compulsions.

Since Christians are to be characterized by a disciplined style of life, we attempt to avoid selfish indulgence in the pleasures of this world. It is our wish to live simply in service to others, and to practice stewardship of health, time, and other God-given resources.

We are committed to help every Christian attain such a disciplined life. Although unhealthy habits are not easily broken, believers need not live in such bondage. We find help through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the counsel and support of other Christians.

¶3212 **Entertainment**

We evaluate all forms of entertainment in the light of biblical standards for holy living and recognize that we must govern ourselves according to these standards. The Scriptures say, “we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live” (Romans 8:12-13).

We commit ourselves to be moderate in our pursuit of entertainment, regarding carefully the wise use of time and money and the stewardship of the body so as to avoid evil of every kind and honor Christ in everything. Therefore when making choices with regard to entertainment, before the Lord we should forthrightly answer such questions as: Does this activity enhance or reduce my witness as a Christian? Does it contradict the teachings of Scripture? Is my conscience clear? Will participation expose me to unnecessary temptation? Is this activity in any sense enslaving?

¶3213 **Misuse of Substances**

As Christians we believe that life is full, abundant and free in Jesus Christ (John 8:35; 10:10). Therefore, we abstain from whatever damages, destroys, or distorts His life in us.

Illicit drugs are prime offenders. We avoid their use because various forms of narcotics cause untold damage to people and relationships; such drugs restrict personal development, damage the body, and reinforce an unrealistic view of life.

Though alcohol and marijuana are legal drugs in some jurisdictions, both have a history of damaging individuals, families, and Society. Both are unpredictably addictive and their destructive effects cannot be fully measured. Their misuse leaves a trail of broken marriages, family violence, crime, industrial loss, ill health, injury, and death. Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Therefore, we advocate abstinence for the sake of health, family, and neighbors.

We advocate abstaining from the use of tobacco because we believe Christians are to treat their bodies as sacred trusts. It is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as being an expensive and socially offensive addiction. Likewise, the intemperate consumption of food is a form of abusing the body which may result in illness and obesity. We eat healthily so as to preserve the strength of our bodies and so extend our years of usefulness as servants of Christ. We take seriously the words of Paul, the apostle, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from

God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We guard against the indiscriminate use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs because drug dependency often inhibits fullness of life in Christ. Though the therapeutic value of such substances may be great, their potency, proliferation, and easy accessibility require that as Christians we be vigilant against their misuse.

We endeavor by God's help to be understanding and supportive toward those who have abused or are currently misusing substances. We acknowledge that the misuse of substances is understood as a disease that harms the body, mind, and spirit, causing physical, emotional, and spiritual difficulty. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we acknowledge the difficulties of overcoming the bondage to a substance and desire to give help and support as needed while fellow Christians seek healing, including professional counseling and pastoral care. As further evidence of an awakened conscience, we advocate refraining from the cultivation, manufacture, or promotion of these substances which are harmful to health.

¶3214 **Pornography**

The Scriptures warn that those who participate in sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21). The use of pornography is a vicarious participation in sexual immorality. Such participation includes viewing, listening to, or purposefully imagining others engaged in sexual activities.

Human sexuality is a gift from God which is debased and damaged by pornography. This damage is personal, relational, and cultural. Pornography causes a desensitizing of conscience, a perversion of sexual desire, and a decay of moral values. It often victimizes the innocent and unsuspecting. It is a rampant, degenerative force.

The church has a corporate responsibility to provide education, protection, and God's redeeming care for those susceptible to or addicted by pornography. Therefore as Christians we abstain from pornography and oppose its use and work toward removing its legitimacy and availability.

¶3215 **Sexual Intimacy**

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God for marital union. As such it creates a bond that Scripture describes as one flesh (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). When expressed within marriage, sexual intimacy is a great blessing and source of fulfillment. The sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman is to be protected against all manner of immoral conduct (Exodus 22:16-

17; Deuteronomy 22:23-28; Leviticus 20:10-16).

Premarital intimacy robs the marital union of the exclusive bond that sexual intimacy is given to create. Fornication is listed along with other forms of immorality (Galatians 5:19-21).

Extramarital intimacy, which Scripture describes as adultery, transgresses the moral law and betrays the marriage bond. Adultery is a degrading and destructive force. It undermines trust and contaminates the exclusive bond of marriage (Exodus 20:14).

Postmarital intimacy which occurs after divorce or the loss of a spouse debases the biblical design of sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

Same-sex intimacy is regarded by the Scriptures as immoral because it is a distortion of God's created order. The Scriptures speak explicitly against same-sex intimacy (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10).

All persons are accountable to God for their thoughts, words, and deeds (Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). For those who have fallen, the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and deliver (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25; Luke 4:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Because the sexual desire is so powerful, counseling is recommended as a part of the church's pastoral care.

The church has a corporate responsibility to be God's agent of transformation to persons as they learn to live a Christian life that is wholesome and pure. We oppose cultural mores and laws that legitimize adultery, premarital, postmarital and same-sex intimacy.

¶3220 **"We commit ourselves to respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God." (¶158)**

¶3221 **Dignity and Worth of Persons**

We are committed to the dignity and worth of all humans, including the unborn, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, color, socio-economic status, disability, or any other distinctions (Acts 10:34-35), and will respect them as persons made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and redeemed by Christ's death and resurrection.

The Old Testament law commands such respect (Deuteronomy 5:11-21). Jesus summarized this law as love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). He ministered to all without distinction and His death on the cross was for all (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).

We are therefore pledged to active concern whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, depersonalized, enslaved, or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10). We

are committed to give meaning and significance to every person by God's help. Remembering our tendency to be prejudicial, as Christians we must grow in awareness of the rights and needs of others.

A. With Regard to Poverty

Poverty represents one important way in which the dignity of persons is threatened, and the Scriptures explicitly command us to care for those in need. The Old Testament reveals God's special care and protection for the poor by establishing social obligations toward those in need in a covenant community such as the sabbatical year and the gleaning law (Exodus 21:2; 22:22-27; 23:10-11; Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 15:1-5; Psalm 10:17-18; 12:5). The New Testament also shows God's heart for the poor in the ministries of Jesus and His disciples by preaching the gospel to the poor and obliging us to share our resources generously with those in need, treating them with fairness and equity (Luke 4:18-19; 7:21-22; Galatians 2:10; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; James 2:1-7). As we minister to the poor, destitute and those in need, we do so with basic underlying convictions:

1. We commit to the biblical principle of caring for the destitute of wealth, influence, position, and honor, as well as widows and orphans, and other marginalized groups, including the disabled, the elderly, and the sick. This care is an essential expression of Christ's love through His church (Deuteronomy 10:17-18; 24:17-18; Isaiah 59:6-10; Acts 6:1-3; James 1:27).
2. We commit to pursue economic justice, prioritizing the needs of the destitute. These needs are primarily met through their inclusion within the family of God, where caring for those in need takes precedence over personal, institutional, or societal avarice. We diligently avoid participating in any activity that oppresses or defrauds the poor (Amos 2:7; 4:1; Micah 2:2; Isaiah 10:1-2; 32:7; Ezekiel 22:6-7; Jeremiah 5:25, 28).
3. We commit to open hands to the destitute and needy, and to support policies that grant them proper access to resources, work, security, and protection (Deuteronomy 15:7, 11; 26:12).

B. With Regard to Racism

Racism represents a particularly egregious affront to the dignity and worth of persons and its presence is manifest in the life, history, and institutions of all nations. Slavery

and genocide are grievous stains, warranting collective lament, repentance, and repair. Racial oppression in all its forms continues to exact harm throughout the world, distorting the dignity of persons and God's love for the great multitude of all nations (Acts 17:26, Revelation 7:9). The Free Methodist Church was itself born out of a desire to stand against the evil of slavery and we continue to recognize the sin of racism and oppose it in all its forms. We do so with the following convictions:

1. We commit to lament and repent for the ways that we have been complicit in or failed to recognize acts of racial oppression.
2. We commit to an attitude of ceaseless humility and self-examination, recognizing the ease with which our own limitations can make us blind to the experiences and interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4). We shall seek to identify, confess, and redeem thoughts, attitudes, or behaviors that manifest discrimination against a person on the basis of race, ethnicity, or any other distinction between social groups that we create or enforce.
3. Because systemic racism – the way in which human institutions or structures can both actively and passively preserve patterns of discrimination and exclusion – is less perceptible, but no less harmful than overt, individual racist acts, we commit, not just to avoid or sanction individual prejudicial attitudes and actions, but seek to redeem processes, systems, and institutions that continue to perpetuate injustice on the basis of race or ethnicity.
4. Therefore, in our own churches and denomination we commit ourselves to model the racial redemption and reconciliation we hope to see in the world, proclaiming the transformative victory of Jesus Christ into places of great brokenness, looking forward to the day when all people gather before the throne of God.

C. With Regard to Immigrants, Refugees, and Those in Bondage

Issues surrounding immigrants and refugees and modern slavery / human trafficking* globally are complex. They require solutions that both serve the vulnerable and oppressed and also challenge individuals, organizations, and systems that create oppression and enslavement. These solutions include, but are not limited to: prayer, education, rescue, aftercare, proclamation, voting, protest, and an engaged discipleship that sees living justly as integral to

spiritual and community formation.

As we minister to all immigrants and refugees, we do so with basic underlying convictions:

1. We commit to the biblical principle of caring for the foreigners among us regardless of racial or ethnic background, country of origin, or legal status.
2. We commit to acting redemptively with love rather than fear, and to reach out to meet needs as we see them.
3. We commit to identifying intolerance and working to end it, as well as ending any personal inclinations to refer to individuals in less than loving terms.
4. Where there is a conflict, it is our duty to oppose all unjust and harsh laws and to seek to change them.
5. We commit to responding to this crisis in terms of the Great Commission, seeking to reach the lost whoever they may be, ministering to all, caring for all, and showing God's grace to all people.

As we minister to all who are touched by modern slavery / human trafficking, we do so with basic underlying convictions:

1. We commit to centering the work of setting captives free on Jesus our redeemer and His mission.
2. We commit to working for holistic freedom; God desires for each person to experience the joy and hope of being free from physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual captivity.
3. We commit to integrating the work of ending modern slavery/human trafficking with both the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the church. Ending modern slavery / human trafficking is integrally related to ending other injustices. Additionally, hopeful solutions for injustices are found in the community and character formation of people and institutions pursuing holiness.
4. We commit to setting captives free within an atmosphere of worship and community, seeking partnerships with others while embracing lament, humility, prayer, and love.
5. We commit to work towards the mobilization of all influencers within Society, knowing that the church on mission with God is the greater change agent in Society.

*For both local and global context; the terms *modern slavery* and

human trafficking are used. Globally, the term *human trafficking* is more common. In the U.S., and among leading abolitionist organizations, the term *modern slavery* is widely used. The term *human trafficking* has a specific legal context, but within a church context the two terms are somewhat interchangeable. The term *modern slavery* is stronger for this resolution because of our historical context and because of the reality of the problem.

D. With Respect to the Criminal Justice System

A criminal justice system plays an important role in securing peace and order for a Society, protecting innocent people from harm, punishing wrongdoers, and delivering some semblance of justice for victims. Such systems, however, do not always perform these tasks justly. While victims of crimes ought to receive special moral attention, victimizers should receive fair treatment and the opportunity to repent and be rehabilitated.

Although Free Methodists submit to the justice systems of their time and place, we do not unwittingly affirm their understanding of or approach to justice. Such systems should be in a continual process of review and revision toward achieving justice that is equitable and seeks the common good. We especially lament the ways in which such systems incarcerate and treat particular demographics disproportionately. Free Methodists oppose any system that demeans, abuses, depersonalizes, or enslaves human beings, treating them as less than human. We are accordingly committed to justice systems that protect and defend victims of harm without violating the dignity of those punished. God is our Redeemer. It is not the job of the state to redeem those who commit crimes, but the state's criminal justice system must conscientiously preserve space, time, and humane conditions for the restoration of all to human community. The church, including the Free Methodist Church, plays a central role in this restorative aspect of justice through our chaplains, local church ministries, and similarly focused ministries. Remembering that all people are created in the image of God and for fellowship with God, Free Methodists will actively pursue criminal justice system reforms that recognize and protect the dignity of all persons.

¶3222

Sanctity of Life

God is sovereign: the world and all that is in it belongs to God. Though God's eternal purposes may never be thwarted by human action we are still free and responsible to make God-consistent choices in matters of life and death. Christians live in the reality that human beings are created for an eternal purpose.

As we attend to human suffering, we acknowledge that the ability of medical technology to end human suffering is finite. Therefore, we accept our responsibility to use this technology with wisdom and compassion, honoring God, who is ultimately supreme.

Our convictions about the inherent worth of human life form the foundation of our approach to bioethics. These complex bioethical issues involve religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Therefore, Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law of the state or the possibilities of safe medical procedures.

God meets us in our suffering, to comfort us, to shape a Christlike character within, and to make us instruments of His healing. Chronic disease, diminished physical capacity, or ongoing disability do not constitute the end of life and need not compromise one's trust in God.

For the Christian, death is not the end of life, but the transition into eternity. Therefore, physical death is not the ultimate enemy, but part of our journey. God's love sustains us in our suffering. He ministers to us personally and through the healing environment of Christian community. Divine wisdom in the face of suffering comes to us through Scripture, prayer, godly counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit. As we are comforted, we are called to extend God's comfort to those who suffer.

A. **Reproductive Technology**

Reproductive technologies generate a large number of ethical, medical, legal, and theological questions even as they offer hope. The guiding principle, that all human life must be valued, respected, and protected throughout all its stages, must be carefully and consistently applied to every new development. A Christian theology of family must also inform these decisions.

B. **Abortion**

The intentional abortion of a person's life, from conception on, must be judged to be a violation of God's command, "You shall not commit murder," except when extreme circumstances require the termination of a pregnancy to save the life of the pregnant woman.

Induced abortion is the intentional destruction of a person after conception and before delivery by surgical or other means. Therefore, induced abortion is morally unjustifiable except when the act has been decided upon by responsible and competent persons, including Christian professional

counsel, for the purpose of saving the life of a pregnant woman. Abortion, when it serves the ends of population or birth control, personal preference or convenience, and social or economic security, must be considered as selfish and malicious.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy involves religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Christian morality demands that we consider both the biblical commandment and the human situation in which the law must be applied. As Christians, we believe that human life, whether in vitro, mature, or senile, is sacred because life exists in relation to God. Compassionate alternatives and long-term care should be offered to women considering abortion. We counsel physicians and parents to understand that the moral commandment and the law of love are transgressed when human life is destroyed for selfish or malicious ends.

C. Euthanasia

There is no justification for euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. On the other hand, a terminally ill person's request that life not be sustained by heroic measures does not constitute euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. We recognize that the use of painkillers and other medications which carry the risk of shortening life is permissible so long as the intent is to relieve or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death. We further recognize the responsibility of medical professionals to alleviate pain within these parameters. Christians, however, must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living. We believe that there is no such thing as a "useless" life. The value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God who loves us.

D. Capital Punishment

The Free Methodist Church is deeply grieved when any life is taken by murder. We believe that persons who commit these or other horrendous crimes should be justly punished by just laws. Nevertheless, we believe that all human life is sacred, created by God, and therefore we must see all human life as significant and valuable. When governments implement the death penalty (capital punishment), then the life of the convicted person is devalued and all possibility of change in that person's life ends. In well-documented studies innocent people have become condemned and executed, in which cases a sentence meant to bring justice becomes an additional and irreversible form of injustice. For these reasons, the Free

Methodist Church deems the death penalty as currently applied to be inconsistent with our commitments to the sanctity of life.

E. **Other Ethical Dilemmas**

These biblical principles, which guide our approach to bioethics, will need to be applied on an ongoing basis to other ethical dilemmas rising from advances in medical technology. Such ethical dilemmas may include but not be limited to: the allocation of finite resources, organ transplantation, mental health concerns, end-of-life concerns, genetic engineering and testing, gender identity issues.

¶3230 **“We commit ourselves to strive to be just and honest in all our relationships and dealings.” (¶158)**

¶3231 **Life in the Workplace**

As Christians we are called to be servants of all. This norm is equally applicable to employer and employee (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-25). Our concern for justice is primarily a concern to be just and only secondarily a concern to obtain justice. We believe that all persons have the privilege to be gainfully employed irrespective of gender, race, color, national origin, or creed (Romans 10:12).

We recognize the privilege of employees to organize for their betterment. Oath-bound secret pacts or acts of violence designed to violate or defend their rights cannot be condoned. We also recognize the right of employees to remain independent of such organizations. As Christians we do not view management and labor as necessarily hostile to each other. They need not bring distrust and hostility to their place of work or the negotiating table. We resist the exploiting of people or seeing them merely as economic units. We discourage rigid confrontation and favor a problem-solving approach to disagreements.

We endeavor to make our witness effective where we work, remembering that as Christian employees we are responsible first to God and then to our employer and the organization. As Christian employers we have a responsibility to deal fairly and kindly with our employees, preserving the witness of Christian character in both word and deed (Matthew 7:12; Colossians 3:17).

¶3232 **Creation Care**

The Lord God brings salvation to earth through a series of revealed covenants, culminating in the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. The first of these covenants, God’s covenant with the earth (Gen 9), is instituted following humanity’s fall into

sin and after the flood. The rainbow is the visible sign of this covenant. God thus has an everlasting covenant with the earth (Genesis 9:8-17), as well as His saving covenant with people. As God’s stewards on earth, called to “cultivate and care for it” (Genesis 2:15, NABRE), we affirm that God’s covenant with the earth constitutes our stewardship commission.

Therefore:

- A. We affirm the goodness of God’s creation, the value—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual—of engagement with it, and our responsibility to care for it as an integral part of our Christian discipleship and God’s creation mandate (Genesis 2:15).
- B. We lament the ways in which humanity has failed to fulfill these responsibilities, polluting our environment, damaging ecosystems, and harming other species. The consequences of such failures are borne the most by the poor and marginalized.
- C. We affirm and seek to support effective ministries of creation care such as tree planting and reforestation, sustainable agriculture and energy production, drought prevention and relief, environmentally sustainable transportation, appropriate recycling, reducing our consumption, and the minimization of waste.
- D. We commit ourselves to be faithful stewards of God’s creation, engaging in practices that reflect God’s covenant with the earth and our commission to care for it, especially in our preaching, teaching, and spiritual practices; the sustainable stewardship of our church buildings and properties; global and local missions work and ministry; and civic efforts to care for our environment.
- E. We, along with the whole of creation, groan in anticipation of the time when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). We eagerly look forward to the renewal of the whole of creation when God through the work of Jesus Christ finally “reconcile[s] to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Colossians 1:20).

As Regards the Institutions of God

¶3300 **In the Membership Covenant our third set of goals relates to honoring and supporting the institutions of God. These goals can be realized only by God’s grace and power. “As a people, we honor and support the God-ordained institutions**

of family, state, and church.” (¶159)

¶3310

“We commit ourselves to honor the sanctity of marriage as the union of one male and one female in holy love, and the family they form.” (¶159)

¶3311

The Christian and Marriage

A. Principles Regarding Marriage

Nature of Marriage: At creation God instituted marriage for the well-being of humanity (Genesis 2:20-24; Mark 10:6-9). Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong relationship of mutual love and service which the Scriptures call “one flesh.” Such a marriage should be based on mutuality and partnership, patterned not according to prescribed hierarchies but according to the creation of the male and female both in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and the call to mutual submission as illustrated by Christ in His relationship with the Church (Ephesians 5:21-31).

We look not to the state but to the Scriptures for our understanding of human personhood and well-being, including human sexuality and marriage. We order our life of faith and our ministries according to the Scriptures, not according to the shifting values of Society and the state.

Sexual intercourse is God’s gift to humanity, for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be celebrative (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage, between one man and one woman, is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within and following marriage.

With deep compassion for persons who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and especially those who have been mistreated and marginalized in various settings, the Free Methodist Church encourages its congregations to practice welcoming hospitality and embracing lovingkindness toward all who desire to worship among us. We will be a people who offer ourselves as agents of Jesus’s grace and love to others – all others. We will trust the Holy Spirit to convict people of their sin, to enliven hope of transforming possibilities, and then to lead people to God’s best for their lives.

Nevertheless, we hold that marriage can only be the union of one man and one woman who have made a public covenant and vow before God and the state (Genesis 2:20-24; Mark 10:6-9). Therefore, it would be a breach of the doctrine of our church for ministers or members of the Free Methodist Church to conduct, officiate, or assist in officiating the marriage or

union between a same-sex or same-gender couple. In light of our beliefs, ministers and members of the Free Methodist Church shall not officiate or assist in officiating marriages or unions of same-sex or same-gender couples.

We hold that our congregations are stewards of the church property. Officiating or assisting in officiating or hosting a marriage between a same-sex or same-gender couple in any Free Methodist Church building or on any Free Methodist property would be a violation of consecrated Free Methodist property. Therefore, such marriages may not be performed or hosted at Free Methodist churches or on Free Methodist properties.

Marriage that the Free Methodist Church deems doctrinally acceptable, legal, and appropriate, should be safeguarded and supported by both the church and Society and should be formalized with public vows. It is not enough for a couple to live together in private commitment; we believe that they are to covenant before God and the state.

Further, we hold that all these provisions are applicable to and fully binding on all activities and ministries of or affiliated with the Free Methodist Church.

B. Nurturing Healthy Marriages

The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the apostle's command (2 Corinthians 6:14), we expect believers to marry only believers. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnize a marriage. It is contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures to unite a believer with an unbeliever.

Couples considering marriage should seek the wisdom of mature Christian leaders for instruction that promotes full equality in communication, finances, family dynamics, sex, and spiritual formation. Young couples contemplating marriage should seek parental consent.

C. Healing Troubled Marriages

Human sin and rebellion against God always threaten marriages. Sin in the Garden brought a change to the way marriage partners related to each other, with profound consequences for a couple's experience of God's plan for marital oneness (Genesis 3:16b). Early in the biblical story the practice of polygamy and spousal abuse became common. Sadly, a constant feature of the story has been the hardening of heart that may lead to broken vows, marriages, and homes.

The prophets describe God's relationship with Israel against the backdrop of common marital brokenness. God pursues His unfaithful people as a husband who refuses to abandon His adulterous wife. Indeed, the steadfast love of Israel's God claims and wins at last a remnant of His rebellious people (Hosea 1-3; Ezekiel 16). In the fullness of time, Jesus the Messiah brings to full expression this steadfast love of the Lord. That love made flesh in Jesus and His followers becomes the prototype of marital love in the teachings of the Apostle Paul (Ephesians 5:22-33).

Therefore, the church as the Body and Bride of Christ has spiritual resources for marriages in trouble. Through the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, the sacraments, and the mutual support of God's people, God brings healing, reconciliation, and oneness to willing marriage partners. We encourage our members to avail themselves of these rich and powerful resources whenever a marriage relationship is strained. In some cases, pastoral and professional, Christ-centered counsel should be sought.

As in the biblical story, domestic violence, emotional assault, and physical abuse sometimes occur in the homes of our people. Such sin jeopardizes safety of spouse and children and may threaten their very lives. These family members need the special care of the church family for spiritual and emotional protection and healing.

The church recognizes all abusive behavior as sin and destructive to the home and its members. Often in these cases separation is necessary to halt abuse and allow space for the healing of persons and their relationships. Even when the marriage and home has experienced the most grievous violation, however, we insist that God's grace can bring healing. Therefore, we counsel our members to seek the fullest measure of healing and reconciliation possible in every situation.

D. **Divorce**

Although God intends and wills that marriage vows be honored for life, some marriages fail even within the fellowship of God's people. When marriages fail and partners divorce, they have violated God's intention for marriage and often one or both have violated their vows to love and cherish the other. Such violations, whatever their reason, constitute rebellion against God's plan for their lives and result in personal brokenness. After a divorce each partner needs healing from God, with counsel towards repentance where needed and renewed faith in God for all involved. The church must stand ready to be agents of this healing work in their lives.

A divorce may result from a variety of sinful acts, attitudes, and responses. Sexual infidelity, abandonment, and patterns of abusive behavior that threaten spouse and children are the most commonly identified sins destructive of marriages. Other sins, however, also sometimes lead to divorce, such as selfishness, anger, fear, obsessive preoccupation, and careless neglect. The hardness of heart that drives partners to divorce may trace back to many different manifestations of sin.

When questioned about marriage and divorce, Jesus stressed three principles. First, He cites the intent from the beginning that no marriage would fail. Second, He identifies “hardness of heart” as the ultimate marriage killer – because either it causes destructive behavior or refuses the grace that can heal and reconcile. And, third, He refuses to support the common assumption that in some cases one partner has a right (i.e., enjoys freedom) simply to walk away. Whatever the particulars, Jesus offered grace that heals and empowers people to live according to God’s plan – to move from their sin to a life that pleases God.

E. **Care after Divorce, Singleness, and Remarriage**

When a marriage fails, the church seeks to restore people from the trauma of their divorce by inviting its members into a process of restoration (see ¶¶7110-7130). Godly counsel that promotes full equality will help people understand what happened in their marriage; specifically, where they may have contributed to the failure and how they have been wounded by it. Sinful relational patterns will be exposed, forsaken, and replaced with Spirit-directed and Christ-centered patterns. The damage to children, the larger families, and their witness to Christ will also be acknowledged and where possible restitution will be made.

Persons who have suffered the trauma of divorce must exercise extreme caution when considering remarriage. Unless they have experienced healing and restoration from their failure in marriage, they will likely fail again. In some cases, wisdom will insist upon remaining single and free to live in devotion only to Christ.

One who has been divorced shall not by that fact alone be denied the privileges and responsibilities of a future marriage in the Lord. The grace that brings correction, conviction, repentance, faith, healing, and restoration can make all things new, even for a Christian whose sin may have broken a marriage. When grace restores the brother

or sister who has failed, the plan God has for human well-being reopens, even the possibility of remarriage.

F. **Refusal of Counsel**

When a member divorces a spouse or remarries without seeking the counsel or following the guidance of the pastor or the Membership Care Committee, the committee shall review the case and recommend appropriate action to the local Board of Administration. Corrective action shall include removal from leadership and may include suspension or expulsion from membership.

Exceptional cases may arise for which the pastor or the Membership Care Committee can find no explicit direction in this *Book of Discipline*. In such cases, the pastor, after consultation with the Membership Care Committee, shall confer with a superintendent.

¶3320 **“We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ.” (¶159)**

¶3321 **Nurture and Education of Children**

The Free Methodist Church believes that the institution of the family is a God-ordained means of protecting Society and protecting children in Society. We believe that God’s intention is that family includes father, mother, and children. We further believe that parents, whether by birth or adoption, are divinely ordered to guide the education, health care, and discipline of their children.

The Free Methodist Church views the education of its children as a parental responsibility (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Ephesians 6:4). Part of that responsibility may be delegated but not relinquished to either public or Christian institutions of education. The FMC asserts that this God-given responsibility cannot be taken from parents by principals’ implementation, state educational bureaucracy, or national legislation. We further assert that all decisions concerning children, including but not limited to education, discipline, and healthcare, belong to the child’s parents.

The Free Methodist Church expects to be interactively involved with parents in teaching and nurturing all children in the foundations of the Christian faith. It is the purpose of the family, both the human and family of God, to provide a setting in which adults and children can grow together in their love of God and love for each other (Deuteronomy 11:18-19; Joel 1:3).

Due to the value Jesus demonstrated toward children (Matthew 19:14), our churches make ministry to children and youth a priority. Ministries focus not only on leading young persons

to faith in Jesus Christ but also on enfolded them into church membership and ministry.

The church wishes to support public schools and recognizes the challenge to Christian teachers, parents, and students to be as lights in the world. When parents choose to use Christian schools or homeschooling, we also support them in their decision.

¶3330 **“We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and we pray for all who lead.” (¶159)**

¶3331 **The Christian and the State**

As Christians, we are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God and secondarily of this world (Philippians 3:20). Such dual citizenship carries with it both privilege and responsibility. We recognize the legitimate authority of human governments, as part of God’s plan to bless the world through wise governance that supports what is good and protects against what is evil (Philippians 3:20; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:14). Although our ultimate allegiance is to God, we respectfully submit to governmental authority as an expression of obedience to the Lord Jesus and His saving plans for the world. Thus, we commit to good citizenship and good deeds as salt and light in our nation and world that will glorify God and bless our neighbors now and always (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:13-15).

A. Civic Participation

As Christians we pray for “all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:1-2) and live in submission “for the Lord’s sake to every human authority” (1 Peter 2:13). We pursue faithfulness to Jesus Christ in all things, work for the common good of all, and actively seek to influence social, cultural, and political systems toward the example and teachings of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-16). We oppose all that degrades, demeans, and dehumanizes human persons and the dignity and value with which God invests them (Romans 13:7; 1 Corinthians 13). With these commitments in mind, we exercise our responsibility to vote in ways that are informed by biblical teaching and the church’s best understanding of contemporary issues.

B. Law Enforcement and Military Service

God has authorized human governments to reward right and punish evil (Romans 13:3-5; 1 Peter 2:14). Thus, those who serve in law enforcement perform worthy and honorable service for the sake of their neighbors at local, state, and national levels (Romans 13:1-7).

We hold that every nation has a responsibility to protect itself against invasion and aggression. Therefore, those who serve in the armed forces make a worthy and honorable

contribution to the well-being of the nation.

At the same time, we regard aggression, as an instrument of local, state, or national policy, as indefensible. The destruction of life and property necessary to warfare are contrary to the spirit and mind of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 2:4; 9:6-7; Matthew 5:44-45). It is our duty as Christians to promote peace and goodwill, to foster understanding and trust among all people, and to work for the renunciation of war as a means to settle disputes. It is our firm conviction that the consciences of our members be respected (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Therefore, we claim exemption from all military service for those who register officially with the church as conscientious objectors to war.

C. Swearing Oaths

As Free Methodists we do not prohibit the taking of an oath when it is required by law. In every case, the Christian must speak in justice and truth (Jeremiah 4:1-2; Ephesians 4:25).

As Regards the Church

¶3400 **In the Membership Covenant our fourth set of goals relates to life together as a church. These goals can be realized only by God's grace and power. "As God's people, we express the life of Christ in the world." (¶160)**

¶3401 **The Christian and the Church**

The church is part of God's eternal plan to make a people for Himself who are holy and blameless. It was instituted by Christ during His ministry when He commissioned the church to be His unique representative in the world. Therefore, the Scriptures speak of the church as the Body of Christ. The church has been empowered for its ministry by the active, ongoing work of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. Just as New Testament letters were written to churches in particular places, made up of particular people, the church is not only universal, but also visible and local.

The church is the people of God in the world. In both Old and New Testaments this fact is amply illustrated. The Lord of the church gives gifts to His people to serve one another and to minister in the world. Christians who separate from the church deprive themselves of the spiritual resources and opportunities God has ordained. Consistent with the Scriptures, we affirm membership in the church as a biblical reality noted from the earliest days after Pentecost (Acts 2:47). When the Holy Spirit gives new life in Christ, He effects our spiritual entrance into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Free Methodist Church is one denomination among the many other legitimate, visible

churches in the world. Membership is a visible and local sign of entrance into the universal church.

¶3402 **Leadership in the Church**

Leadership in the church is an honor that has accompanying responsibilities and sacrifices. The Scriptures describe the qualities of leaders in such passages as: Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9. Those who are chosen to lead in the church do so in a spirit of humility and dependence upon God. They must be spiritually mature individuals whose lifestyle shall be in harmony with the Scriptures, the doctrine of the Free Methodist Church (¶¶100-131), the principles of the Membership Covenant (¶¶154-160), which are the goals of our maturing life in Christ, and of the selection of leaders (¶6200.E).

¶3410 **“We commit ourselves to contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love, and understanding in all our relationships.” (¶160)**

¶3411 **Life in the Church**

Growing Christians find their supportive environment in the fellowship of believers. They do not live independently from the Body of Christ. Worship requires a proper attitude toward God. It involves the believer’s active participation. Mature believers prepare their minds and spirits for worship. Sincere followers of Christ reach out to God in praise, thanksgiving, dedication, confession, faith, and service. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are vital parts of the life of the church that were commanded by the Lord. God has promised to graciously meet the person who faithfully takes part in these sacraments. As a part of the Body of Christ, believers take part in corporate church worship as well as in the other ministries of the church. Small group participation is a means of grace and growth. Support, insight, inspiration, and discipline are the fruit of fellowship.

¶3412 **Love of Others**

Growth in Christ requires taking responsibility to love others, all of whom are loved by God and made in His image. The quality of Christians’ relationships with others affects the quality of their lives. Growth in Christ requires readiness to mend relationships both with God and with others (James 5:16). The Ten Commandments, summarized into two commandments by Jesus (Luke 10:25-28), teach the nature of our relationships with God and with others. Christians express their love both by deeds of kindness and by personal words of witness that point to Christ as the embodiment of God’s love and the Savior of the world.

¶3413 **Spiritual Gifts and Ministry**

Followers of Jesus are called to exercise both natural abilities and spiritual gifts in the church for the sake of the Kingdom of God. God endows all persons with natural abilities that may be employed for service and ministry. The believer uses these in ways that glorify God. In addition, the Holy Spirit also distributes, as He wishes, spiritual gifts for the common good and the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Peter 4:1-11). We welcome the exercise of spiritual gifts when under the Lordship of Christ and guided by His love (1 Corinthians 13). Their usage is motivated by the Spirit, and they are to be employed in “a fitting and orderly way” (1 Corinthians 14:40). The believer seeks the gifts not for personal aggrandizement, but to further the cause of the Kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

¶3414

Divine Healing

All healing of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God. Consistent with the Scriptures (James 5:14-15), we urge our pastors to make opportunity for the sick and afflicted to come before God in the fellowship of the church, in strong faith that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is both able and willing to heal. He may heal by the mediation of surgery, medication, change of environment, counseling, corrected attitudes, or through the restorative processes of nature itself. He may heal through one or more of the above in combination with prayer, or He may heal by direct intervention in response to prayer. The Scriptures report many cases of the latter kind of healing, which centers in the life and ministry of the apostles and the church. At the same time, we recognize that although God’s sovereign purposes are good and He is working toward a final redemption which assures wholeness to all believers, He may not grant physical healing for all in this life. We believe that in such cases He can glorify Himself through the resurrection to life everlasting.

¶3420

“We commit ourselves to practice the principles of Christian stewardship, for the glory of God and the growth of the church.” (¶160)

¶3421

Stewardship of Possessions

Although as Christians we accumulate goods, we should not make possessions or wealth the goal of our lives (Matthew 6:19-20; Luke 12:16-21). Rather, as stewards we give generously to meet the needs of others and to support ministry (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13). The Scriptures allow the privilege of private ownership. Though we hold title to possessions under civil law, we regard all we have as the property of God entrusted to us as stewards.

Gambling contradicts faith in God whose covenants in the

Old Testament promise to care for God's people and whose Son in the New Testament taught us to trust in the goodness and generosity of the Father toward all (Deuteronomy 28:1-14; Matthew 6:6-15; 25-33). Gambling lacks both the dignity of wages earned and the honor of a gift. It takes substance without yielding a fair exchange. Because it excites greed, it destroys the initiative of honest toil and often results in addiction. Government sponsorship of lotteries only enlarges the problem. We refrain from gambling in all its forms because of the evils it encourages, for conscience's sake and as a witness to the faith we have in Christ.

While customs and community standards change, there are changeless scriptural principles that govern us as Christians in our attitudes and conduct. Whatever we buy, use, or wear reflects our commitment to Christ and our witness in the world (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). We therefore avoid extravagance and live in simplicity.

¶3430 **“We commit ourselves to go into our world and make disciples.” (¶160)**

Jesus said, “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing ... and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Disciple making consists in more than the transfer of knowledge. It aims at holy living. Disciples have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), seek first the priorities of His kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and fulfill His mission in the world.

Resources for Churches

¶3500 See the website of the Free Methodist Church USA at <https://fmcusa.org/resources> for additional resources. Print resources are also available via the Light + Life Bookstore online at <https://freemethodistbooks.com>.

In the following chapter, paragraph numbers and section letters with a plus sign + beside them indicate those items which may be changed by the Board of Administration. All others may be changed only by the General Conference.

Chapter 4 General Administration

General Conference, Free Methodist Church USA

Preamble

¶4000 “It is desired that all things be considered as in the immediate presence of God; that every person speak freely whatever is in his heart. While we are conversing, let us have an especial care to set God always before us. In the intermediate hours, let us redeem all the time we can for private exercises. Therein let us give ourselves to prayer for one another, and for a blessing on our labor.” – John Wesley (*Large Minutes*)

Purpose

¶4010

- A. The General Conference shall have general organizational, legislative, judicial, promotional, and supervisory powers over the activities of the church. It shall have power to determine the number of its officers, their qualifications for office, and the manner of their selection.
- B. The General Conference is the primary legislative body in the church. It shall have full power to make rules and regulations for the church, under the limitations and restrictions described in ¶¶210-213. *Robert's Rules of Order* in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure in the General Conference sessions.
- C. It is the inalienable right of any annual conference, Society, or individual member of the Free Methodist Church to register concerns and offer resolutions to be processed by the Free Methodist Church USA. Concerns will be submitted to the General Conference Board of Administration to determine the appropriate body to respond to them. Resolutions will be submitted for consideration through the General Conference resolution review process.
- D. Resolutions must be processed through the Resolutions Committees of the annual conferences. Those Committees shall review, rate, and forward them to the General Conference Resolutions Review Committee, appointed by the Board of Administration, which will determine whether a resolution should be processed by the entire General Conference or by the Board of Administration of the FMCUSA. Those resolutions assigned to the BOA will be processed during its spring meeting immediately preceding the General Conference. The BOA will issue a report on the disposition of all resolutions it has processed.

That report will be sent to all delegates in advance of the General Conference. At the General Conference, any delegate may move that a resolution be considered by the body. Such a motion must be approved by a majority vote of the General Conference.

Composition

¶4020 The General Conference shall be composed of an equal number of ministerial and lay delegates to be elected by each annual conference, as well as the following people, by virtue of their office:

- A. Currently serving bishops of the FMCUSA
- B. Department of World Missions Area Directors
- C. AFMEI Presidents

Delegates of each annual conference are to be elected at the last session prior to the session of the General Conference, except that conferences held within nine months of the General Conference may elect their delegates the year before.

Ministerial Delegates

¶4030

- A. Each annual conference and provisional annual conference shall be entitled to one ministerial delegate in the General Conference, and whenever an annual conference shall reach 800 adult lay members, it shall be entitled to a second ministerial delegate, and to an additional ministerial delegate for every subsequent 600 adult lay members.
 1. Mission areas not under an annual conference or a provisional annual conference but meeting the markers for an annual conference or a provisional annual conference as described in ¶¶ 4560 and 4570 may be entitled to representation at the General Conference as delimited in ¶¶ 4030 and 4040.
 2. The Board of Bishops shall receive the recommendation from the Area Director to make a determination of the number of delegates to be included in the General Conference delegation from Mission Areas described in ¶4030.A.1 based on the number of ordained elders and disciples being formed from the Mission Area.
- B. The superintendent of a provisional annual conference or annual conference shall serve as the first ministerial delegate of that conference by virtue of office. Additional ministerial delegates shall be elected by ballot. The Conference Nominating Committee shall prepare a slate of ministerial nominees, from which both delegate(s)

and reserve(s) shall be elected. All ministerial delegates shall be elected by a majority vote of those present and voting. Delegates may be nominated by the Nominating Committee, giving due consideration to ethnic, gender, cultural, and geographical representation as well as to senior pastors of large churches. Nominees shall be elders under active appointment and members of the annual conference that elected them, both at the time of their election and at the time of the General Conference. When a ministerial delegate leaves the conference from which he/she is elected prior to the time of the General Conference by accepting an appointment to serve another conference, he/she shall be automatically disqualified as a delegate.

- C. In emergencies where neither elected nor reserve delegates can serve in this capacity, the Administrative Committee (or its equivalent) of that conference shall have the authority to elect by majority vote the additional reserve delegates to serve.
- D. When multiple superintendents serve an annual conference, they must determine and declare to the Conference Nominating Committee which of them will serve as the first ministerial delegate. Those not serving as the first ministerial delegate are eligible to be elected among the additional ministerial delegates.

Lay Delegates

¶4040

- A. Each annual conference and provisional annual conference shall be entitled to the same number of lay as ministerial delegates in the General Conference.
- B. Lay delegates to the General Conference shall be elected by ballot by the conference they are to represent. The Conference Nominating Committee shall prepare a slate of lay nominees, from which both delegate(s) and reserve(s) shall be elected. All lay delegates shall be elected by a majority vote of those present and voting. Delegates may be nominated by the Nominating Committee, if the conference so chooses, giving due consideration to ethnic, gender, cultural, and geographical representation. Nominees must at the time of election and at the time of the General Conference be members of the church in full relation within the bounds of the conference which elects them.

- C. In emergencies where neither elected nor reserve delegates can serve in this capacity, the Administrative Committee (or its equivalent) of that conference shall have authority to elect by majority vote the additional reserve delegates to serve.
- D. Presidents of AFMEI denominational institutions, who are lay members of a conference church, shall, by virtue of office, be delegates to the General Conference.

Delegate Credentials

¶4050

- A. The secretary of each annual conference shall furnish certificates of election to all delegates, signed by the president and the secretary as the credentials upon which they are to be admitted to the General Conference.
- B. A delegate to the General Conference is not a member until present with credentials and seated.
- C. Conferences of mission origin may send their delegates to General Conference as provided in their several Constitutions which have been approved by the General Conference.

Time and Place

¶4060

- A. The General Conference shall meet every four years (see ¶4320.L).
- B. The bishop(s), or if there be none, the secretary of the General Conference, shall, whenever two-thirds of the annual conferences shall demand it, call an extra session of the General Conference, fixing the date and the time of assembling later than the next ensuing session of each of the annual conferences.
- C. The determination of venue for the General Conference shall be made by the Board of Administration serving in the quadrennium preceding said General Conference.
- D. The Friday preceding every General Conference shall be observed as a day of fasting and prayer.

Organizing Principles

¶4070

- A. The bishops shall preside at the sittings of the General

Conference in such order as they may determine. If no bishop is present, the General Conference shall elect by ballot an elder to preside.

- B. The General Conference secretary (previously elected by the Board of Administration) shall continue in office until a successor is named and shall be custodian of the General Conference records and journals. A record of conscientious objectors shall be kept as reported by the annual conference secretaries (see ¶3331.B, ¶5130.B.8).
- C. At all times when General Conference is in session, two-thirds of all the delegates elected by the annual conferences shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The General Conference may recess from time to time until a quorum is present.
- D. The members of the General Conference shall deliberate and vote as one body; nevertheless, upon the call of one-fourth of the members present and voting, the house shall divide; and it shall require a majority of the ministerial and of the lay delegates to pass any vote or transact any business.

Study Commission on Doctrine

¶4080

- A. A Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) shall serve the church by studying theological and social issues facing the church and make recommendations to the Board of Bishops, Board of Administration, and General Conference.
- B. The Study Commission on Doctrine will be composed of the Board of Bishops plus seven additional members to be nominated by the Board of Bishops and confirmed by the Board of Administration and will serve for one quadrennium. The SCOD may gather advice and counsel from persons with expertise in various theological and social issues from across the denomination, but not limited to within the denomination, with an emphasis on gender and racial diversity. Such persons can initiate discussion and propose action to be referred for review.

Bishops

¶4100

Bishops are the general overseers of the church. They lead the church to fulfill its mission, which requires them to be holy examples with skill and experience to provide that oversight. They must understand the nature and purpose of the church. They must also be able to communicate clearly the gospel, the mission and vision of the Free Methodist Church; possess a well-cultivated understanding of other cultures; and, identify, develop, and lead godly, competent leaders. Each bishop shall be amenable to the General Conference for the discharge of his/her official duties and shall be responsible for his/her conduct to the annual conference to which he/she belongs.

The Nomination and Election of Bishops

¶4110

- A. The General Conference shall elect by ballot two or more traveling elders as bishops to serve as the pastoral overseers of various areas of the denomination, who shall constitute the Board of Bishops. These are to be persons who exhibit exemplary character and leadership qualities, and who embody deep commitment to the mission, doctrine, and theology of the Free Methodist Church. The term of office of bishops shall be four years and shall begin 90 days after the close of the General Conference at which they are elected. The number of bishops to be elected will be established by General Conference action and remains in effect until changed by a subsequent General Conference action.
- B. The nomination and election process shall be as follows:
 1. Call to Prayer: During the year prior to General Conference, the Board of Bishops and the Board of Administration shall call the church to prayer, specifically focused on the election of bishops.
 2. Search Committee: A Search Committee will be formed two years prior to any General Conference in the following manner: Each Annual Conference BOA will be asked to submit names in alignment with the candidate qualifications in the following paragraph. The FMCUSA Board of Administration will prayerfully seek out qualified candidates. Members of the Search Committee must be spiritually mature. Some of them must also have experience in developing or searching for candidates of significant positions of leadership. The Search Committee must include at least one lay and one clergy

member from the Board of Administration. Consideration shall be given to ethnic, gender, cultural, and geographical representation across the breadth of the FMCUSA.

3. **Candidate Qualifications:** The nominees should have fruitful leadership experience related to the spiritual life and leadership responsibilities noted in ¶¶ 4100 and 4120. Ethnic, gender, cultural, and geographical considerations shall be given due attention in selecting nominees for bishop. Potential candidates must grant their permission to proceed through the nomination process. Nominations from annual conferences to the Search Committee must be accompanied by supporting rationale on a form designed and provided by the Search Committee. Sitting bishops, having already been previously qualified, who are willing to continue to serve, will be placed on the ballot with the other nominees.
 4. **Procedures:** The refined list of nominees, with supporting rationale, will be forwarded to the Board of Administration of the FMCUSA. The Board of Administration may ask the Search Committee to consider (an) additional nominee(s). The total number of nominees for bishops forwarded to the Board of Administration will exceed by at least two the number of bishops currently serving. The General Conference secretary shall compile the nominee information in standardized format and distribute it, by paper or electronic means, to all delegates no later than 30 days prior to the opening of General Conference. The ballots for election of bishops shall consist of the names of these nominees and the incumbent bishops who are willing to continue to serve.
 5. **Lead Bishop:** Following the election of the bishops, the Bishops Search Committee shall convene to name a Lead Bishop and bring its recommendation to the General Conference for its affirmation prior to the conclusion of the General Conference.
- C. The Board of Bishops shall develop an internship plan for newly elected bishops. The plan will include training in the duties and responsibilities of the bishop, debriefing on sensitive matters, transfer of materials, informing on pressing and current denominational issues, coaching on matters related to personal preparedness for the office, and accompanying the seated bishops on necessary travel for the sake of introduction, transition, and relationship building. Such training is to take place commencing upon the election of the newly elected bishop(s) and culminating in the full transfer of authority 90 days subsequent to the General Conference at which he/she/they were elected. Compensation

for interning bishops will be determined by the Board of Administration.

- D. In the event of a vacancy on the Board of Bishops during the interim between sessions of the General Conference, the preceding General Conference shall fill the vacancy with an election held by paper or electronic ballot. Existing rules for the election of bishops by the General Conference shall apply.

The Role of a Bishop

¶4120 To assist the bishops in directing the Church, these leadership priorities are set forth.

A. Regarding self and family, the bishop shall:

1. Feed his/her soul (heart, mind, spirit), diligently attending to the means of grace;
2. Love his/her spouse and family, maintaining a household of faith; and
3. Fulfill his/her vows as a baptized disciple and elder called to leadership.

B. Regarding the General Church, the bishop shall:

1. Lead in word, sacrament, and order. The task of the “word” applies to bishops in two regards, to teach the apostolic gospel and to protect the church from error. Regarding “sacrament” (and worship) the church gives praise to God, pleads with Him for mercy, and receives the grace God mediates to His people. Bishops lead the church in its adoration and petition of God and in upholding the sacredness of the Lord’s Supper and baptism as means of grace. Regarding “order,” bishops lead the church by articulating its mission and vision. Thus, bishops must have a deep commitment to the church’s mission, insight into the complexities of human nature, and skill at guiding others;
2. Cast the vision of the Free Methodist Church and inspire its leaders, members, and attendees to advance the vision, live according to Kingdom values, love God, and serve Him sacrificially and faithfully;
3. Encourage every church to be a healthy, biblical community of holy people, multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.

C. Regarding Annual Conferences, the bishop shall exercise

or delegate his/her authority to:

1. Multiply godly, competent leaders, who disciple and equip others;
2. Train, ordain, transfer, cite, or suspend pastors and leaders as need and circumstances require;
3. Serve with executive authority as the conference president;
4. Disciple superintendents and conference leaders to:
 - a. Grow spiritually and develop professionally in their calling;
 - b. Identify, recruit, equip, deploy, and encourage godly, competent leaders;
 - c. Encourage and equip pastors and leaders to achieve missional priorities;
 - d. Develop growth strategies;
 - e. Maintain our Wesleyan and Free Methodist distinctives;
5. Serve as chair of the Ministerial Appointments Committees of his/her assigned conferences (see ¶5220);
6. Form new provisional and annual conferences as the needs of the work demand, subject to approval of the General Conference Board of Administration;
7. Decide all questions of law at annual conferences, subject to an appeal to the General Conference. A bishop's decision upon a point of law arising in annual conference session shall be the rule unless reversed by the General Conference.

Retirement of Bishops

¶4150

- A. A bishop may retire:
 1. Following his/her 62nd birthday if the bishop so chooses; or
 2. At any time because of failing health. Disability status shall be determined by the Board of Administration upon recommendation from either the Human Resources Department or the Board of Administration Benefits Committee, based upon medical evidence.

- B. When a bishop, or former bishop, retires he/she may be given the title of Bishop Emeritus. Such may be granted by the FMCUSA Board of Administration, provided he/she has given honorable and distinguished service to the church as bishop.
- C. The title of Bishop Emeritus may, due to extenuating circumstances as verified by the conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board (MEG Board), be reviewed and/or adjusted by the FMCUSA Board of Administration.

Board of Bishops

¶4200 The Board of Bishops provides primary pastoral leadership of the denomination with ecclesiastical authority to lead and direct the church and develop and articulate the purpose, vision, values, and expected outcomes of the church. They shall convene immediately following the General Conference in which they are elected to determine their roles and titles on the Board of Bishops other than the role and title “Lead Bishop” and their assignments for fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as articulated in ¶4120. They shall assume responsibility for the fruitfulness and vitality of the annual conferences and shall recommend to the General Conference Board of Administration changes in an annual conference’s status resulting in merger, closure, or realignment.

Board of Administration

The Nomination and Election of the Board of Administration

¶4300

- A. The General Conference shall elect a Board of Administration, determine its powers, and prescribe the qualifications of its members and manner of their selection. The Board shall be comprised of:
 1. All the U.S. bishops;
 2. One Superintendent from each bishop’s area;
 3. Sufficient additional elders (not excluding additional superintendents), with equal representation from each bishop’s area, to give a total of 12 clergy, which ensures a balance of voices from the eldership, the superintendency, and the bishopric on the BOA;
 4. Twelve lay members, with equal representation from each bishop’s area;

5. Such honorary members as the Board of Administration shall designate and approve.
- B. Each annual conference may, if it desires, submit up to two clergy and two lay nominees for election to the Board of Administration. Such a nominee shall:
1. Be widely known in the community, church, and conference as a follower of Christ in word, wisdom, attitude, and deed;
 2. Have exercised leadership gifts in the Free Methodist Church;
 3. Have provided quality leadership in both the local church and annual conference;
 4. Have served, or be serving, as a delegate to or leader of an annual conference, or be an ordained elder in the conference;
 5. Have demonstrated strong ability to engage in a meaningful way on matters of mission and vision of the Church, locally and globally; and
 6. Have demonstrated commitment to attend and positively participate in scheduled meetings.
- C. Submission of such nominees must be completed by the nominating annual conference no later than 60 days prior to the General Conference and must be submitted on the provided nomination form, including biographical data. A one-paragraph introduction of each nominee may be attached to the nominating form.

Nomination forms from each U.S. area will be sent to the General Conference delegates from that area no later than 30 days prior to the General Conference. The forms will also be distributed prior to balloting for election of the Board of Administration.

The delegates from each area will caucus during General Conference as a regular part of the agenda with a current bishop serving as chair of the caucus for the purpose of nominating its representatives to the next Board of Administration. Prior to General Conference, and again during the caucus, the nomination forms will be distributed to all delegates within the respective caucus area and the candidates introduced. The General Conference delegates from each area shall select their nominees by ballot

from the nominee slate and present them to the General Conference for election to the Board of Administration.

A majority of the Board of Administration members shall be delegates to the General Conference electing them.

Organization

¶4310+

- A. The term of office of each Board of Administration member will begin 30 days after the close of the General Conference in which they were elected and shall remain in office for four years or until 30 days following the close of the subsequent General Conference. The incoming Board of Bishops will nominate a chair and vice-chair of the board. Officer elections will be held via electronic ballot by the incoming Board of Administration within 60 days following General Conference.
- B. A Nominating Committee of not less than six persons, including two bishops and consisting of equal lay and clergy representation, shall be elected by the Board of Administration to subsequently nominate the members and chairs of the committees and task forces of the Board. In the selection process, sensitivity to regional, ethnic, and gender diversity should be demonstrated.
- C. The Nominating Committee shall nominate a person who is not a member of the Board of Administration to serve as secretary of the General Conference. This person shall also serve as the secretary of the Board. The Board shall elect the secretary, who shall serve with voice but no vote, unless his/her vote is needed to establish lay-clergy balance.
- D. It shall be the secretary's duty to make a full report of the proceedings of the Board of Administration to the General Conference.
- E. The Board of Administration may employ a general church secretary as a denominational executive who shall then assume all the responsibilities and authority of the secretary of the General Conference and other duties as may be assigned by the Board.
- F. Termination of membership in the Free Methodist Church shall automatically terminate membership on the Board of Administration.

- G. No General Conference officer other than the bishops and the secretary may be a member of the Board of Administration.
- H. The Board shall assign its work to committees and boards as it shall determine and may elect an Executive Committee. The Board may determine the rules and regulations for the conduct of its business.

Authority and Responsibilities

¶4320+

- A. The Board of Administration shall be responsible for policy, procedural, financial, and legal issues during the interim between General Conference sessions.
- B. It shall meet at least annually and whenever the bishops or one-third of the members shall deem it necessary.
- C. A majority of the members elected shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.
- D. Each member of the Board of Administration owes primary duty to the Board and secondary duty to the committees to which he/she has been elected.
- E. The Board of Administration shall have power to accept resignations, fill vacancies, and remove for cause any of its members during the interim between General Conference sessions, subject to the provisions of the *Book of Discipline*. Persistent neglect of duty and excessive absence of scheduled meetings qualifies as cause.
- F. The Board of Administration shall elect the Board of Directors of The Free Methodist Foundation. The Board of Directors of the Foundation may suggest names to the Nominating Committee of the Board of Administration.
- G. The Board of Administration shall set the salaries of the bishops and the Chief Operating Officer, considering the recommendations from the Budget and Finance Committee.
- H. World Ministries Center Personnel
The Board of Administration shall have power to employ suitable personnel in the leadership of the various church ministries and may delegate this responsibility to the Board of Bishops.
- I. The finances of the church shall be administered by the Director of Finance under the leadership of the Chief

Operating Officer. The Director of Finance shall be bonded.

J. Financial Reporting

1. The Board of Administration shall employ a certified public accountant firm to audit annually the accounts of the general church. The auditor will make an annual report in writing to the Board of Administration with recommendations, if any.
2. The proper officers shall publish in the *Yearbook* annually full and detailed statements of the assets, liabilities, net worth, and financial standing of the general church and its corporations.
3. Women's Ministries International and Men's Ministries International auxiliaries shall make and file annually their financial statements with the secretary of the Board of Administration.

K. The Board of Administration shall oversee all church property (see ¶6400).

L. The Board of Administration shall have the power to establish the time and place for the meeting of the General Conference. It shall make appropriate arrangements for the General Conference.

M. Conference Boundaries

1. Any question of conference boundaries that may arise in the interim between General Conferences shall be referred to the Board of Administration.
2. The Board of Administration may prepare proposals to merge two or more conferences or otherwise revise existing conference boundaries and recommend such proposals to the conferences involved and to the bishop of record. Changes will be made upon the majority vote of the annual conferences concerned and with the consent of a majority of the Board of Administration. In the event that the proposal is rejected, a written rationale for the rejection shall be submitted to the Board of Administration by the conferences. The Board of Administration shall have authority to revise the proposal if it deems it wise and resubmit it to the conferences. The Board of Administration may send representatives to the conferences to make a full explanation.

3. Conferences considering merger or the revision of their boundaries (except as provided in ¶6850) may initiate discussions with their concerned neighbors, keeping the bishop of record informed. The bishop shall inform the Board of Administration which may convey its thinking to the conferences through the bishop of record if it so desires. Approval requires a majority vote of the annual conferences involved, voting separately, and a majority vote of the Board of Administration.
 4. When an annual conference merges with another annual conference, the bishop of record shall assure that the records and archival materials are conveyed to the merged conference or, in the case of the dissolution of a conference, that such materials are deposited in the Marston Memorial Historical Center for filing and preservation.
- N. The members of the Board of Administration of the Free Methodist Church USA, elected by the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church USA, shall constitute the members of the Free Methodist Church USA Corporation (see ¶9100).
- O. The Board of Administration of the General Conference shall have the power to cite a Society or an annual conference to appear before it to show cause why it should not be declared in a state of insubordination when reliable information reaches the Board that the accused body is openly in a state of insubordination and disobedience. Notice of the order to show cause shall be given in a clear and definite statement of the facts constituting the state of insubordination so that the accused body may be properly informed of the grounds of the accusation. The order shall be served upon the secretary of the accused body. If the Board should find it guilty or if it should admit guilt, the Board shall have the power to suspend it of all rights and of recognition as a Free Methodist body until the ensuing General Conference, which shall have final disposition of the case.

If the convicted body should reform and pledge its loyalty to the church and the *Book of Discipline* and show contrition for its insubordination, the Board of Administration shall have the power to reinstate it.

Finance and Pension

Budget and Finance Committee

¶4350+

- A. The Board of Administration shall elect a Budget and Finance Committee of not less than five members. All members, including the chair, shall be elected with nominations from the Nominating Committee. A bishop and the Chief Operating Officer (COO) shall be ex officio members of the committee.
- B. Terms of service shall be for the interim of General Conferences.
- C. In consultation with the Budget and Finance Committee, the Board of Bishops shall hire and oversee a COO who will make a report to the Board of Administration at each of its meetings.
- D. In consultation with the COO, the Budget and Finance Committee will:
 1. Recommend policy to assure good stewardship of church financial assets, assure appropriate levels of financial performance and debt levels, maintain appropriate financial flexibility, select investment managers, negotiate fees and review performance, and assure proper accounting and reporting of all church financial records;
 2. Recommend to the Board of Administration compensation levels for the bishops and COO;
 3. Provide a careful review and recommend to the Board of Administration the operating budgets of the Free Methodist Church USA;
 4. Serve as the Audit Review Committee (less ex officio members); and
 5. Develop and recommend to the Board of Administration any changes in the model used to fund the work of the Free Methodist Church USA.

General Church Funding

¶4360+

- A. The portion of the general church budget that pertains to world missions shall be funded by methods and programs devised by the Missions Resource Team, in consultation with the Global Advisory Team and the Missions Catalyst

- Committee, and approved by the Board of Administration.
- B. All other General Church ministries, including their administrative costs, shall be funded as determined by the Board of Administration upon recommendation of the Budget and Finance Committee in consultation with the U.S. Superintendent Leadership Team.
 - C. The Board of Administration may approve projects for promotion that are not included in the general church budget. The Board of Administration shall develop guidelines for defining, approving, promoting, and administering such projects.
 - D. Approved projects outside of the general church may be made available to individuals, groups, and organizations outside the Free Methodist Church.
 - E. Contributions received at the World Ministries Center shall be applied to the home church operations budget unless specifically designated otherwise by the donor.
 - F. The proposed budget of each general church ministry shall be prepared annually under the direction of the Chief Operating Officer and presented to the Budget and Finance Committee. The recommended budget shall be submitted by the Budget and Finance Committee to the Board of Administration for approval.
 - G. The FMCUSA will provide an “End of Year” Financial Report on the use of the Equal Participation Plan (EPP) funds that will be available to annual conferences and local FM churches.

Social Security

¶4370+

- A. The benefits available under Social Security are a part of the church’s plan for support of its retired ministers and missionaries or their widows and orphans.
- B. It is recommended that each Society, annual conference, or other organization responsible for a minister’s or a missionary’s salary obligate itself to contribute, in addition to salary, an amount equal to at least one-half of the annual contribution, or assessment, for Social Security as a “self-employed” minister.

Pension Plan

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- A. The Board of Administration by authorization of the 1964 General Conference has established a defined contribution pension plan which became effective January 1, 1969, and covers ministers, general officers, and other persons as described in the pension plan. On January 1, 1981, a defined benefit pension plan was added.
- B. The pension plan was created for the exclusive benefit of employees of the employer and their beneficiaries and shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with its being a qualified pension plan as defined in section 401(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as the same may be amended from time to time.
- C. The trustees of the pension plans shall be the Board of Directors of the Free Methodist Church USA, who shall be responsible for seeing that the plans are administered in accordance with the plan documents.
- D. The pension plans shall be administered by the Board of Administration serving as the Pension Board, in accordance with the rules and regulations of the plans. The details of this administrative responsibility may be delegated to a Benefits Committee that is elected from nominations from the Nominating Committee by the Board of Administration.
- E. If established, the Benefits Committee shall make recommendations concerning the administration of the plans and shall regularly review the plans and their administration for needed clarification, procedural adjustments, or amendments. The Benefits Committee's work is subject to the approval of the Board of Administration.
- F. Benefits Committee. The Benefits Committee shall:
 - 1. Administer and monitor the Free Methodist Church USA Defined Benefit and Defined Contribution pension plans in a manner consistent with the definition of a qualified pension plan in section 401(a) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 as amended. The pension plans may be amended by the General Conference or the Board of Administration. The text of such amendments

shall be communicated to the participants of the plans in writing. No amendment shall abridge or annul the rights of members in respect to their accumulations as of the date of the adoption of such amendment.

2. Administer an overall policy regarding enrollments, contributions, and retirement benefits that will ensure that all appropriate personnel receive a benefit;
 3. Regularly review the plans' provisions and provide clarification, adjustments, or amendments;
 4. Receive and review annually the plans' audit and valuation for any possible benefit improvements;
 5. Periodically meet with the plan actuary to review the plans' financial profile related to current and future plan participants and refer participants' issues to legal counsel when appropriate;
 6. Periodically meet with The Free Methodist Foundation to receive and review reports of the plans' investment performance and fee structure;
 7. Communicate with the plans' participants on a regular basis regarding plan changes and accrued benefits, and, in conjunction with The Free Methodist Foundation, provide retirement financial planning;
 8. Provide any necessary reports and recommendations for the plans to the Board of Administration which has ultimate responsibility for the plans' administration; and
 9. Work with the administration of the World Ministries Center on benefit issues that are outside of the retirement plans.
- G. Each United States Society shall contribute to the support of the defined benefit pension plan in accordance with the rules and regulations of the plan. The contribution paid by the Society shall be in addition to the pastor's earnings, not a deduction from them.
- H. Any qualifying person serving a Free Methodist church in another country shall be granted a leave of absence and shall not forfeit any pension benefits which have accrued.
- I. No participant in the pension plans shall have any right to assign, alienate, anticipate, or commute any payments from the plans; and, except as otherwise prescribed by

law, no payment shall be subject to the debts, contracts, or engagements of any payee, nor to any judicial process, to levy upon or attach the same for the payment thereof.

Free Methodist Communications

¶4400+ The purpose of Free Methodist Communications is to communicate the vision and core values of the Free Methodist Church to its constituents and to the world at large.

Free Methodist World Missions

¶4500+ The Free Methodist Church joyfully accepts responsibility to obey the Great Commission of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20). Missionaries are sent into all the world to evangelize and make disciples, to build them together in His church (1 Peter 2:5; Ephesians 2:20-22), and to engage in ministries of compassion and human development in the name of Christ. The Free Methodist Church initiates new Free Methodist ministries and services in partnership with the international church in evangelization, works of biblical justice, and church planting. Free Methodist World Missions defines its mission field globally, including the United States of America. Since the missional task is at the heart of the church, Free Methodist World Missions is not an auxiliary of the church but a facilitator and enabler of the church, seeking synergies, communicating and teaching, and advocating for global and local missions.

General Missionary Board

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- A. The Board of Administration shall constitute the General Missionary Board of the Free Methodist Church USA, which has authority over world missions functions. The General Missionary Board is incorporated and is used for special financial transactions for Free Methodist World Missions (FMWM).
- B. The objectives for which this corporation is formed are:
 1. To receive, hold, pay out, or dispose of any property, of whatever nature and situation as allowed by law, that may be obtained in aid of the general missionary work of the Free Methodist Church; and
 2. To acquire real estate or personal property and to hold or sell or convey the same as in its judgment may be necessary in the propagation of its missionary work.

Missions Catalyst Committee

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The Missions Catalyst Committee (MCC) is created by the Board of Administration to provide an avenue for the Missions Liaison Bishop, Missions Resource Team, and Global Advisory Team to engage with people who understand and practice sound missiology and are effective in global and local ministry. As willing advocates, they share in the responsibility for the integrity and viability of the Free Methodist World Missions enterprise. The MCC serves as a sounding board for new ideas, provides counsel on funding the mission, and offers feedback on operations. It brings FMWM policy recommendations to the Board of Administration.

Free Methodist World Missions Operations

¶4530+

- A. Those being considered by the Board of Bishops for the position of Area Director shall:
 1. Be elders in the Free Methodist Church;
 2. Have demonstrated at least five years of productive leadership in the church;
 3. Have significant international and cross-cultural ministry experience;
 4. Have a favorable result from a job-related professional evaluation;
 5. Articulate a vision for the area for review and approval by the Board of Bishops;
 6. Commit to attend and participate in training events and the meetings of the Global Overseers Team and Global Advisory Team.
- B. Area Directors and the Board of Bishops are responsible for all missions work under FMCUSA oversight, regardless of the developmental stage of the church in each country.
- C. Free Methodist World Missions (FMWM) personnel shall be appointed and serve under the leadership of the Board of Bishops.
- D. The Board of Bishops, in consultation with the Area Directors and the Chief Operating Officer, will oversee the annual submission of a balanced budget for Free Methodist World Missions to the Board of Administration.

Global Advisory Team

¶4540+

- A. The Global Advisory Team is composed of a bishop appointed by the Board of Bishops, Area Directors, and additional FMWM leadership as determined by the Board of Bishops.
- B. The team shall oversee all missionary work originating in the Free Methodist Church USA General Conference.
- C. Regarding general oversight, the team shall:
 - 1. Recommend policy, strategy, funding, and goals;
 - 2. Recommend partnerships and affiliations;
 - 3. Serve the church in developing and teaching a healthy missiology; and
 - 4. Serve as an internal advisory board regarding country and area issues.
- D. Regarding field operations, the team shall:
 - 1. Recruit, appoint, license, and commission candidates for missionary service;
 - 2. Appoint all short-term Volunteers In Service Abroad (VISA) personnel.
- E. Regarding expansion of ministries, the team shall:
 - 1. Encourage and aid church planting among all population groups, in cooperation with a national church, whenever possible; and
 - 2. Recognize that in areas not presently served by the Free Methodist Church, new work shall first be a Mission District under the jurisdiction of Free Methodist World Missions before being established as a provisional annual or annual conference.
- F. The team shall function as the MEG Board for Mission Districts under its jurisdiction.

Trustees and Property

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- A. Titles to land purchased for missions and institutions under the direction of Free Methodist World Missions shall be in the name of Free Methodist World Missions or deeded to trustees elected or approved by the General Missionary

- Board. Trustees may be missionaries, nationals, or both.
- B. Such trustees shall hold the property for the benefit and use of Free Methodist World Missions of the Free Methodist Church USA. Where property cannot be titled or held in trust for Free Methodist World Missions, it shall be held for the benefit and use of the Free Methodist Church and its institutions in those countries.
 - C. Any sale or disposal of property or use of funds from the sale of such property shall be with the approval and consent of the Area Director in consultation with the bishop of record of the Free Methodist Church USA and ratified by the Board of Administration.
 - D. Whenever possible the tenure of the trustees shall be subject to Free Methodist World Missions and in all cases to the laws and regulations of the country where the property is located.

Mission Districts

¶4550+ When, in the judgment of the Area Director and the Board of Bishops, a church in formation reaches appropriate developmental markers, it may be organized as a Mission District.

Provisional Annual Conferences of Mission Origin

¶4560+

- A. The normal minimum for the organization of a provisional annual conference is five ministers in full membership and 300 lay members within its bounds.
- B. All provisional annual conferences of mission origin shall be under the jurisdiction of the Board of Bishops and the overseeing Area Director except where provisional annual conferences have been organized from an existing annual conference, in which case they shall be administered by the bishop of the originating annual conference.
- C. The Board of Bishops, upon the recommendation of the Area Director, approves the formation of a provisional annual conference from a Mission District, it having adopted in principle the *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church USA and having filed the appropriate governmental registration documents (Constitution), adapted to local culture and circumstances.

Annual Conferences of Mission Origin

¶4570+

- A. When a provisional annual conference has made marked advancement in national leadership, evangelistic outreach, self-government, and self-support and has reached the stage where it is able to operate satisfactorily under the *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church USA and has a Constitution that has been approved by the General Conference or its Board of Administration, it shall be recommended to the bishop of record or the president of the conference to be organized into an annual conference as outlined in ¶4120.C.6.
- B. The normal minimum for the organization of an annual conference is 10 ministers in full membership and 600 lay members within its bounds.
- C. Any changes in Constitutions of annual conferences of mission origin shall be considered by the bishop of record and Area Director with legal counsel for recommendation to the Board of Administration or General Conference for approval.

Provisional General or General Conferences of Mission Origin

¶4580+

- A. Requirements for forming a provisional general conference are found in ¶221 and those for a general conference in ¶222.
- B. To prepare for a new provisional general conference, the bishop of record shall form a provisional general conference task force of the superintendents, lay representatives from the participating annual conferences, and the Area Director to prepare a provisional general conference proposal. It shall be presented to the participating annual conferences for adoption in principle.
- C. The governing body of a provisional general conference shall be composed of the suffragan bishop(s) and an equal number of lay and ministerial delegates elected by the participating annual conferences. The number of delegates shall be recommended by the bishop of record in consultation with the provisional general conference task force and be approved by the Free Methodist Church USA Board of Administration.

- D. The Board of Administration of the Free Methodist Church USA shall elect (an) elder(s), (a) national citizen(s) of the provisional general conference country, as (a) suffragan bishop(s) from the nominee(s) presented by the annual conferences or the provisional general conference. A suffragan bishop is a bishop of a provisional general conference and serves under the supervision and counsel of the Board of Bishops.
- E. The suffragan bishop(s) shall provide a written annual report to the Board of Bishops of the FMCUSA.
- F. The provisional general conference shall have powers and duties conferred upon it by the Free Methodist Church USA General Conference and as set forth in its *Book of Discipline* and/or its Constitution, including:
1. To constitute the Free Methodist corporation which shall hold in trust all real estate belonging to the Free Methodist Church for the use and benefit of its membership;
 2. To have general supervision of all matters pertaining to the functions of the Free Methodist Church;
 3. To be responsible for all activities such as: Bible schools, development projects, medical work, literature work, requesting and assigning missionaries, interdenominational and cooperative relationships, legal representation, scholarships, and other ministries as need may arise;
 4. To form a Board of Administration to carry on the work during the interim between meetings of the provisional general conference; and
 5. To establish budgets and raise funds to support the work, particularly the office of the suffragan bishop(s) and the process of legal representation.
- G. A provisional general conference, once formed, will move to general conference status within four years, unless an extension is granted by the Free Methodist Church USA General Conference Board of Administration.

Free Methodist Foundation

- ¶4600+ The Board of Administration approves Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of The Free Methodist Foundation which govern the business and affairs of the Foundation. These documents provide that the:

- A. Free Methodist Foundation is a separate religious and charitable corporation formed to establish, promote, fund, extend, and maintain the Christian faith according to the tenets of, and for the exclusive benefit and support of, the Free Methodist Church USA;
- B. Board of Administration shall elect the directors of the Foundation. Directors shall be laypersons and ordained ministers who are members in good standing of the Free Methodist Church. At least two members of the Foundation Board shall be ordained ministers, one of whom shall be a U.S. Bishop (see ¶4320.F).
- C. Denomination may assign to the Foundation the management of appropriate activities related to estate planning, wills, trusts, estates, and other types of deferred gifts;
- D. Denomination may assign to the Foundation the management of investments for the denomination, its departments, subsidiaries, and related agencies, pension funds, and all other funds assigned by the Board of Administration;
- E. Denomination may assign to the Foundation the management of the Free Methodist Loan Fund; and
- F. Foundation reports annually to the Board of Administration, providing a statement of philosophy of operation, any significant changes in policies or procedures, audited financial reports and related federal income tax returns, and other items requested by the Board of Administration or its Budget and Finance Committee.

Marston Memorial Historical Center

¶4650+ To maintain a permanent location for the records and history of the Free Methodist Church in North America and worldwide, the General Conference of 1964 took action that created an historical repository, known today as the Marston Memorial Historical Center. The Marston Memorial Historical Center is charged with maintaining the official archives of the denomination, a work that is supervised by the Committee on Free Methodist History and Archives. This committee is the primary agency that fulfills the mandate of the General Conference and functions collaboratively with the denominational Board of Administration, to which it reports regularly.

Upon nomination by the Committee on Free Methodist History

and Archives, the Board of Administration shall elect members to serve on this committee.

Chaplains

¶4700

- A. The Free Methodist Church USA provides ministry to persons in special situations beyond the local church, such as in the military, prisons, institutions, and law enforcement agencies, through ordained ministers who are chaplains.
- B. Ecclesiastical chaplain endorsement procedures and guidelines of the Free Methodist Church USA are established and approved by the Board of Bishops and the Board of Administration. Endorsement procedures are printed in the *Guidelines for Chaplain Ecclesiastical Endorsement*.
- C. All ordained ministers wishing to serve as Free Methodist chaplains in the military, Veterans Affairs, or civilian institutions must be approved by the Board of Bishops and credentialed by the Free Methodist Church Chaplain Endorsing Agent.
- D. All credentialed chaplains shall be appointed to denominational service. No noncredentialed ordained minister shall be appointed as chaplain by any annual conference.
- E. The Free Methodist Church USA recognizes the association of chaplains, whose name is The Free Methodist Chaplains Association USA, together with its constitution and duly elected officers.

Association of Human Service Ministries

¶4750+

A primary commitment of the Free Methodist Church is care for “all humans, including the unborn, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, color, socio-economic status, disability, or any other distinctions, and will respect them as persons made in the image of God and redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection” (see ¶3221). Due to its role in fulfilling that commitment, the Association of Human Service Ministries (AHSM) is an integral part of the church.

- A. The Association of Human Service Ministries (AHSM) members accredited by the Free Methodist Church shall report annually to the Board of Administration.

- B. The Board of Administration shall:
1. Be responsible for determining the process an agency must follow to become a member of AHSM. The Board will approve new members and shall also be the determining body when a member must be removed due to noncompliance or any other reason;
 2. Receive and examine the annual reports of each accredited ministry. The structure and content of such reports will be determined by the Board of Administration;
 3. Determine if the ministry continues to qualify for accreditation by the Free Methodist Church. If it is determined a ministry is at risk of losing accreditation, the Board of Administration shall work with the president of the AHSM to contact the organization, discuss what steps are necessary to retain membership, and clarify if an agency is able to meet the requirements;
 4. Regulate the establishment of new human service ministries so as to preserve fidelity of accredited institutions.
- C. A new human service ministry shall not be approved without an official recommendation from its annual conference.
- D. Members of the AHSM Ministries shall be listed in the *Yearbook*.
- E. Pastors are encouraged to preach on the subject of practical charity, receiving offerings and providing opportunities for financial support. These offerings are to be used for the relief of the poor in that Society or sent to an accredited human service ministry.

Educational Institutions

¶4800+ Educational institutions are responsible for promoting and helping to maintain adequate opportunity for college and graduate training in alignment with the values, beliefs, and mission of the Free Methodist Church.

The Free Methodist Church USA recognizes as educational institutions those colleges and universities whose commitments are consistent with the history, theology, mission, and character of the Free Methodist Church.

The Free Methodist educational institutions shall have a statement of faith consistent with Free Methodist Church USA doctrine which boards of trustees and executive leaders agree shall guide the policies of the institution.

The Free Methodist educational institutions shall have a statement of lifestyle expectations for the campus community which is consistent with the principles and practices of the *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church USA.

All instruction shall be in harmony with the teachings of the Scriptures and the Free Methodist Articles of Religion.

¶4810+ **Denominational Relationship Status**

A. Leadership Commitments

1. The president shall be a member of the Free Methodist Church who actively seeks to create a Free Methodist presence in the life and leadership of the institution.
2. The chief academic officer shall be a member of the Free Methodist Church, or one who is in both conviction and spirit committed to Wesleyan theology and perspectives.

B. Mission Commitments

1. The Free Methodist educational institutions shall have articles of incorporation, bylaws, or other appropriate governance documents which:
 - a. Identify the college or university as a private institution of evangelical higher education affiliated with the Free Methodist Church USA;
 - b. Define the relationship of the institution to the churches and conferences of the Free Methodist Church USA; and
 - c. Specify Free Methodist Church USA representation in the governing board.
2. The Free Methodist educational institutions shall have a mission statement which includes an institutional priority to serve as an educational resource for the advancement of Christianity through the church.

C. Connectional Commitments

1. All trustees shall be committed Christians of whom no less than 25 percent shall be members of the Free Methodist Church.

2. No less than 10 percent of faculty shall be members of the Free Methodist Church.
 3. The school, division, or department of religion shall have a majority of full-time faculty who are members of the Free Methodist Church or sister Wesleyan denominations with all members affirming Wesleyan theology and the Articles of Religion of the Free Methodist Church as its educational focus.
 4. The Religion Department chair shall be Free Methodist or thoroughly Wesleyan.
 5. The institutions shall offer courses in Free Methodist history, government, mission, and theology.
 6. The relationship to and presence of bishops and denominational leaders shall be defined.
 7. The institutions shall have an intentional plan for Free Methodists to speak at chapel, colloquia, and events.
 8. The institutions shall participate in the Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions.
- D. Recognition Process Based Upon:
1. Denominational institutions shall be recognized at each General Conference and the presidents of those institutions shall serve as voting delegates.
 2. Denominational institutions shall reapply for endorsement in the year prior to each subsequent General Conference.
 3. At least every four years, the Board of Trustees shall review and reaffirm the institution's covenant relationship with the Free Methodist Church, as recorded in its minutes.

¶4820+ **Affiliated Relationship Status**

- A. Other institutions of higher education may apply to the Board of Administration for endorsement as Affiliated Institutions. The minimal expectations for this relationship shall be that:
1. The institution shall have Free Methodist representation on the Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty;
 2. Provision shall be made for instruction in Free Methodist curricula of concern: i.e., Free Methodist history, doctrine, polity, mission, and vision.

3. The task of nurturing a Free Methodist presence on the campus, by welcoming Free Methodist clergy, educators, leaders, and innovators to speak at chapel, colloquia, and special events shall be assigned.
- B. Based upon an application to the Free Methodist Church USA's Board of Administration, and upon recommendation by the Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions, in the year prior to General Conference, an institution of higher education which meets these criteria may be endorsed as an Affiliated Institution. At least every four years, the Board of Trustees shall review and reaffirm the institution's covenant relationship with the Free Methodist Church, as recorded in its minutes.

¶4830+ **Associate Relationship Status**

- A. Other institutions (see *Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions Constitution and Bylaws*) may apply to the annual meeting of the Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions (see ¶4850) for endorsement as Associate Institutions. The minimum expectations for this relationship shall be:
1. The institution shall have Free Methodist representation on the Board of Trustees.
 2. The institution's mission shall connect to and support the mission of the Free Methodist Church USA.
- B. At least every four years, the Board of Trustees shall review and reaffirm the institution's covenant relationship with the Free Methodist Church, as recorded in their minutes.

Educational Funds

- ¶4840+ All educational endowment funds, including the permanent endowment fund, designated to educational institutions (including John Wesley Seminary Foundation) and such as may be raised or otherwise received for the Educational Endowment Fund, shall be held for investment as directed by the Board of Administration. The income shall be distributed annually to the Free Methodist denominational schools in the United States as directed by the Board of Administration. When funds are available for operating budgets or capital projects, the Board of Administration shall determine the appropriation for each school according to the numeric enrollment of full-time Free Methodist students in those institutions.

The Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions

¶4850+

- A. The denomination sponsors an association for denominational institutions of higher education: to advance their common mission as Free Methodist schools, to explore cooperative programs, and to define and maintain the quality of their relationship with the denomination.
- B. Denominational institutions shall be represented by the president and the chairperson of the Board of Trustees, each having one vote.
- C. Affiliated Institutions shall be represented by the president and a Free Methodist member of the Board of Trustees. Each Affiliated Institution shall have one vote.
- D. Associate Institutions shall participate as honorary members, having voice without vote.

John Wesley Seminary Foundation

¶4860+

- A. The John Wesley Seminary Foundation offers scholarship aid for the postcollege training of persons for the pastoral ministry and other types of Christian service within the Free Methodist Church USA.
- B. John Wesley Seminary Foundation shall be managed by the Center for Pastoral Formation with accountability from the Board of Bishops and Board of Administration.
- C. John Wesley Seminary Foundation shall be supported by the general church budget and special project funds, as approved by the Board of Administration.
- D. John Wesley Seminary Foundation-affiliated schools shall maintain support and cooperation with the Articles of Religion.

Auxiliary Organizations

Men's Ministries International

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Men's Ministries International of the Free Methodist Church is recognized as an auxiliary of the Free Methodist Church USA, and is governed by its own constitution and bylaws.

Women's Ministries International

¶4910+ Women's Ministries International of the Free Methodist Church is recognized as an auxiliary of Free Methodist World Missions and is governed by its own constitution and bylaws.

In the following chapter, paragraph numbers and section letters with a plus sign + beside them indicate those items which may be changed by the Board of Administration. All others may be changed only by the General Conference.

Chapter 5 Annual Conferences

Preamble

¶5000 Annual conferences, after the pattern of the Methodist Episcopal Church, have been a basic organizational structure of the Free Methodist Church since its beginning. After the first annual conference was organized in Pekin, NY, in 1860, 22 more were born in the next 25 years, as, in the words of Bishop Leslie Marston, early Free Methodism “marched across the nation.” Today, as then, the annual conference is the organization at the regional level that joins societies into a network. The annual conference ensures that pastors and congregations are counseled and encouraged, identifies those who are being called into the ordained ministry, and promotes and oversees church planting and evangelism.

Organization

Ministerial and Lay Delegates

¶5010

- A. The General Conference shall organize the work at large into annual conferences. Each annual conference shall be composed of all ministers in full membership and lay delegates elected by the several societies.
- B. One lay delegate shall be admitted from each Society. If there is more than one pastor in full membership appointed to a Society, the Society shall be entitled to one additional lay delegate for each additional pastor. A Society that has more than 100 adult members may elect an additional lay delegate; and for each additional 200 adult members, an additional lay delegate may be elected. The election of a delegate and any reserve delegate shall be by separate ballot and each shall require a majority vote of those present and voting.
- C. Delegates are not members of the annual conference until they are present with their credentials and have been seated. Conference Ministerial Candidates are without vote except for those who are appointed as pastors in charge of a Society (See 5340.G).
- D. In consultation with the bishop of record, each annual conference shall provide for substantially equal ministerial and lay representation in its annual sessions.

Responsibilities of Delegates

¶5020 In the Free Methodist connectional system, annual conference delegates have a twofold responsibility: to represent their societies and to act for the good of the conference. Delegates

shall be considered as liaison between the Society and the conference during the interim between conference sessions. They are expected to report significant actions of the conference to the Society which elected them (see ¶6250.E.2).

Voting

¶5030 The ministerial and lay members composing the annual conference shall deliberate and vote as one body; but at the call of one-fourth of all the members present and voting, the house shall divide and the ministers and lay members shall vote separately. It shall require a majority of both branches to constitute a vote of the conference. *Robert's Rules of Order* in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure in the annual conference sessions.

Time and Place

¶5040+ Each annual conference shall appoint the place and, with the concurrence of the bishop, the time of its own sessions. If for any reason a conference cannot be held at the place appointed, the determination of the place shall be left with the superintendent(s) and the secretary of the last conference. The Friday preceding every annual conference shall be observed as a day of fasting and prayer.

Conference Year

¶5050 The conference year of each annual conference shall close automatically with the adjournment of that conference. The fiscal and statistical year for the local societies, conferences, and the general church shall coincide with the calendar year.

Limitation of Powers

¶5060 An annual conference cannot enact laws, nor can it interpret the *Book of Discipline* by resolutions or reports.

Organizational Structure

¶5070 In consultation with the bishop of record, the annual conference may organize itself in ways that more consistently reflect the operational values and desired outcomes of the Free Methodist Church. Organizational structures and function shall be reviewed periodically to insure missional priorities and to assess the conference in light of the benchmarks of conference vitality established by the Board of Bishops and National Oversight Team. When such assessment reveals failure or decline, the conference shall seek help in formulating appropriate strategic responses.

Nominating Committee

¶5080

- A. Each annual conference will have a standing Nominating Committee approved by the annual conference of not less than six members, giving consideration to equal representation of ministerial and lay members. General considerations in the selection of the Society Nominating Committee shall also apply to the annual conference (see ¶6310). Representation by districts/regions or other appropriate distinctions shall be determined in advance by the conference body.
- B. Nominating Committee members may be elected to rotating terms as determined by the conference. The chair shall be elected by the Nominating Committee.
- C. The Nominating Committee shall:
 1. Prepare for the annual conference a list of nominations for positions vacated by either resignations or expiration of terms; and
 2. Review board and committee memberships in light of the standing rules of the annual conference.

Officers

Presiding Officer

¶5100 The bishop is the presiding officer of the annual conference. In the absence of the bishop or his/her designee, the conference shall elect, by ballot, an elder from its own number to preside. All other conference officers must be members of the church within the bounds of the conference.

Superintendent

¶5110

A. Nomination

1. No later than the calendar year prior to the election of a superintendent, the annual conference shall designate the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board (MEG Board) or a special committee of not less than six plus the bishop of record as chair to serve as the Superintendent Nominating Committee. The incumbent superintendent shall not serve on the Superintendent Nominating Committee (SNC).
 - a. The Superintendent Nominating Committee shall determine the qualifications desired in a superintendent in accord with the role of superintendent as described in ¶5120, the mission/vision of the General Conference, and need of the annual conference.
 - b. The Superintendent Nominating Committee shall develop a list of candidates to be interviewed. The Board of Bishops

may add candidates to that list and may veto any potential candidate on the list without comment or prejudice.

- c. The Superintendent Nominating Committee will be responsible to interview candidates they deem suitable for the superintendency and those presented by the Board of Bishops, recommending the superintendent nominee to the annual conference for election by ballot either at the annual conference or by electronic ballot or at an adjourned sitting within six months of the annual conference when the new term commences. The time and method of ballot voting will be determined by the bishop of record in consultation with the Board of Administration of the annual conference.
 - d. If the Superintendent Nominating Committee chooses to renominate the sitting superintendent who is willing to continue serving, the SNC may limit their interview process to include only him/her. The Board of Bishops may add or veto candidates as noted in A.1.b.
2. A prospective superintendent shall:
 - a. Have demonstrated at least five years of productive leadership in the church;
 - b. Have a favorable result from a job-related professional evaluation;
 - c. Articulate a vision for the conference for review and approval by the bishop of record and the Superintendent Nominating Committee;
 - d. Commit to fully participate in the superintendents' leadership development process as determined by the Board of Bishops;
 - e. Commit to attend and participate in superintendent training, regional, national, and international leadership events as required by the Board of Bishops.
 3. Should the nominee fail to be elected by majority vote of the annual conference, the bishop of record will reassemble the Superintendent Nominating Committee to interview candidates as described in 5110 A.1.a-c and present a new nominee to be elected by ballot either at an adjourned sitting of annual conference or electronically as determined by the bishop of record in consultation with the conference Board of Administration.
- B. Election and Terms
1. Each annual conference shall elect one elder as superintendent,

except as otherwise provided (see ¶5110.B.5). A conference may elect, appoint, or make provision to employ one or more elders to serve as assistant(s) to the superintendent.

2. Superintendents must be elected from among the ordained elders of the denomination upon due nominating process.
3. Superintendents shall be elected by a majority vote for four-year terms, except for special arrangements approved by the assigned bishop for a shorter term.
4. If two or more contiguous conferences so desire, they may request that they be under common direction of an area superintendent. The superintendent shall be interviewed by a committee composed of at least one lay and one ministerial member from each of the conferences with the bishop of record serving as chair. The nominee must receive a majority vote in each conference involved. Election shall be by ballot.
5. A conference may propose to have a stationed superintendent and/or stationed assistant(s) to the superintendent.

C. Special Circumstances

1. If a vacancy should occur in the office of the superintendent between conferences, the bishop of record in consultation with the conference MEG shall appoint an interim superintendent until the next annual conference session.
2. The bishop of record may instruct a superintendent to work under the general direction of the bishop of record, his/her designee, or an advisory committee, provided there is no infringement of the disciplinary powers of the superintendent.
3. Recall of a superintendent shall be by a two-thirds ballot vote by any succeeding annual conference.
4. Should the bishop of record not be available to chair an overseas conference for the vote of a superintendent, the bishop of record may assign the Area Director or other designee to conduct the election.

D. Financial Support

1. Annual conferences in the United States are expected to demonstrate fiscal viability by providing a workable budget, including a base remuneration for the superintendent that is appropriate for a church executive overseeing the number of direct reports and managing a budget the size the superintendent oversees. Each Society shall contribute its proportion as adopted by the annual conference.
2. Where this salary level is not attainable, the bishop of record shall assist the conference Administrative Committee in preparing a leadership plan that shall be presented to the

Board of Bishops and, upon its approval, implemented.

3. Superintendents shall be supported by the conferences to which elected in the manner determined by the conferences. Stationed superintendents shall receive an appropriate portion of their support from the pastoral charges to which appointed. The conference shall remain responsible for assuring that the total compensation of a stationed superintendent is consistent with provisions of ¶5110.D.1. A conference shall provide for the superintendent's office and travel expenses, whether stationed or itinerant.
4. A home purchased for the superintendent can be rented to others only if the superintendent consents and receives the rent.

The Role of a Superintendent

¶5120

To clarify the role and responsibilities of the superintendent, the following leadership priorities are set forth.

- A. Regarding self and family, the superintendent shall (also listed in ¶4120.A):
 1. Feed his/her soul (heart, mind, spirit), diligently attending to the means of grace;
 2. Love his/her spouse and family, maintaining a household of faith; and
 3. Fulfill his/her vows as a baptized disciple and elder called to leadership.
- B. Regarding the annual conference, the superintendent shall exercise his / her authority and influence in the following areas:
 1. Vision Alignment and Implementation
 - a. Promotes a Wesleyan theology and Free Methodist distinctives.
 - b. Encourages pastors and churches (societies) to develop specific plans to implement the Board of Bishops' vision and strategic initiatives.
 - c. Works as a part of the Global Overseers Team to coordinate and carry out the mission of Jesus and the Free Methodist Church.
 2. Leadership Development
 - a. Insures that the conference MEG Board has a system of spiritual formation, accountability, and care for pastors.
 - b. Identifies or recruits the highest-quality pastors to be recommended to the conference MAC for appointment.
 - c. Challenges and equips pastors and leaders to insure that

the local church has an ongoing process of discipleship and growth.

- d. Insures that the conference has a process that identifies, develops, and deploys new leaders.
3. Order and Expansion
 - a. Develops strategies for church planting and the multiplication of ministries.
 - b. Promotes church health by encouraging every church to be a healthy, biblical community of holy people that multiplies disciples, leaders, groups, and churches.
 - c. Provides administrative oversight for the annual conference; works with the conference BOA to insure that the annual conference has systems in place to care for the financial, legal, property, and personnel issues of the conference.
 - d. Looks after the spiritual and temporal interests of the churches within his/her assigned areas; take charge of societies without pastors; and have general oversight of the work in his/her areas.
 - e. Serves as ex officio of all committees.

Secretary

¶5130

- A. The annual conference shall elect a secretary who shall continue in office until a successor is elected.
- B. The secretary shall:
 1. Record in a suitable book the proceedings of the conference, excluding non-conference business matters;
 2. Keep, in a book to be preserved with the journal, the original or so-called rough minutes as approved by the conference;
 3. Keep on file the reports adopted by the conference and record in the journal financial and such other reports as the conference may order;
 4. Be custodian of the conference records and journal;
 5. Transcribe from the annual conference records all the decisions of disciplinary law rendered by the president, giving the number of the pages upon which those decisions are recorded and forward the transcript promptly to the secretary of the General Conference and, if there are no such decisions, to send a statement to that effect to the secretary;
 6. Send a copy of the annual conference minutes following completion of each annual conference to the office of the

Board of Bishops for examination on behalf of the General Conference;

7. Report annually to Ministerial Credentialing Services following the annual conference session the names of ministers whose ordination parchments are no longer valid, whether by issuance of certificates of transfer to other denominations, uniting with other denominations without Free Methodist papers, withdrawal, expulsion, or death, listing the reason for such invalidation; and
8. Keep a proper register containing names, addresses, and dates of declaration of all members of the Society within the conference who declare themselves to be conscientious objectors and to make a prompt report of these declarations to the secretary of the General Conference, who shall keep a complete record of them (see ¶3331.B and ¶4070.B).

Treasurer

¶5140

- A. The annual conference shall elect a treasurer who shall be bonded. In case of a vacancy the superintendent of the conference may appoint a treasurer to act until the next conference session. All funds due the general church shall be remitted monthly. The general church treasurer shall, immediately after the conference session, notify the conference secretary of any deficit.
 1. The annual conference shall require each Society to remit a financial report of its receipts and expenditures. This report shall be published in the *Yearbook*.
- B. Each annual conference shall have its financial records examined at least annually by an independent third party, with the result of such review being reported to the Board of Administration of the annual conference, with a copy filed with the FMCUSA.

Auditor

- ¶5150 The annual conference shall elect an auditor who shall provide an audit, financial review, or other agreed-upon procedure of the accounts of the treasurer and report annually.

Pension Agent

- ¶5160+ The annual conference shall designate a pension agent who will be responsible to oversee the administration of the pension plan at the conference level in harmony with guidelines developed by the General Pension Board.

Standing Boards and Committees

Administrative Committee

¶5200

- A. Each annual conference shall elect a standing Administrative Committee of not less than four members, giving due regard to clergy/lay balance. It shall act as the standing Administrative Committee of the conference in the interim between annual conference sessions to care for routine business and items specifically delegated to it by the conference within the limits of the *Book of Discipline* (see ¶6400).
- B. The conference Administrative Committee shall give strategic planning attention to such ministries as world missions, Christian discipleship, church planting, and social action. It may assign individuals, form task forces, and create standing committees to carry out the ministries deemed appropriate for the health and growth of the church.

Superintendent's Cabinet

¶5210

- A. Each annual conference may establish a Superintendent's Cabinet, to meet at the call of the superintendent.
- B. The purpose of the Superintendent's Cabinet shall be:
 1. To serve as a forum for the superintendent, pastors, and laity;
 2. To aid the superintendent in counsel, encouragement, and evaluation; and
 3. To inform the societies concerning the nature and function of the superintendency.
- C. The members of the Superintendent's Cabinet shall be the superintendent and not more than six members elected by the annual conference, two-thirds of whom may be nominated by the superintendent. The superintendent may chair or name a member to chair the Cabinet.

Ministerial Appointments Committee

¶5220

- A. Each annual conference shall elect a standing Ministerial Appointments Committee (MAC) composed at least of the bishop as chair, a superintendent as vice-chair, and one lay member. An annual conference may, as it deems necessary, increase the number of MAC members by electing additional elders and lay members. Each annual conference may define subgroups within the membership of the MAC and may define the scope of responsibility of each group according to that annual conference's structure of

regional oversight and the superintendency. Elections may be for three-year terms with provision for rotation and continuity.

The annual conference may ask the Nominating Committee or the Board of Administration to prepare nominations for election of the MAC and to delineate the scope of responsibilities within the MAC membership according to that annual conference's structure of oversight and the superintendency. The slate of nominees is to be brought before the annual conference for election.

When a new conference superintendent(s) is elected, the immediate past superintendent may not serve on the Ministerial Appointments Committee for the succeeding year.

- B. If for any reason a member is unable to serve during the conference session, the Board of Administration may appoint an elder or lay member to serve. No person who is recommended to the annual conference to be received as a Conference Ministerial Candidate, nor a Licensed Pastor (see ¶5640), though acting as a delegate, shall be eligible to serve on the Ministerial Appointments Committee.
- C. The committee shall serve until the close of the following annual conference.
- D. The committee shall appoint pastors for an indefinite tenure. The committee shall monitor progress and make changes at each annual conference when deemed necessary.
- E. To assist in the assessment of the work, pastors shall be offered an opportunity to express themselves and shall be given opportunity every three years to participate in a ministry effectiveness evaluation (see ¶5800), which shall be considered by the Ministerial Appointments Committee.
- F. Proposed changes shall be discussed with both pastors and delegates of churches involved.
- G. In the event a change in pastoral leadership becomes necessary between annual conferences, the committee shall have authority to make appointments. Delegates of churches involved shall be consulted, but final authority rests with the Ministerial Appointments Committee.
- H. The Ministerial Appointments Committee report of appointments shall be announced at the annual conference session.
- I. The committee may initiate church planting appointments, either by requesting a Society to sponsor a Church-Planting Project or by creating a new Church-Planting Project by appointing a

church planter in consultation with the conference Administrative Committee.

- J. Upon recommendation of the conference superintendent, the committee may appoint an elder as “Conference Associate” to serve in specialized ministry leadership as directed by the superintendent.
- K. The committee shall follow the restrictions regarding divorced ministers or spouses (see ¶5650).
- L. The committee shall have authority to suspend any conference appointee for cause (see ¶7130) according to due process (see ¶7150). This is not to be construed as conflicting with an ordained minister’s rights as outlined in chapter 7.
- M. The committee planning to recommend that a pastor not receive a pastoral appointment the ensuing year shall notify that pastor at least 60 days prior to the session of the annual conference.
- N. When a pastor’s appointment is concluded at a local Society (e.g., retired, left without appointment, requests release from appointment) he/she, along with his/her immediate family, is to withdraw from the life of that Society. This would include serving in official or unofficial capacities, attending worship services or activities of the Society, or entertaining communication with staff, constituents, or the larger community regarding the Society’s leadership, practices, or health. The former pastor and/or family, however, may re-engage with the local Society with the consent of conference superintendent in consultation with the newly appointed pastor.

Ministerial Education and Guidance Board

¶5230

- A. Each annual conference shall have a standing Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, composed of the members of the Ministerial Appointments Committee and additional members as determined by the electing body.
- B. Such additional members may be elected to rotating three-year terms. Members of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board may be reelected to multiple rotating terms, contingent upon their ongoing, effective service.
- C. The total membership of the Board shall be established by the annual conference with due regard to a proper division between laypersons and ministers and to provide sufficient number of members so that at least four members can convene when needed

and where needed to fulfill the responsibilities required by the *Book of Discipline*.

- D. Each member of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, including those elected to the Ministerial Appointments Committee, shall receive training in Free Methodist history and polity.
- E. When a new superintendent is elected, the immediate past superintendent shall not serve on the Board for the succeeding year.
- F. The Board shall be responsible to screen candidates for reception into the conference and/or for ordination.
- G. The annual conference, acting upon the recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, has final responsibility for the approval of Conference Ministerial Candidates in keeping with the standards outlined in ¶5340.
- H. The Board, in consultation with the bishop of record, is the authority on the meeting of the standard criteria for ordination. Requests for waivers regarding any of these standard criteria shall be made to the Board of Bishops (See ¶5410 for these standard criteria).
- I. The Board shall guide and counsel those who are received so that they may be able to meet the demands of pastoral ministry.
- J. For instructions on administration of multiple staff, see ¶¶6700-6730 and the *Ministerial Education and Guidance Board Manual*.
- K. The Board may grant a certificate of standing with view to transfer to another conference during the interim between annual conference sessions.
- L. The Board shall give consideration to the integrity and Christian discipleship of each ministerial member and the performance of duty of each appointed pastor of the conference and shall present to the annual conference a statement to this effect: "The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board has given due consideration to the integrity and Christian discipleship of each ministerial member of the _____ Conference and affirms the integrity and Christian discipleship of each in accord with ¶5310 of the *Book of Discipline* (with the exception of _____)" (see ¶5220.L).
- M. The Board shall affirm the integrity and Christian discipleship of Located Deacons and Located Elders, reporting such action to the annual conference as follows: "Upon recommendation by the

various pastors and local Boards of Administration of the societies where they are located, the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board reviewed and affirmed the integrity and Christian discipleship of the Located Deacons and Located Elders (except for _____)" (see ¶5220.L).

Finance Board

¶5240 Each conference shall elect a Finance Board with not less than five members. Its duties may include the preparation and supervision of the conference budget. It shall assist the superintendent in stewardship education and the promotion of the general church budget throughout the conference. The conference superintendent and treasurer shall be ex officio members.

Social Issues and Ministries Committee

¶5250

- A. The annual conference may elect a Social Issues and Ministries Committee to assist churches in seeking justice for all, showing mercy to the poor, empowering the disenfranchised, and maintaining openness and sensitivity to the social problems of all ages, race, and gender.
- B. The Social Issues and Ministries Committee shall
 1. Articulate to the annual conference the denomination's position on social issues and study and recommend resolutions for General Conference;
 2. Communicate to the societies and to the public the denomination's positions on social issues; and
 3. Organize the resources of the conference, both human and material, to assist the local Society in seeking justice for all, showing mercy to the poor, and empowering the disenfranchised.

Local Global Partnership Team

¶5260

- A. The annual conference shall create a Local Global Partnership Team or Board to advocate for engagement in local and global mission. The annual conference shall designate a person to serve as a liaison to Free Methodist World Missions.
- B. Functions of the Local Global Partnership Team may include:
 1. Coordinating conference-wide missions activities, advocating for cross-cultural ministry, and partnering with missionaries and national leaders in cooperation with Free Methodist World Missions;

2. Equipping churches to achieve effectiveness in and promotion of missional outreach and consistent promotion of missional outreach by such means as workshops for pastors and lay leaders; and
3. Empowering churches to participate in local, regional, and global missions opportunities. This includes assistance in the recruitment of individuals for long-term missionary service and Volunteers in Service Abroad (VISA) short-term activities and to increase the financial support of worldwide missionary outreach.

The Ordained Ministry

Preamble

¶5300 It is biblical for the church to set apart particular persons for special tasks of leadership. These persons bear witness to an inward call of the Holy Spirit. They are examined and set apart by public ordination, including the laying on of hands after the pattern of the early church.

These men and women ordained by the church are characterized by both gifts and graces. Gifts are special endowments of abilities. Graces are special qualities of character. Both have their source in the enabling Holy Spirit. Although the church must discern and cultivate those who have such endowments, ordination is always first and foremost an act of God's calling and anointing. In each assignment, the ordained minister follows the model of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep (John 10:1-18; Ezekiel 34), served willingly and selflessly (1 Peter 5:1-4), and commanded the undershepherds to feed the sheep (John 21:15-17).

Free Methodist ministers may carry out their task under appointment as pastors of particular congregations or they may be given other assignments. In either case, they are called to provide Spirit-filled leadership in the church to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. A healthy church, reproducing more and better disciples as well as new churches, will be characterized by vital worship, evangelistic and social action, Christian nurture, and fellowship.

Ordained ministers commit themselves to equipping the whole body of believers to these ends. Biblically and historically, they are set apart for the study and proclamation of the Word of God, intercessory prayer, the winning of persons to Christ, the administration of the sacraments, and the defense of the gospel.

Free Methodist ministers under appointment as pastors of churches are called to be leaders of God's people. Leadership

requires vision, daring, moving people to action, and living with the turbulence change brings. Pastoral leadership is rooted in a deep love for Christ and His compassion for human need. God's resources are abundantly available for all who embrace this task in courageous and radical obedience.

Ordained elders may be elected to lead the church-at-large as bishops or superintendents. Under the direction of the bishop they may also be given other assignments, such as those of general church administrators, chaplains, missionaries, evangelists, or theological teachers in universities or seminaries.

Qualifications for Pastoral Ministry

¶5310

- A. A person called by God enters a vocation which through biblical tradition and Methodist heritage carries significant responsibilities. Dealing with the souls of people and leading the church in making disciples requires a heart attuned to God and others, a mind appropriately informed for the work of ministry, and hands equipped for effective service.
- B. The Free Methodist Church prepares elders and leaders who will serve effectively in any context. Preparing for ministry with a solid education is a rich part of our heritage as Free Methodists and an integral part of developing leaders. A baseline of a bachelor's degree (B.S./B.A. or equivalent) and some graduate work in theology is what we envision. We urge our candidates to entrust this part of their journey to one of our AFMEI institutions. While this may not always be possible or practical, still our colleges and universities remain essential partners in shaping the future of the Free Methodist Church.
- C. Outcomes-Based Ordination emphasizes candidate proficiency in 15 areas of qualification for ministry (see ¶5410.B). Candidates will enter this process with varying degrees of preparation and readiness; as such, Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards have the freedom to design formation plans according to the needs of the candidate.
- D. These qualities are intended to assist the church. Ordained ministers should examine themselves in light of these; conferences should publicly review these when designing evaluation and reporting instruments for pastors; Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards should consider these qualities and skills when interviewing and guiding ministers.

Steps Leading Toward Ordination

¶5320+ There are four steps to becoming an ordained minister in the Free Methodist Church.

- A. The person recognized by the church as having the call of God to pastoral ministry is licensed as a Local Ministerial Candidate (LMC) (see ¶6500).
- B. Acceptance by the annual conference as a Conference Ministerial Candidate.
- C. Conference Ministerial Candidates (CMC), upon recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, are received into annual conference membership and elected to elder's orders.
- D. Ordination as elder completes the process.

Local Ministerial Candidate

¶5330 A Local Ministerial Candidate is a member of the Free Methodist Church who is seriously considering a call to full-time Christian ministry. Local ministerial candidate status provides the opportunity to explore the perceived call to ministry with the pastor in the context of the local church. The requirements and responsibilities of a Local Ministerial Candidate are found in ¶6500.

Conference Ministerial Candidate

¶5340

- A. A Conference Ministerial Candidate is a member of the Free Methodist Church who has been received by an annual conference in preparation for ordained ministry.
- B. The Conference Ministerial Candidate shall
 1. Be a Local Ministerial Candidate;
 2. Be thoroughly acquainted with the history and conversant with the polity of the Free Methodist Church, normally as provided in an approved course of study;
 3. Have completed application for ministry appointment;
 4. Be interviewed, certified, and recommended by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and received by the annual conference upon satisfactory response to the questions (see ¶8710);
 5. Be under the guidance of the conference superintendent and an assigned coach/mentor;
 6. Maintain membership in a Free Methodist Society;
 7. Maintain relationship as a Conference Ministerial Candidate by annual recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.
- C. A candidate who has been involved in a divorce, annulment, or dissolution of marriage shall not be admitted to the conference as a Conference Ministerial Candidate or in full membership until

approved by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, the conference superintendent, and the bishop. This shall also apply to a candidate whose spouse has been divorced. Divorce prior to conversion shall not in itself bar a candidate from consideration for conference membership.

- D. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board shall examine potential Conference Ministerial Candidates and determine readiness based on the 15 areas measured in the Outcomes-Based Ordination Assessment (see ¶5410).
- E. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board may recommend the Consecrated Deacon track to a candidate for reasons when
 1. A Conference Ministerial Candidate (CMC) who is called to a specialized ministry but not the general itinerant ministry of a Free Methodist elder.
 2. A CMC who desires to continue in ministry in the Free Methodist Church but needs to suspend completing the course of study for an extended season (e.g., personal, vocational, or medical reasons).

To become a Consecrated Deacon, the candidate must complete the steps laid out in the *Consecrated Deacon Handbook*. Because Scripture requires deacons to “keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience,” Consecrated Deacons will be expected to complete core ministry training courses, including but not limited to The Free Methodist Way course, FM History and Polity, Christian Doctrine, Old Testament and New Testament survey courses, Wesleyan Theology, and one or more practical ministry courses related to their specialization.

- F. A Conference Ministerial Candidate shall be interviewed annually, for sufficient time to demonstrate proficiency and fruitfulness commensurate with ordination and conference membership. Normally this will be a period of two to three years (see ¶5010.C).
- G. When a Conference Ministerial Candidate is under appointment to a Society as pastor-in-charge, he/she is considered “clergy” (to maintain a lay/clergy balance) when serving on committees and boards. In all other matters, including election as a delegate to General Conference, he/she is considered a “layperson.”
- H. A Conference Ministerial Candidate appointed by a Ministerial Appointments Committee to have charge of a Society or with the superintendent’s approval may administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper and solemnize marriages in that place, if civil law permits.

Elder's Orders

¶5400

- A. A minister may be received into membership, elected to elder's orders, and granted a seat in the annual conference upon providing satisfactory answers to conference membership questions (see ¶8720) and receiving the recommendation of the MEG Board based on his/her demonstrated proficiency in the 15 Outcomes-Based Ordination areas (see ¶5410).
 1. Whenever a Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, in its annual review of pastors, determines that a retired elder has no involvement in the Free Methodist Church for two consecutive years, the retired elder forfeits the right to vote at the annual conference. This shall not pertain to the enactment of ¶5220.M by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.
 2. This shall not pertain to retired elders who have notified the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board that they are serving a church outside the denomination and the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board has approved of such service. This shall not pertain to elders in extenuating circumstances (i.e., health of the elder or lack of a FM church nearby). The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board shall have the sole prerogative on such matters and the restoration of voting privileges.
- B. Election to elder's orders constitutes the acknowledgement of the annual conference that the person so elected has met all the biblical (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) and ecclesiastical requirements to serve as an overseer in the church. Only an ordained elder may serve as a ministerial delegate to General Conference, a conference superintendent, or a bishop.
- C. The elder shall administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, solemnize marriages, and lead in divine worship. When appointed to a Society, an elder shall perform the responsibilities of a pastor.

Outcomes-Based Ordination

¶5410+

- A. Outcomes-Based Qualifications

A candidate shall

 1. Be initially approved by the Society and granted a Local Ministerial Candidate's license;
 2. Be granted Conference Ministerial Candidacy at the recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance

Board upon review of his/her portfolio and Outcomes-Based Ordination Assessment interview;

3. Complete the prescribed process of coaching, assignments, coursework, and assessment from his/her Conference Ministerial Candidate Formation Plan;
4. Expand his/her portfolio with documentation showing his/her progress through the CMC Formation Plan;
5. Be interviewed and recommended by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board to elder's orders; and
6. Be approved by the annual conference and ordained by the presiding bishop or appointee.

B. Outcomes-Based Assessment

Heart Formation

1. The candidate is characterized by spiritual maturity and a strong sense of call to ministry.
 - Shaped by the spiritual disciplines.
 - Identity and calling rooted firmly in Jesus Christ.
 - Models a life of holiness led by the Spirit.
2. The candidate demonstrates a high level of self-awareness.
 - Understands and is able to articulate their strengths and weaknesses.
 - Builds teams around blind spots.
 - Knows how their leadership/communication style impacts others both adversely as well as positively.
3. The candidate lives a life that is balanced for the demands of ministry.
 - Attends adequately to physical, emotional, and mental needs.
 - Schedules regular time for play and recreation.
 - Lives a simple life free of addiction and compulsion.
4. The candidate lives a life shaped by love for others.
 - Prioritizes spouse and children (if applicable).
 - Builds and maintains healthy, close relationships with people inside and outside of the church.
 - Cultivates relationships of confession and accountability.
5. The candidate models humility.
 - Remains teachable and accepts correction when needed.
 - Maintains a non-defensive posture towards leaders,

followers, and peers.

- Willingly seeks the perspective of others.

Head Formation

1. The candidate demonstrates biblical understanding.
 - Possesses holistic biblical knowledge.
 - Has a Wesleyan hermeneutic that accepts the authority of Scripture.
 - Demonstrates ability to root their Wesleyan worldview in the Bible.
2. The candidate demonstrates a Wesleyan theological integration.
 - Knows and embraces the history, polity, Articles of Religion, and core values of the FMC.
 - Articulates the Wesleyan distinctives compellingly.
 - Understands and embraces Wesleyan relationship theology.
3. The candidate has a theological education commensurate with ordained ministry.
 - Has completed an undergraduate degree or demonstrates equivalent understanding of life and ministry.
 - Has completed some graduate work in theology or demonstrates theological competence at a graduate level.
 - Embodies a lifelong passion for learning through modeling and encouraging others.
4. The candidate has an ecumenical posture towards the church and the world.
 - Actively seeks to build and maintain bridges among fellow Christian groups.
 - Demonstrates an appreciation for the contribution of other Christian traditions while wholeheartedly embracing our own.
 - Demonstrates a growing appreciation for humanity and value of all people regardless of their belief system.
5. The candidate possesses the ability to practically apply learning.
 - Demonstrates an ability to make complex theology understandable to all.
 - Demonstrates an ability to find God's redemptive activity in daily life.

- Demonstrates an ability to deepen faith through real-life experience.

Hand Formation

1. The candidate demonstrates fruitfulness in ministry.
 - Has a track record of transformational preaching/teaching/leading.
 - Personally and corporately engages in evangelism.
 - Able to build and maintain healthy and diverse faith communities.
2. The candidate embraces the ministry of justice and compassion.
 - Challenges injustice and discrimination wherever it is found.
 - Engages local and global needs of the broken and poor.
 - Continually focuses ministry on the margin, seeking to emancipate all who exist within enslaving systems.
3. The candidate operates as a servant leader.
 - Promotes the development of others.
 - Serves the local and global church, demonstrating cross-cultural competency.
 - Creates healthy ministry environments characterized by safety and non-judgement.
4. The candidate empowers others to discover and function within their God-given design.
 - Wholeheartedly supports the role of women in leadership.
 - Facilitates and promotes multicultural community and staff.
 - Actively helps others discover their brilliance.
5. The candidate leads with creativity and vision.
 - Seeks best practices of contextual and culturally relevant ministry.
 - Envisions alternatives and successfully leads others towards more creative and effective outcomes.
 - Casts compelling vision and develops strategic plans to accomplish it.

Service Requirements for Ordination

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The spiritual formation necessary for healthy, effective, long-term ministry happens best in the context of a local church. In order to

properly observe and assess the gifting, calling, and brilliance of a potential ordinand, supervised experience in a local church or in a context beyond the local church as approved by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board is essential. Normally a candidate will move through this season of formation and supervision in two to three years.

Ordination Credentials

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- A. Ministers, whether located or itinerant, whose ordinations are recognized by an annual conference, shall be entitled to credentials from the president of the conference, certifying their ordination. Duplicate copies of credentials for ministers received after June 10, 1969, are remitted by the president of the conference for retention and permanent filing by Ministerial Credentialing Services.
- B. Ordained ministers in good standing who unite with another church or are granted permission to withdraw from the Free Methodist Church shall deposit their credentials with the secretary of the conference and receive a receipt for them. If the credentials are not deposited with the secretary of the annual conference from which the minister has withdrawn, the credentials shall be declared null and void by action of the annual conference.
- C. Ministers who are expelled from the church or who are allowed to withdraw under charges must surrender their credentials. If they refuse or neglect to deposit them with the secretary of the conference from which they have been separated, the conference, by official action, shall declare them null and void.
- D. Credentials may be restored only by the annual conference to which they were surrendered or which declared them void.
- E. In the event of the loss of ordination credentials, a certified duplicate copy shall be made available through the Board of Bishops office.
- F. After a period of three years, an ordained person neither appointed to nor actively seeking a recognized ministry function in the life of a Free Methodist Church shall deposit his/her credentials with the secretary of the conference and receive a receipt for them (see ¶5630).

Continuing Education

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Ordained clergy are urged to engage regularly in continuing education opportunities. MEG Boards are to mandate continuing education standards at the conference level and require a statement or certificate of completion.

Conference Membership Transfers and Termination

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- A. The licenses of Conference Ministerial Candidates and credentials of ordained deacons and elders may be transferred from one annual conference to another. Transfers shall be by means of a certificate of standing from the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board or the annual conference. This certificate is valid until the next session of the annual conference to which the certificate is given.
- B. The annual conference or its Ministerial Education and Guidance Board may give a certificate of standing to a minister intending to join another denomination. Membership in the conference and the church terminates upon the giving of such a certificate.
- C. A minister who unites with another denomination without having requested or received proper credentials of withdrawal from the church may, upon satisfactory evidence of that fact, be declared withdrawn by a majority vote of the conference.
- D. The unauthorized founding of or the unauthorized assumption of a leadership role in an independent congregation by a Free Methodist minister is equivalent to joining another denomination. All rights and privileges of the minister cease and his/her credentials must be deposited with the secretary of the conference.
- E. A minister who is serving a conference and who plans employment elsewhere the succeeding year shall notify the superintendent at least 60 days prior to annual conference or, failing to give such notice, shall apply to the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board for permission to withdraw from the service of the conference at the close of the current conference year.
- F. When a superintendent is elected and accepts office in another conference, the superintendent's membership shall be transferred to that conference. If a superintendent serves more than one annual conference, he/she shall choose membership in one of those conferences.

Reception from Other Denominations

¶5510

- A. Ministers from other evangelical churches who desire to unite with the Free Methodist Church may be received according to the church's procedures, provided that they
 1. Produce documentation of current ministerial credentials held in good standing from the previous denomination;

2. Give satisfactory answers to the questions which the church proposes to
 - a. Laypersons for membership and
 - b. Ministers for admission to annual conference membership;
 3. Indicate agreement with the church's doctrine, discipline, government, and usages and give evidence of appropriate gifts, graces, and usefulness;
 4. Participate in classes or a cohort to complete Free Methodist History and Polity, and Wesleyan Theology or Wesleyan Theopraxis;
 5. Complete an Outcomes-Based Ordination Assessment or equivalent interview with the MEG Board to ensure the minister's health and theological compatibility with the FMC;
 6. Meet with a conference-approved clinician capable of assessing the candidate's emotional, mental, relational, and marital (if applicable) health; and
 7. Receive the recommendation of the MEG Board and approval by the annual conference.
- B. No person may be ordained more easily by transfer from another denomination than through meeting the requirements of the *Book of Discipline* for Free Methodist ministers. Equivalency is the guideline. The candidates must qualify in both educational and service requirements.
- C. Where immediate transfer of credentials is not possible due to one or more of the above steps being incomplete, a candidate may be licensed as a Licensed Pastor (see ¶5640.A) for the period of 12 months to be renewed annually by the conference, thereby providing the time necessary for proper acclimation into the conference.
- D. The credentials of ministers transferring from other denominations who have been divorced or are married to a spouse who has been previously divorced will only be recognized if the MEG Board votes to approve them for conference admission and such decision is approved by the conference superintendent and the bishop of record.
- E. Upon completion of the process, they shall be issued credentials.

Termination of Conference Membership

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Conference membership ceases when

1. An ordained minister is returned to lay status in a local Society and the conference receives the minister's credentials (see ¶5630); or
2. An ordained minister voluntarily withdraws from the conference

- and denomination, having surrendered credentials; or
3. A conference allows an accused minister to surrender credentials and return to lay membership in a local Society; or
 4. A conference allows an accused minister to surrender credentials and withdraw from the conference and denomination under charges or complaints (see ¶7190); or
 5. An ordained minister joins another denomination; or
 6. An ordained minister is expelled.

Special Cases of Appointments

Left without Appointment

- ¶5600 An annual conference may, upon the unanimous recommendation of the Ministerial Appointments Committee, leave a minister without an appointment. Any ordained minister left without an appointment for more than two years in succession may be located or returned to lay status by vote of the annual conference.

Under Review

- ¶5605 The MEG Board may determine that a minister in conference relationship be placed “under review” (as per ¶7190.D) while the MEG Board determines the minister’s suitability for continued ministry. During the time they are “under review” they may not be given a certificate of good standing. After a reasonable amount of time, not to exceed a year, the MEG Board must either return the minister to good standing or proceed to terminate conference relationship. The time of review may be extended for up to one additional year if agreed upon by both the minister under review and the MEG Board.

Family Leave

- ¶5608 Persons stepping back from full-time, part-time, or other active ministry in order to focus on family commitments such as raising children or caring for aging parents may be officially appointed to “Family Leave.”

Leave of Absence

- ¶5610 An ordained minister not in active relationship to the ministry of the Free Methodist Church may be given a leave of absence by the annual conference on the recommendation of the Ministerial Appointments Committee. After two years on leave of absence, a minister who is not restored to an active relationship shall be located to a Free Methodist Society as a Located Deacon or Located Elder. One two-year extension of leave of absence may be granted by an annual conference, with further consideration for extenuating circumstances, upon recommendation of the

Ministerial Appointments Committee. A minister so located to a Society may be restored to the itinerant relationship only by the annual conference that voted the location. The published appointments of ministers on leave of absence shall designate the reason for the leave.

Located

¶5620 When an ordained minister is located by an annual conference, the Ministerial Appointments Committee shall fix the place of membership after consultation with the minister involved and the pastor and local Board of Administration of the Society involved. Ordained persons in good standing shall be listed as Located Elders or Located Deacons as the case may be and may be elected as a lay delegate to annual and General Conference.

Return to Lay Status

¶5630 An ordained minister may be returned to lay status. This may occur at the request of an elder after consultation with his or her Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, or as a result of evaluation of ministry effectiveness followed by the unanimous recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and subject of the annual conference, or when an elder leaves appointed ministry to pursue secular employment. In all cases, the elder shall deposit his/her credentials with the secretary of the annual conference where membership is held. Individuals who wish to again pursue active pastoral ministry must make application to and be recommended by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board where their credentials are held. This does not pertain to special leaves of absence as authorized by the conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.

Licensed Pastor

¶5640

- A. Any person appointed to a Society who is not a member of the annual conference in which he/she is appointed shall be designated a Licensed Pastor. Though Conference Ministerial Candidates who are appointed as lead pastor have a vote, Licensed Pastors do not vote at annual conference. A person becomes a Licensed Pastor when approved for ministry by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and appointed by the Ministerial Appointments Committee. Licensed Pastor status shall be renewed annually. Licensed Pastors have the right to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and solemnize marriages in that place if civil law permits.
- B. No person may be appointed to serve as a Licensed Pastor who does not meet the qualifications of a minister outlined in ¶¶5310, and 5650. Prior to his/her appointment, a Licensed Pastor not

currently a member of a local Free Methodist Church shall answer affirmatively the questions for Free Methodist membership at a meeting of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.

- C. Ordinarily, a person serving as a Licensed Pastor will transfer into the Free Methodist Church or will complete a process of preparation for ordination in the Free Methodist Church. Exceptions to this rule must be processed with the area bishop.

Preaching Points / Ministry Points

- ¶5645 An elder or CMC may be appointed to a “Preaching Point” or a “Ministry Point” within a community, as an initial step toward establishing a Church-Planting Project.

Divorce and Remarriage

- ¶5650 A clergy member of a conference who divorces or is divorced by his/her spouse shall enter into the care of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board which shall design for the member a process of healing and restoration as appropriate for the circumstances. That clergy member may not remarry until the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board determines that it is appropriate according to biblical guidelines in consultation with the bishop of record. A clergy person who refuses to enter into such a process shall not be reappointed by the annual conference. This provision shall also apply to a minister whose spouse has been divorced from a mate who still lives.

Evangelists

- ¶5660
- A. Evangelists are men and women gifted by God to promote revivals and to spread the gospel of Christ abroad in the land but not necessarily called to pastoral charges or to government in the church.
- B. All Evangelists shall be approved by the conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and appointed as Evangelists by the Ministerial Appointments Committee. Securing work in local churches and other settings such as camps and retreats shall be the Evangelist’s responsibility.
- C. The Evangelist shall seek the counsel of the superintendent whenever invited to minister outside the denomination in a region where there is a Free Methodist work. In such a case, the Evangelist shall also initiate collegial contact with the pastor of the Free Methodist work.

Located Deacons and Located Elders

¶5700

- A. Located Deacons and Located Elders (persons holding ordination but not itinerating) shall have their names listed in the records of the annual conference and shall be accountable to the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board with respect to their character, conduct, and doctrine. They shall be located to a particular Society by the Ministerial Appointments Committee and shall function in ministry under the direction of that Society (see ¶5620). Located Deacons and Located Elders may be elected as lay delegates to annual conference and General Conference.
- B. A Located Deacon or Located Elder may be transferred to an itinerating ministry within the conference upon the recommendation of the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, having given satisfactory answers to the questions of ¶8720 and having received the approving vote of the annual conference.
- C. Located Deacons or Located Elders who relocate into the boundaries of another conference shall approach the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board of that conference requesting that their membership be received. If and when a transfer is effected, it shall then be the responsibility of the Ministerial Appointments Committee of the receiving conference to locate the deacon or elder.
- D. Located Deacons and Located Elders shall function as exemplary members of the Society where they are located. Neglect of duty, including persistent refusal to participate in the life of the Free Methodist Church when such participation is possible, shall subject them to the discipline of the conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board. This discipline may include the request for surrender of ordination credentials. However, no Located Deacon or Located Elder shall be deprived of ordination credentials without due process.
- E. Located Deacons and Located Elders shall be approved annually by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, upon recommendation by the pastor and local Board of Administration of the Society where they are located.

Evaluation of Ministry Effectiveness

¶5800

- A. The evaluation of ministry effectiveness is intended to provide insight for the pastor and congregation on their effectiveness in ministry. In addition, the information gleaned from the evaluation is valuable to both the conference Ministerial Appointments Committee and Ministerial Education and Guidance Board as each carries out its work.
- B. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board not only

certifies pastors for work in the conference but also, through this evaluation, identifies areas of pastoral ministry which need improvement and facilitates this training.

- C. The Ministerial Appointments Committee makes its decisions after reflection on information and perspectives from the delegate(s), recommendations from the superintendent, a confidential report from the pastor, and the results from the evaluation.
- D. All who participate in the evaluation are encouraged to do so with Christian grace, prayer, and fasting, as the Lord may lead.
- E. The elements of the evaluation of ministry effectiveness include
 1. Annual staff evaluations to be handled by the senior pastor and local Board of Administration. For each conference-appointed staff person, the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board will review the local Board of Administration's evaluation as well as the character of these individuals.
 2. A pastoral evaluation conducted annually by the superintendent to assist the pastor in setting goals and objectives for his/her ministry. The results of each evaluation shall be submitted in appropriate form by the superintendent to the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and/or Ministerial Appointments Committee. Periodically, the superintendent will review progress with the pastor. The pastor will review the evaluation with the Pastor's Cabinet and/or the local Board of Administration.
 3. An evaluation of its ministry effectiveness by each Society every three years with the Society's participation. The superintendent or designee, with the pastor, will facilitate the evaluation. The results will be communicated to the Society and shared with the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board. If the stability or mission of a Society is threatened, any member of the local Board of Administration may move to request assistance from a conference intervention team. If passed by a majority vote of the local Board of Administration, then the pastor, Board of Administration vice-chair, or annual conference delegate shall make this request known to the conference superintendent, who will respond within previously established conference guidelines.
 4. An opportunity to assess the effectiveness of conference ministries, provided during the local church ministry effectiveness evaluation.
 5. The use of evaluation tools developed by the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board in consultation with the bishop of record.

In the following chapter, paragraph numbers and section letters with a plus sign + beside them indicate those items which may be changed by the Board of Administration. All others may be changed only by the General Conference.

Chapter 6

The Local Church

Preamble

¶6000+

A. Mission

The mission of all churches is the same and is shaped by both the Great Commandment and Great Commission. God is glorified when the church loves (the Great Commandment) and participates in His plan of redemption (the Great Commission). The mission of the church is for the whole church to achieve what God clearly directed us to do.

The church's mission, simply stated, is **"To love God, love people, and make disciples."**

B. Vision

Vision is each church's unique contribution to the mission of loving and making disciples. The Free Methodist Church has a unique history with a unique vision of how best to love God and make disciples: to focus on full salvation (holiness), live in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and love practically, tangibly, and profoundly as part of our Wesleyan call. Our vision calls us to love God and humanity and serve in ways that express this full salvation and activating love. The result is more than personal spiritual health. It is to realize the kingdom of God on earth.

Our vision, simply stated, is **"To bring wholeness to the world through healthy, biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches"**

God has given us, throughout our history and even now, the charge to lead people into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ which makes them whole people through holy living and holy loving. The results have been a kingdom movement committed to wholeness of individuals and societies. To that end we have labored and continue to labor to address poverty, eliminate slavery, affirm the dignity of all persons, restore equality to women in all places – church and world – and help all people in bondage discover freedom in Christ.

Characteristics

¶6010 **Characteristics**

The church is the Body of Christ in the world. In worship, the church comes together to meet the holy God and to respond in obedience and love. In witness, the church makes known the good news of Christ throughout the local community and to

the ends of the earth, calling the lost to repentance and faith. In making disciples, converts are brought into the body, baptized, trained, and equipped for service to Christ. In fellowship, redeemed people experience their oneness in Christ by sharing in one another's lives with love and concern. In service, the church corporately cares for the needs of its own and others (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-13; Acts 2:42; 26:17).

¶6020

Holiness

Holiness is the great commandment of our community. Believers pursue holiness in its most comprehensive meaning of loving God with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength and our neighbors as ourselves. John Wesley rightly identified happiness as the fruit of holiness; freedom as the result of surrender to God; and peace as the child of forgiveness. The church calls on God for a renewed and clear vision of holiness that brings the presence of God near to the people of our time. This call to holiness not only reaffirms our historical values but heightens our responsibility to openly confront sin, be it addiction, selfishness, evil speaking, or anything else that dishonors the name of God.

¶6030

Disciple making

Disciple making is the great commission of our community. The church earnestly engages in evangelization and disciple making. We are not casual about pointing out the way of life and holiness. We are concerned for the spiritual growth of all those in our charge, whether pre-Christians, new Christians, or longtime Christians.

¶6040+

Nonnegotiable Fundamentals

All structures, ministries, and personnel of the church shall reflect these nonnegotiable fundamentals of the Free Methodist Church:

1. We may not live in violation of the Scriptures.
2. We may not live in violation of the Articles of Religion, the Constitution, the Membership Covenant, or the mission of the Free Methodist Church.
3. Our pastors may not live in violation of their ordination vows.
4. Our leaders may not lead the church in ways which detract or divert from our mission.

¶6050+

Core Values

All structures, ministries, and personnel of the church shall reflect these core values known as the *Free Methodist Way*:

1. Life-Giving Holiness

2. Love-Driven Justice
3. Christ-Compelled Multiplication
4. Cross-Cultural Collaboration
5. God-Given Revelation

¶6060+ **Expected Outcomes**

All structures, ministries, and personnel of the church shall produce these expected outcomes:

1. Every Society a prayer-saturated congregation
2. Every Society a worshipping congregation
3. Every Society a discipling congregation
4. Every Society an evangelizing congregation
5. Every Society a reproducing congregation
6. Every Society a culture-engaging congregation
7. Every Society a world-mission congregation

¶6070+ **Essential Ecclesiology**

The essentials of our ecclesiology can be summed up in the following seven scriptural characteristics:

1. Jesus is worshipped as Lord (“Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that it should be holy and without blemish” ¶121; see 1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 2:9-11; Romans 10:9).
 - a. The gathered believers are united in loving, covenant fellowship around the Trinitarian presence of the One true God: the Father, the Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19; John 14:26).
 - b. Jesus is honored as the incarnation of God and as the Lord and foundation/cornerstone of the church (see Colossians 2:9; Colossians 1:15, 1,; Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:19-20).
 - c. Worship in any of its multiple forms (teaching, testimony, prayer, singing, giving, etc.) is occurring regularly (see Hebrews 13:15; Colossians 3:16-17; 1 Peter 2:5).
 - d. Jesus is honored and His presence recognized when a group (even two or three) gather in His name (see Matthew 18:20; Revelation 2:1).
 - e. The Lordship of Jesus Christ as manifest in the created order is recognized and celebrated (see Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).
2. Scripture is taught and obeyed as truth (In its requirements it seeks to honor Christ and obey the written Word of God ¶121; see Hebrews 4:12; Matthew 4:4; Acts 2:42).

- a. The Scriptures are honored as the authority in all matters of doctrine and life (see 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15; 2 Peter 3:16).
 - b. The Scriptures are read and shared as the directive of the faith community (see 1 Timothy 4:13, 16).
 - c. The Scriptures provide moral authority and the standard of conduct for the community (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 - d. The Scriptures define and prioritize individual and corporate holiness (see 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 2:21)
3. Believers gather regularly for fellowship and mutual edification and equipping (The Free Methodist Church purposes to be representative of what the church of Jesus Christ should be on earth. It therefore requires specific commitment regarding the faith and life of its members ¶121; see Acts 2:42; Romans 12:4-6).
- a. The church is a community of “believers,” those who have been born again into the Body of Christ – interdependent persons (the people of God) who assemble for worship, koinonia fellowship, and witness (see John 1:12-13; 1 Corinthians 10:17; 12:13; 1 Peter 2:17; 5:9).
 - b. The assembling happens frequently enough to advance the familial, interactive realities of the church (see Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 14:26).
 - c. The “one anothers” of Scripture are practiced as a fulfillment of fellowship and discipleship (see Romans 12:10; Ephesians 5:21).
 - d. Active love, mutuality, generosity, and caring for the needs of one another are prioritized (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:34-35).
 - e. Unity of the faith and Spirit overcome divisions caused by race, class, status, wealth, or gender (see Galatians 3:26-28; 1 John 1:3, 7).
 - f. Prayer is a defining practice of the fellowship (see Acts 2:42; 12:5; 14:23; Colossians 4:2).
4. Sacraments are practiced (The church is a fellowship of the redeemed and the redeeming, preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments according to Christ’s instruction. ¶121).
- a. Baptism is practiced for initiating believers into the church (see Acts 2:38, 41; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:4-5).
 - b. Communion / the Lord’s Supper is practiced frequently as the ongoing, real presence of Jesus Christ and in remembrance of the reality and centrality of Christ’s

- convicting, converting, and sanctifying work (see Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26),
5. Spiritual authority is present, credible, and active (The church is created by God. It is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head. ¶121; see Hebrews 13:17).
 - a. Overseers and leaders are established and held accountable in a credible and biblical manner (see Acts 14:23; 15:6; 20:28; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5).
 - b. Overseers and leaders teach and equip the saints for maturity, ministry, and mission (see Ephesians 4:11-12; James 3:1).
 - c. Church discipline is exercised to guard the church and assist believers growth in discipleship (see 1 Corinthians 5:4-5).
 - d. Credible spiritual authority ensures accountable, equitable processes for the collection, stewardship, and distribution of financial resources (see Acts 6:3).
 6. God's Mission of disciple making and servanthood is pursued (It exists to fulfill the purposes of God in Christ. It redemptively ministers to persons ¶121).
 - a. The church understands itself as an expression of God's kingdom mission (see Matthew 6:9-10; 6:33).
 - b. The Great Commission (going and making disciples) is prioritized and practiced (see Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Timothy 2:2).
 - c. Serving the community is prioritized and practiced (see Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12; Mark 10:45).
 - d. Witness in word and deed is prioritized and viewed as the first step in disciple making (see Acts 1:8; 2:47).
 - e. The church pursues its mission through practicing the priesthood of all believers (see Ephesians 2:10; 1 Peter 2:9)
 - f. Generosity and assistance to the poor, widows, orphans, and immigrants are prioritized (see Galatians 2:10; James 1:27)
 7. The Holy Spirit is active and acknowledged in the gathering (The Holy Spirit is its life and power ¶121; see 2 Corinthians 13:14, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 2:22)
 - a. The Spirit is empowering the fruit and gifts of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 12:7).
 - b. The Spirit is teaching the gathered believers the words and acts of Jesus (see John 14:26; 1 John 2:27)

- c. The Spirit is comforting, correcting, and empowering the church (see Acts 9:31; Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 1:9).

¶6080+ **Expressions of Church**

The guidance of Church-Planting Projects as found in ¶6810 points A-H are instructive for the formation of new churches. This guidance is not to be understood as prescriptive or restrictive, however. Consistent with the spirit of paragraph 6040, as long as church plants live within the framework of the nonnegotiables, (¶6040), they are free to be creative in the expression of church. Some quickly multiplying gatherings will not form into Fellowships or Societies (as defined in the *Discipline*) but may serve as new-church incubators. The sacerdotal functions fall under the authority of the overseeing body.

Membership

- ¶6100 In harmony with our mission statement we invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith. We are open to all whom God has awakened and support them with the healing and equipping power of the Holy Spirit in His church. The biblical requirements of repentance, faith, and baptism make membership in the Free Methodist Church as nearly as possible synonymous with entering into the Body of Christ. We recognize that in some settings the terms *members* and *membership* are unhelpful and can create confusion. In such situations societies, with approval by the conference superintendent, are free to use alternate terms.

Admission into Membership

¶6110

- A. The requirements for membership in the Free Methodist Church are described in ¶151. Persons meeting these requirements shall be admitted to the privileges of membership. Those members who rise to leadership shall also meet expectations described in ¶6200.E. (See *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, section V, for guidance in membership preparation.)
- B. The ritual of membership is found in ¶8800.
- C. Any person in good standing in an evangelical church may be received into membership upon meeting the requirements of ¶151, which includes membership instruction, approval of the local Board of Administration, and public declaration of faith.
- D. When two or more societies vote to merge, individual membership is automatically transferred to the united Society.
- E. Members who withdraw from the church with no complaints against them at the time may be reinstated into membership

upon meeting the requirements of ¶151 and ¶8800.

- F. Pastors shall keep separate records of members, inactive members, and former members as described here in ¶6110 points F, G, H, and I. Members living at a distance from the Society in which membership is held and who are not attending shall send to the pastor a written testimony at least once a year describing their active worship and involvement in a Society of similar doctrinal beliefs. The pastor of that Society shall confirm these activities. Distant members who do not write or support their home church financially may, after one year, have their names removed from the active membership by action of the local Board of Administration. The Society shall seek to contact all absentee members annually to ascertain the viability of the membership connections and shall respond accordingly (restore, remove permanently, remove to the inactive list).
- G. When members live in violation of the Membership Covenant, it is the responsibility of the pastor(s) and the Membership Care Committee to seek in love to restore them. If such members refuse restoration, they must be dealt with according to the due process of the church (¶153.D, ¶6330).
- H. Members who willfully absent themselves from participation in the life of the church may be placed on an inactive members list (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, p. 113) by action of the local Board of Administration. This list shall be held by the pastor in the hope of restoration to active membership and fellowship in the Church. Membership for persons on the inactive membership list may be restored according to the provisions of ¶6110.E. Inactive members shall not be reported in the *Yearbook* or any other official membership data.
- I. Members whose membership is terminated by death or transfer to another church shall have their names placed on a separate list to be kept as a record of former members (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, pp. 109–110).

Youth Membership

¶6120

- A. All members under 16 years of age shall be known as youth members. They shall not be counted in the allocation of financial goals by the annual or General Conference. Their number shall be kept in a separate column in the statistical report. They are not eligible to vote in business meetings.
- B. The names of youth members shall be reviewed by the local Board of Administration at least once each year, with a view to character cultivation and Christian nurture.
- C. At age 16 youth members may be approved by the local Board

of Administration for adult membership. To be admitted as adult members, they must answer satisfactorily the questions for adult membership before a public meeting of the Society.

Associate Membership

¶6130 Free Methodist students and servicemen and women and their families living at a distance from their home and church may be granted associate membership in another Free Methodist Society. All rights and privileges except the right to vote shall be granted. Associate members shall be recorded on a separate list.

Transfer of Membership

¶6140

- A. Members desiring to move to another Society or to unite with another evangelical church are entitled to a letter of transfer and if in good standing shall receive it upon request.
- B. Members wishing to transfer to another Society must have a letter of transfer from the pastor (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix C). When giving a letter of transfer, the pastor shall promptly notify the pastor of the Society to which the letter is addressed. The letter of transfer is valid for one year.
- C. Members given a letter of transfer shall remain members of, and be amenable to, the Society by which the letter was given. Once the letter is presented to another Society and they are received into membership, they shall be responsible to the new Society for their conduct.
- D. It shall be the duty of the pastor receiving the letter to notify the pastor who gave it of its receipt (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix C).
- E. Youth members may be transferred to another Society by the pastor giving a letter of transfer (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix C).
- F. The conference superintendent must give consent for the issuing of a letter of transfer for a Licensed Pastor in charge of a Society (see ¶5640).

Membership – Special Circumstances

¶6150 Conferences of mission origin as well as in North America who, for cultural reasons, encounter difficulties with membership procedures as outlined in ¶¶6100-6110 may revise these procedures so long as they do not violate the doctrine or ecclesiology of the Free Methodist Church. Revised procedures shall be sponsored by the Board of Bishops which shall study them to assure that the constitutional requirements and guarantees of membership are carefully safeguarded and submit them to the Board of Administration for approval.

Local Society Administration

¶6200

- A. A Society is composed of two classes of members: adult and youth. The steps to membership are found in the sections of the Constitution under *Membership* and *Membership Covenant* (¶¶150-160).
- B. A business meeting of the adult members is called a Society meeting. Society meetings may be scheduled at the discretion of the local Board of Administration for purposes such as electing officers, reviewing ministry plans and progress, and affirming the missional priorities of the Society. Each Society should conduct an annual meeting in accordance with the corporation's bylaws and laws of the state.
- C. New and smaller societies should view the organization outlined as a goal to be reached as the church grows and ministries expand. Some offices/functions may be omitted or combined in such instances.
- D. Recognizing the diversity in the Free Methodist Church, diversity in board and ministry structures is needed to meet the expected outcomes. Ministry settings vary due to size, goals, and culture. The Society is free to organize its boards and ministry structures in such a manner as to maintain Free Methodist values while accomplishing the Expected Outcomes (see ¶6060).
- E. Selecting Leaders (see ¶3402)
 1. Leaders of the Society give substance and direction to the Society as they seek to fulfill our Expected Outcomes. They pray, strategize, and focus the energies, spiritual gifts, and passion of the whole body.
 2. Leadership and/or policy making positions shall be filled by members who
 - a. Live consistently within scriptural guidelines (expectations) for leaders (e.g., Exodus 18:21; Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9) and express Christlike attitudes in life and in relationships (e.g., Matthew 20:26-28; John 15:12-17; Acts 6:1-7; Ephesians 4:1-17);
 - b. Give evidence of spiritual gifts such as leadership, faith, and administration;
 - c. Agree with and sincerely seek to live out the goals for their maturing life in Christ (i.e., the principles of the Membership Covenant);
 - d. Continue in harmony with our doctrine and mission; and
 - e. Are vital in faith, faithful in attendance, and financially

supportive of their church to at least the level of a title.

3. Leadership and/or policy making positions are defined as: the Board of Administration, delegate(s), Nominating Committee, financial chairman and/or treasurer, plus other key ministry or teaching positions as determined by the local Board of Administration.

Society Meeting

¶6250

- A. The Society meeting shall be composed of the adult members of the Society. Youth members are ineligible to vote (see ¶6120).
- B. The pastor shall be chair of the meeting without vote. The secretary of the local Board of Administration shall be the secretary of the Society. The minutes of the Society meetings shall be kept in the record book of the local Board of Administration.
- C. The meeting shall be announced at least 10 days before it is held. Absentee voting is not permitted.
- D. Prior to the annual election process, the pastor shall present to the Society the scriptural qualifications for lay leadership positions such as those noted in ¶6200.E.
- E. Annual Conference Lay Delegates
 1. Adult members, with the exception of Conference Ministerial Candidates appointed to a Society as pastor-in-charge, who conform to the conditions outlined for leaders in ¶6200.E.2, are eligible to be (a) delegate(s) or reserve delegate(s). However, a delegate who is received as a Conference Ministerial Candidate during the current session of the annual conference shall not be disqualified to serve as a delegate. The Society shall, from those nominated by the Nominating Committee, elect by ballot their delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) to the annual conference, according to the provisions in ¶5010. The election of annual conference delegates normally occurs at a duly called Society meeting. In some societies, however, the local Board of Administration, in consultation with the conference superintendent, may provide an alternate means of electing its delegates providing that due notice is given (¶6250.C) and all members of the Society have opportunity to participate in the election. The election of the delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) shall be by separate ballot and shall each require a majority vote of those present and voting. The secretary will provide (a) credential(s) for the delegate(s).
 2. Delegates serve as liaison between the Society and its appointed personnel, as well as between the conference and the Society. Their primary tasks include: representing the Society at annual conference; participating in conference activities

- as requested; representing the Society to the superintendent; preserving unity within the body by promoting peace and harmony among the members.
3. Delegates are to support pastors and staff in the planning and promotion of Great Commission strategies.
- F. The Society shall elect a Nominating Committee (see ¶6310).
 - G. The Society shall elect adult members to serve in various capacities on the local Board of Administration, in addition to those named by virtue of office.
 - H. The Society may determine the number of stewards and may elect a Board of Stewards (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix B).
 - I. The local Board of Administration may serve as the trustees of the Society, or a separate board may be elected. When a separate board is elected, it shall consist of not less than three persons of whom two-thirds shall be adult members of the Free Methodist Church. All trustees shall be elected as specified in the charter or bylaws or by civil law (see ¶6400.B).
 - J. The Society shall elect a treasurer who shall be an adult member of that Society. He/she shall keep a record of all money received and expended and report to the Society (see ¶6300.G).
 - K. A financial review or audit shall be performed annually.
 - L. The Society may elect other personnel to serve.
 - M. The Society may elect a Pastor's Cabinet (see ¶6320).
 - N. The Society shall determine the propriety of incorporating and identify "the local church governing body" required by the state (see ¶6400).
 - O. The pastor's state-of-the-church, the treasurer's, and board or committee reports will be given at the annual Society meeting.
 - P. The pastor or local Board of Administration may call a Society meeting.
 - Q. *Robert's Rules of Order* in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure in the sessions of the Society meetings.
 - R. A suggested order of business for a Society meeting may be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix B.

Standing Boards and Committees

Local Board of Administration

¶6300

- A. The local Board of Administration shall be composed of the senior pastor and ministry leaders as determined by the Society.

It is recommended that there shall be no less than seven nor more than 15 members. The Board shall have at least one delegate and, when the Society has a separate Board of Trustees, one trustee as well. It is also recommended that no member, with the exception of the pastor, serve for more than six consecutive years.

1. In consultation with the conference superintendent, the Society may choose other structures and titles to appropriately reflect core values and desired outcomes.
 2. The Board shall organize itself to care for temporal business and to best facilitate and enable the church's ministries.
 3. Board members shall be representative members of the Society, faithful in worship attendance, involved in ministry, and should also be supportive financially at least to the level of the tithe (see ¶6200.E).
 4. Only adult members of the Society may serve on the local Board of Administration, except that members of an annual conference may serve on the Board if the Society elects them.
 5. Whenever practicable, the Board shall meet once a month.
- B. The pastor shall be chair of the Board, except as provided in ¶5110.D.3-4, and when absent, a chair shall be elected. Annually, the pastor may designate a layperson as presiding officer of the local Board of Administration, from among those elected to serve on this Board, upon mutual agreement and confirmation by the Board.
- C. The pastor is an ex officio member of all boards and committees.
- D. The local Board of Administration shall work in partnership with the senior pastor to implement the vision for the church and to promote and support the church's mission. It shall seek to be guided by and strive to model the scriptural admonitions found in Matthew 28:19-20, Matthew 22:37-39, Ephesians 4:11-16, Matthew 20:25-28, John 17:20-21, that we may be presented to Christ in accordance with Ephesians 1:22-23, John 13:34-35, 1 Corinthians 14:33, Galatians 5:22-23, James 3:17, and Hebrews 12:14.
- E. The pastor, in partnership with the Board, is responsible for making provision to accomplish the mission of the church including Christian education, evangelism, missions, church growth, and the work of stewards.
- F. The Board shall elect a secretary, an adult member of the Free Methodist Church, who shall also serve as the secretary of the Society. The secretary shall keep minutes of the proceedings of

the local Board of Administration and of the Society meetings, and shall record all marriages and baptisms.

- G. The treasurer of the Society shall keep a record of all monies raised and of the manner in which they are expended. The treasurer shall provide a detailed, monthly financial statement in writing to the Finance Committee and the local Board of Administration, with a full report to the annual Society meeting.
- H. To safeguard the treasurer, it is recommended that the Board elect tellers who shall count each offering and provide the necessary documentation for the financial review or audit.
- I. A financial secretary may be elected if the size of the congregation and amount of funds handled make it advisable. Duties of the financial secretary shall be defined by the local Board of Administration.
- J. It is recommended that the local Board of Administration elect from the members a finance board. The pastor and the treasurer shall be ex officio members. The Finance Board shall report regularly to the local Board of Administration (see ¶6450.A).
- K. Upon the joint request of the pastor and the Finance Board, the financial books shall be made available for examination.
- L. The members of the Finance Board shall see that each member of the Society is solicited for the support of the local work and urged to give regularly (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) according to his/her means (see ¶6440).
- M. The Board shall see that a permanent record is kept of all baptisms, weddings, and funerals; a list of the names and addresses of all members, with time and method of reception, date of birth and baptism, completion of pastoral instruction classes of each, and time and reason for termination of membership. Each year the senior pastor will oversee the completion of the Society's annual report.
- N. The Board shall provide for a Membership Care Committee consisting of the pastor(s) of the church and up to five additional members of the church who shall be chosen on the basis of demonstrated Christian maturity and with representation of both women and men. Where a separate Membership Care Committee is not feasible, these duties may be assigned to an existing committee such as the Pastor's Cabinet (see ¶6320).
- O. The Board licenses Local Ministerial Candidates according to the guidelines provided in ¶6500.

- P. *Robert's Rules of Order* in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure in the sessions of the local Board of Administration.
- Q. A suggested order of business may be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix B.

Nominating Committee

¶6310

- A. At the annual meeting, the Society shall elect by ballot from its adult membership a standing Nominating Committee of not fewer than three nor more than nine persons, plus the senior pastor. The Society shall consider persons for this committee who are spiritually mature and who understand and actively pursue the mission of the church. The Society shall determine the size of the Nominating Committee, the duration and rotation of terms, and any term limits. The Nominating Committee may not present nominations for the next Nominating Committee; however, the Society may allow for nominations from the membership to be received in advance of the annual meeting. In this case, a form for nominations shall be provided at least 30 days prior to the election. The local Board of Administration shall process these nominations and provide a ballot including the names of all available nominees. In addition, the Society may determine whether nominations will be allowed from the floor and set a standing rule in advance to that effect.
- B. The objective of the nomination process is to identify persons of spiritual maturity, giftedness, and fruitfulness in ministry and to provide appropriate roles for each to participate in the overall mission of the church.
- C. The Society and the Board of Administration shall ensure a member's right to submit nominations.
- D. The Nominating Committee shall
 1. Recommend to the Society persons to serve in the leadership roles of all standing committees or boards;
 2. Nominate annual conference delegates, if the Society so chooses, presenting at least two nominations for each delegate position for election by ballot (see ¶6250.E);
 3. Consult ¶6200.E when considering persons for the position of delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) to annual conference and for all leadership positions. The Board of Administration shall establish a procedure whereby the pastor and/or Cabinet

can review the nominations and remove from the final ballot the names of members who have shown inadequate growth in Christian practice or Christlikeness. Prior to the annual election process, the pastor shall remind the Society and/or Nominating Committee (whichever is most appropriate) of the scriptural qualifications for leadership positions as defined in ¶6200.E; and

4. Make their report available to the Society at least 10 days prior to the election.

Pastor's Cabinet

¶6320

- A. Each Society may elect a Pastor's Cabinet. It shall be composed of not fewer than three nor more than nine lay members, including representation by delegate(s) to annual conference. The pastor may nominate one-third of the cabinet and shall serve as chair. A lay vice-chair may be chosen to serve in the event of the pastor's absence or to consider congregational complaints when necessary. No meeting shall be held without the pastor's knowledge and consent.
- B. The Cabinet is to assist the pastor in making his/her ministry more effective in these ways:
 1. Serve as a prayer cabinet;
 2. Be available for counsel;
 3. Keep the congregation informed concerning the nature and function of the pastoral office;
 4. Keep the pastor advised concerning conditions within the congregation as they affect relations between pastor and people;
 5. Serve as a planning committee;
 6. Serve as a personnel committee, offering counsel on staff employment, reviewing compensation, and making recommendations relative to pastoral and staff compensation to the appropriate committee or board;
 7. Assist in selecting suitable supply pastors when the pastor is to be absent, groups for special services, and special speakers, unless otherwise provided for by the local Board of Administration;
 8. Serve as the Church Calendar Committee;
 9. Serve as the Membership Care Committee when so

designated by the local Board of Administration; and

10. Assist the pastor in counseling and guidance of Local Ministerial Candidates (see ¶6500).

Membership Care Committee

¶6330

- A. The Society shall have a Membership Care Committee. It shall consist of the pastor(s) and up to five additional members who shall be chosen on the basis of demonstrated Christian maturity and with representation of both genders.
- B. When the local Board of Administration so decides, the duties of the Membership Care Committee may be assigned to an existing committee.
- C. If cases arise for which the Membership Care Committee can find no disciplinary direction, it shall refer the matter to the conference superintendent who may confer with the bishop of record (see ¶6110.G).
- D. The Membership Care Committee shall:
 1. Assist the pastor(s) in identifying and recruiting members;
 2. Review the membership rolls at least annually;
 3. Counsel with members whose conduct and relationship to the church may be cause for concern, such as the threatened breakup of a marriage (see ¶3311.C);
 4. Make recommendations to the local Board of Administration regarding the membership status of those who have been counseled;
 5. Provide continuing ministry to former or inactive members (see ¶6110.F);
 6. Perform the duties of discipline prescribed in ¶7130; and
 7. Maintain records of the Society's membership according to ¶6110 with lists of active (¶6110.F), inactive (¶6110.H), and former (¶6110.I) members.

Christian Schools

¶6340+

- A. Free Methodist Christian schools, preschools, daycares, homeschool groups or collaborations, and latchkey and similar programs are expected to maintain a Christian emphasis, exceed state educational standards, and comply with applicable state and local laws.

- B. Responsibility for the establishment, supervision, and operation of Free Methodist Christian schools, preschools, daycares, homeschool groups or collaborations, and latchkey and similar programs shall rest with the local Board of Administration, which may elect a Free Methodist School Board of Directors to give specific oversight. If a Free Methodist School Board of Directors is in place, it shall provide financial and statistical reports to the local Board of Administration at least once each quarter. The Free Methodist School Board of Directors, of whom at least two-thirds shall be members of the Free Methodist Church, shall cooperate with the local Board of Administration in accordance with guidelines established by the local Board of Administration.
- C. The local Board of Administration which has responsibility for the operation of a Christian school, preschool, daycare, homeschool group or collaboration, latchkey, or similar, school-related program shall require an annual financial report to be completed by a qualified auditor or accountant.
- D. A person shall be employed by the local Society to be principal of its school only after
 1. The local Board of Administration has determined that the candidate's educational and spiritual leadership is appropriate;
 2. The local Board of Administration approves the candidate for employment; and
 3. The candidate is, or upon employment will become, a member of the Free Methodist Church.
- E. The leadership commitments, mission commitments, and connectional commitments as found in ¶4810 for denominational institutions shall apply, as appropriate, to Free Methodist Christian schools, preschools, daycares, homeschool groups or collaborations, and latchkey and similar, school-related programs. Any complaint of violation of any of these principles shall be directed to the local Board of Administration. Should the complaint be found to be valid, the local Board of Administration shall apply such penalty to the school, preschool, daycare, latchkey, or similar, school-related program found guilty as it deems appropriate.
- F. It is the responsibility of each local Board of Administration of each Society having Free Methodist Christian schools, preschools, and/or daycares that own real property, and of the local officials administering them, to see that the appropriate Trust Clause is a part of each deed pertaining to Free Methodist

Christian school, preschool, or daycare property, the same as other church property (see ¶6400.D).

- G. Any concerns of child abuse shall be reported immediately to the appropriate state and/or local authorities in conformity with the laws of the jurisdiction where the school, preschool, daycare, latchkey, or similar, school-related program is located.

Property and Finance

¶6400

- A. Before an annual conference or a Society purchases real estate, the articles of incorporation, wherever the law will permit, shall provide that the corporation be subject to the rules, regulations, doctrines, and *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church, incorporated as “The Free Methodist Church of North America,” as from time to time adopted by the General Conference of that Church insofar as they do not contravene the civil laws. When incorporation is complete, the deed(s) shall be made out directly to the owning body in its corporate name and shall contain the Trust Clause in ¶6400.D. Churches who hold property at the time they join the Free Methodist Church may be given the option by the Board of Bishops, with legal counsel, whether or not to adopt the Trust Clause for their existing property.
- B. The Board of Administration of an annual conference or a Society of the Free Methodist Church shall have and hold in trust (see ¶6400.D) any and all property committed to it. Whenever local law requires church property to be held by trustees, and when the Society authorizes its local Board of Administration to be the legal trustees (see ¶6250.I), references in the *Book of Discipline* to “Board of Administration” may be construed to be synonymous with “Board of Trustees.” The Board of Administration shall be elected by ballot where civil law requires. The task of caring for property and facilities may be referred to a separate properties committee.
- C. The Board of Administration of the owning body shall see that titles are good; that deeds are drawn in harmony with civil law; that they are immediately recorded; and that abstracts and other valuable papers are safely stored.
- D. **Trust Clause.** Local church property is understood as a matter of stewarding God’s resources to advance the mission of Jesus Christ in the world through the Free Methodist Church USA. Therefore, so that adequate protection may be afforded the respective body (see ¶6400.F), all property,

whether real, personal, or mixed, acquired by any local Society, annual conference, or other body, whether incorporated or unincorporated, shall be held subject to the following trust whether appearing in the evidence of title or left out of such evidence of title, by mistake, inadvertence, willfulness, or otherwise, and can only be released pursuant to the provisions of ¶6400.F of the *Book of Discipline*.

The property is held in irrevocable trust for the Free Methodist Church USA (incorporated as “The Free Methodist Church of North America”) and is subject to all provisions of its *Book of Discipline*. “Property” includes all houses of worship existing now or later constructed on the property. The following additional provisions apply to the trust:

- All seats shall be forever free;
 - All trustees and their successors, any Society or congregation, and all entities or persons with any interest in the property shall permit a minister to hold religious services on the property if the minister is authorized under the *Book of Discipline* and holds services in accordance with it.
 - The property may be sold and the proceeds disposed of only in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*.
- E. An annual conference or a Society shall not accept a deed which contains a clause by which the land conveyed may revert to the original grantor, the heirs, or assigns, nor shall it permit church property to be sold, mortgaged, or otherwise encumbered for current expenses. No other denomination shall be permitted to hold stated appointments in any Free Methodist churches without the consent of both the pastor and a majority of the local Board of Administration of the pastoral charge or Society.
- F. Whenever it becomes advisable and the electing body so authorizes, the local Board of Administration may sell or encumber or otherwise dispose or convey church property by securing the consent of the superintendent and the Conference Administrative Committee in which the property lies and of the Board of Directors of the Free Methodist Church USA, provided that in all cases the proceeds of such sale or encumbrance shall be:
- a. Invested by the local Society for use at a future time, and/or
 - b. Reinvested by the local Society to address the most pressing needs (operating or capital) faced by that local Society,

with preference given to property / capital projects, subject to the review and approval of the conference Board of Administration. If within three years of the date of sale or encumbrance the proceeds have not been so used, the Administrative Committee of the annual conference may name a committee to cooperate with the Society to lay plans for using such proceeds. If after two years of such cooperative effort satisfactory plans have not been developed, the annual conference may take control of the proceeds. In the case of annual conference property, the authority so given may either be limited to specific property or may be a general authorization pertaining to any or all of its property.

- G. Whenever any property is no longer used permanently for church purposes and it is so declared by the annual conference, the local Board of Administration, if any remains, shall sell it and turn over the proceeds of the sale to the annual conference or convey the same to the conference in its corporate name. If the Society Board should refuse to do so, their offices shall be declared vacant by the annual conference and shall be replaced by the conference designees. If no such board remains, the annual conference shall take possession of the property by due process of law. The annual conference may sell and convey such property and the proceeds of sale may be used as the conference may direct, in accordance with the civil law.

Construction of Churches

¶6410

- A. Church buildings are a visual testimony to the surrounding community of the church's faith in God; therefore architecture, interior arrangements, and landscaping shall convey honor and reverence for God. All churches shall clearly identify themselves as Free Methodist. All structures shall be built in compliance with zoning laws and building codes and shall be compatible with the prevailing architecture of the neighboring area. New buildings shall be easily accessible to the physically handicapped. All seats shall be free. Interior arrangements shall assist in making the preaching of the Word central in our services. Careful planning is necessary, including consideration of utility and maintenance costs, safety, acoustical features, and the long-term needs of the church.
- B. No step shall be taken involving pecuniary liability in constructing houses of worship or parsonages, or in purchasing real property of any kind, until the finance plan is approved in

writing by the proper conference boards as determined by the annual conference.

- C. Each annual conference may appoint a Buildings and Locations Committee of not less than three or the Administrative Committee may serve this function. No real property shall be purchased or building constructed within the bounds of the conference without this committee's approval in writing both of the location and the plan of the building, and of the title of the property. When a church building is involved, this Committee shall make sure that proper accommodations have been made for the projected ministries before giving its approval.
- D. No houses of worship, parsonages, or other buildings shall be purchased or constructed on leased ground, except on reservations or in other places where it is impossible to secure a deed in fee, or without the unanimous written consent of the Administrative Committee of the annual conference in whose territory the property is situated.

Church Merger/Closing

¶6420 The determination of the continuance, merger, or closing of a Society by an annual conference, when recommended by its conference Administrative Committee, shall be based on the following considerations: recent growth patterns, proximity to other Free Methodist churches, the present and long-range priorities of the location, facilities, and financial ability. In the event that membership of a Society declines below a minimum of ten supporting adult members or is deemed by the conference Administrative Committee to be incapable of adequately supporting the Society or fulfilling the vision of the Free Methodist Church, the conference Administrative Committee may at its discretion disband the Society and/or assume responsibility for the property, assets and the care and transfer of members.

In the case of the closing of a Society, the Society book of minutes, the records, and archival materials of that church shall be considered part of the legacy of the denomination to be deposited with the conference historical collection. Where such a collection does not exist or where suitable facilities are not available, the materials should be deposited with the Marston Memorial Historical Center.

Church Litigation

¶6430 A Society may not initiate litigation without first receiving

approval from the Board of Directors of the Free Methodist Church USA.

Raising of Funds

¶6440

- A. The support of the Society is to come from the tithes, offerings, and gifts of its people. The membership is requested to cooperate heartily by giving not less than one-tenth of their income for the Lord's work (see ¶6200.E, ¶8800.5).
- B. Other methods for the raising of funds may be used by constituents of our societies, provided that
 1. They are not a substitute for the giving of tithes and offerings;
 2. They are consistent with the ethics and practices of our faith; and
 3. The Society itself does not serve as a marketing agency for the commercial products of its constituency.
- C. The Society may support community-wide efforts to raise funds for worthwhile projects so long as the fundraising effort is consistent with the ethics of our faith and Membership Covenant.
- D. The Society may develop initiatives of its own, or strategic partnerships with others engaged in educational, commercial, or charitable endeavors, which provide healthy connection with the community and world. Such initiatives may tangibly benefit the church and its ministries financially so long as the church acts within the tenets of the *Book of Discipline* and in conformity with local, state, and federal laws.
- E. All fund appeals to be made by societies outside of their annual conference must first be cleared by the Administrative Committee of the conference(s) into whose area the appeal is to be sent.

Support of Pastors

¶6450

- A. It shall be the duty of the Finance Board to consult with the pastor and then prepare an estimate of the amount necessary for the support of the pastoral staff. This estimate is to be presented to the local Board of Administration for action (see ¶6300.J).
- B. If a pastor chooses not to occupy the parsonage, the local Board of Administration may rent it out to others and shall pay the pastor a housing allowance not less than the rent received, less

any additional taxes or insurance required.

Resources

¶6460+ Information regarding local church boards may be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, appendix B. Superintendents, pastors, and lay members are encouraged to make frequent use of resources such as

Deacon Handbook
Ministerial Education and Guidance Board Manual
Pastors and Church Leaders Manual
Superintendent's Manual.

Local Ministerial Candidates

¶6500

- A. A Local Ministerial Candidate is one who is seriously considering a call to vocational ministry and who has completed the processes of licensing. Local Ministerial Candidate status provides the opportunity to explore the perceived call to ministry with the pastor in the context of the local church. Prior to being approved to work toward a Local Ministerial Candidate license, the person shall have been a member of the church long enough to have given evidence of possessing the developing qualities and gifts normally expected of a Christian minister: a heart for God and the mission of the church, leadership potential, good conduct, and the ability to work with people.
- B. Persons who discern a call to the diaconate should pursue the Consecrated Deacon path at the completion of the Local Ministerial Candidate process.
- C. The pastor shall enter into a mentoring relationship with the potential Local Ministerial Candidate, establishing a Formation Plan (see *Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook*). The pastor shall journey with the individual through licensing as Local Ministerial Candidate, and possibly even through licensing as a Conference Ministerial Candidate. A Local Ministerial Candidate shall be amenable to instruction, supervision, and related discipline to assure growth in grace, knowledge, and leadership skill (see ¶6300.O, ¶6320.B.10).
- D. Licensing as a Local Ministerial Candidate is contingent upon
 1. Membership in the Free Methodist Church;
 2. Exploring a call to ordained ministry in a mentoring relationship with pastor/designee (see *Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook*);
 3. An interview with and approval by the local Board of Administration upon satisfactory answers to the questions

- provided in ¶8700.A; and
4. Receiving a Local Ministerial Candidate certificate before the congregation upon satisfactory answers to the questions provided in ¶8700.B.
- E. Following licensing, the new Local Ministerial Candidate opens a file with The Center for Pastoral Formation (see *Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook*).
 - F. The names of all Local Ministerial Candidates shall be reported to the annual conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board.
 - G. A Local Ministerial Candidate shall maintain membership in the Society that licensed him/her, unless appointed as a Licensed Pastor (see ¶6500.H).
 - H. A Local Ministerial Candidate appointed as a Licensed Pastor shall hold membership in the Society served (see ¶5640).
 - I. A Local Ministerial Candidate's license is subject to annual review and renewal by the local Board of Administration.
 - J. A Local Ministerial Candidate, who after four years does not actively progress toward Conference Ministerial Candidacy leading to elder's orders shall choose to study for the diaconate or to serve in another lay capacity, thus discontinuing the Local Ministerial Candidate license.
 - K. A Local Ministerial Candidate appointed by a Ministerial Appointments Committee to have charge of a Society may administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and solemnize marriages in that place if civil law permits.
 - L. Finally, the local Board of Administration recommends to the conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board that the candidate be accepted as a Conference Ministerial Candidate.

Consecrated Deacons

¶6600

- A. Consecrated Deacons are members in good standing in the Free Methodist Church. They are persons of good reputation, full of wisdom and the Spirit, whose spiritual gifts from God have been confirmed by their societies. In response to God's call on their lives, Consecrated Deacons offer servant leadership in particular areas of congregational life, according to the gifts and graces God has given and they have developed. Complementing the work of elders, Consecrated Deacons serve the Society by assisting and leading the membership to carry out its ministries

to one another and the world.

- B. The specialized ministries of the Consecrated Deacons include, but are not limited to, ministries of
 1. Care and mercy.
 2. Worship and music.
 3. Administration and organization.
 4. Spiritual nurture and counsel.
 5. Outreach and service.
- C. Under the leadership of the pastor(s), local congregations will help people recognize, accept, and use their gifts in ministry. In due course, God will call some to lead the body in specialized ministries, assisting the pastor(s) in equipping the people for ministry and dedicating significant time to this work.
- D. Under the guidance of the pastor(s) and the local Board of Administration, persons called to such ministry will be recognized, encouraged, mentored, trained, examined, and certified for the diaconate.
 1. The local Board of Administration shall guide prospective Consecrated Deacons in a process of study and mentoring appropriate for their areas of ministry and according to denominational standards. This shall begin by meeting the requirements of Local Ministerial Candidacy followed by the remaining requirements outlined in the Consecrated Deacon candidacy process. The local Board of Administration will give due consideration to character, calling, gifting, training, and fruitfulness in ministry (see *Consecrated Deacon Handbook*).
 2. When a prospective Consecrated Deacon or his/her spouse has been divorced, clearance for ministry shall be required, according to denominational guidelines used by the bishops. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board will review and recommend clearance for ministry to the local Board of Administration for final approval. The file will go to the conference office, so that if the Consecrated Deacon were later to proceed to elder's orders, the bishops would have access to the previous endorsement.
- E. Upon meeting the requirements and completing the process of preparation, the local Board of Administration shall approve the candidate for consecration as a deacon within the Society. The conference superintendent or designee shall consecrate the deacon with the assistance of the pastor(s) and other deacons. The local Free Methodist Church shall issue a certificate to the newly consecrated deacon.
- F. On an annual basis the local Board of Administration shall review

and approve Consecrated Deacons within their care as to their character and performance in ministry. When appropriate, with due process, the local Board of Administration may discontinue certification.

The Consecrated Deacon's Role

¶6610

- A. Consecrated Deacons remain members of the local Free Methodist church with no official standing in the annual conference. Consecrated Deacons may therefore serve as lay delegates to annual conference and General Conference.
- B. The Consecrated Deacon's particular ministry role is defined by his or her individual gifts, passions, and calling from God. Consecrated Deacons may therefore serve the local congregation in a variety of ways.
- C. Consecrated Deacons may administer the sacraments only when authorized by an elder.
- D. The consecration of a deacon will be valid only in that Society. Whenever a Consecrated Deacon transfers membership to another Free Methodist Church, the receiving pastor may decline to recognize the prior consecration. If the pastor chooses to affirm the transferring deacon's consecration, the person may be approved for ministry in the new congregation after review by the pastor and local Board of Administration of the receiving Society.
- E. A composite record or list of Consecrated Deacons will be kept at the conference office and not listed in the denominational *Yearbook*. They shall be clearly distinguished from ordained Located Deacons who are listed in the *Yearbook*.

Pastoral Staff Assistants

¶6700 These guidelines apply to part-time or full-time, paid local church pastoral staff, ordained, Consecrated Deacons, or lay, such as associate/assistant pastors, ministers of visitation and outreach, ministers/directors of music, ministers/directors of Christian education, and ministers/directors of youth. These provisions do not apply to short-term appointments of less than four months or to unpaid positions.

Selection/Appointment

¶6710

- A. When a Society determines that additional pastoral staff is needed, the senior pastor shall consult the conference superintendent before any local action is taken. The superintendent shall

represent the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board and the Ministerial Appointments Committee in the initial stages of selecting a suitable person for the proposed position.

- B. The process of selecting a staff member shall involve the senior pastor, the Society, the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board, and the Ministerial Appointments Committee.
1. The senior pastor shall have the privilege of nominating pastoral staff. They shall be in harmony with the doctrine of the church, agreeable with the pastor's approach to ministry, and willing to work under leadership.
 2. The local Board of Administration shall select a Personnel Committee which may be the Pastor's Cabinet and must include the senior pastor. This committee shall establish a job description which delineates the responsibilities of the staff member and recommends salary and benefits. The committee shall screen and interview candidates, using conference applications and reference forms, and present its report to the local Board of Administration. If the local Board of Administration accepts the recommendation of the pastor and Personnel Committee, it shall then forward the recommendation to the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board for approval.
 3. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board shall review the application and recommendation from the Society.
 4. If the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board approves the recommendation and the prospective staff member is (or anticipates being) in conference relationship, the recommendation shall be referred to the Ministerial Appointments Committee, which shall have final jurisdiction regarding appointment.

Supervision

¶6720

- A. The pastoral staff assistant shall work under the supervision of the senior pastor, in accordance with the job description. The pastor and assistant(s) shall meet regularly (preferably weekly) for prayer and planning. They shall meet at least once yearly with the Personnel Committee to review the relationship of the assistant(s) to the senior pastor and to the Society.
- B. In case of a problem between the pastor and the assistant, the following procedure is recommended:

1. The pastor and the assistant shall first seek to resolve the problem themselves.
2. If they cannot resolve the problem, the matter shall be referred to the Personnel Committee for counsel and assistance.
3. If, after a reasonable period of time, the problem is still unresolved, the pastor or the assistant shall request a formal hearing with the Personnel Committee. The committee shall listen to both the pastor and the assistant and make recommendations for resolution.
4. If this procedure fails at the Society level, the pastor or the assistant or the Personnel Committee shall consult the conference superintendent, who may convene the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board or the Ministerial Appointments Committee to take whatever steps are necessary to solve the problem.

If for whatever reason the senior pastor finds it impossible to work effectively with the assistant, the conference superintendent shall be notified. The senior pastor shall then communicate this information to the assistant, the Personnel Committee of the Society, and, if the assistant is in conference relationship, the Ministerial Appointments Committee. The Personnel Committee or the Ministerial Appointments Committee, as appropriate, may then take action. This shall not occur prior to the annual conference without due cause and process.

Change in Appointment

¶6730

- A. Appointment of pastoral staff assistants shall be on a yearly basis, ending with the annual conference. An assistant who desires a change shall notify the senior pastor, who shall notify the Personnel Committee.
- B. The assistant shall also notify the conference superintendent and, if in conference relationship, the Ministerial Appointments Committee.
- C. If the Ministerial Appointments Committee wishes to appoint the assistant (when that person is in conference relationship) to another Society, the conference superintendent shall first consult the senior pastor, then the assistant, the delegate(s), and the Personnel Committee of the Society where the assistant serves.

- D. If the senior pastor is to be moved, the incoming pastor shall be given the responsibility of deciding whether to retain the existing assistant(s). Letters of resignation from all staff pastors shall, without exception, be submitted when he/she arrives. The new senior pastor has up to one year to exercise the option on each resignation. No resignation of conference-appointed assistants shall be accepted without due cause and/or process, which shall include the conference superintendent, the Ministerial Appointments Committee, and the designated Personnel Committee and/or team of delegates. The Ministerial Appointments Committee shall retain all of its appointment authority including the timing of any change. When the senior pastor is to be moved, the Ministerial Appointments Committee shall communicate this information to each conference-appointed assistant and the Personnel Committee of the Society.

Formation of New Churches

¶6800

- A. The fulfillment of the Great Commission and the mission of the Free Methodist Church requires larger, growing, and more effective local churches as well as more and varied churches. Reaching unreached people is the motive for the planting of new churches. Each church should be eager and open to win all people to Christ and incorporate them into membership. Yet within each population group there are persons who, because of geographic distance or language or cultural differences, can more readily be reached by new churches than by existing ones. Creative strategies and multiple styles of ministry are required.
- B. Most new churches will come into being as societies form new groups nearby or use their facilities for new kinds of ministry. Others will come about as individuals or teams are commissioned at the local, conference, or general level to enter new areas. In still other cases, already existing groups may discover the benefit of affiliating with the Free Methodist Church and sharing in its mission. In each instance, the ultimate goal is not only to reach more people and see them mature in Christ, but also to reproduce new societies.
- C. New Free Methodist churches shall be known as “Church-Planting Projects,” “Fellowships,” or “Affiliated Churches” in preparation for Society status. These terms will be used in reporting appointments and for official denominational records. However, the name “Free Methodist Church” may be used in public reference by groups in any of these categories.

All local congregations shall clearly identify themselves with the Free Methodist Church. The following guidelines provide consistency in policy while allowing latitude in strategy for multiplying societies.

- D. An annual conference or Society may partner with Free Methodist World Missions to design and implement strategies for ministries to ethnic peoples within the United States. Groups of immigrant residents within the United States may be identified as missions initiatives by Free Methodist World Missions.

Church-Planting Projects

¶6810

- A. A Church-Planting Project is the first phase in the formation of most new churches.
- B. Authority to Form. Each Church-Planting Project must have a sponsoring agency, which may be a local Society or conference board or committee. The project comes into existence when the sponsoring agency announces its decision.
- C. Accountability and Responsibility. The church-planting pastor or lay project leader is accountable to the sponsoring agency which is responsible for providing assistance and support in the form of consultation, personnel, materials, and/or finances.
- D. Membership. A church-planting pastor or lay project leader is responsible for preparing persons to become members of a new Free Methodist Fellowship or Society with assistance as needed from the sponsoring agency. Free Methodist members participating in the project retain membership in their home church.
- E. Financial Matters. Full self-support should be attained as early as possible. The Church-Planting Project may hold or disburse its own funds only if authorized by the sponsoring agency, which retains auditing responsibility.
- F. Local Organization. A church-planting pastor or lay project leader may appoint a ministry committee to provide counsel and direction.
- G. Duration. Church-Planting Projects are encouraged to move to Fellowship or Society status as soon as possible. Only under special circumstances approved by the sponsoring agency should a Church-Planting Project continue more than two years if it has not progressed to the Fellowship status (¶6820).

- H. Conference Relationship. A lay project leader shall have an honorary seat in the conference and may be named in the appointments at the discretion of the Ministerial Appointments Committee.

Fellowship Status

¶6820

- A. Fellowship status is the second phase in the formation of most new churches. The conference's Administrative Committee or Board of Evangelism shall serve as the Fellowship's sponsoring agency.
- B. Authority to Form. A conference superintendent, with the concurrence of the sponsoring agency, may recognize a group as a Fellowship when
 1. Enough prospective members have been adequately prepared for membership;
 2. These prospective members give public, joint assent to the adoption of the *Book of Discipline* and individually answer the questions for adult membership;
 3. The group is incorporated or organized under state law and it is duly authorized to transact business in the state where it is located. A document of agreement containing the denominational mission statement, the official name of the group, and adequate statements of mutual responsibility and accountability between the Fellowship and the conference has been signed by these prospective members, the superintendent, and representatives of the sponsoring agency.
 4. The requirement to incorporate or organize under state law is applicable to churches in the United States. For new churches of mission origin, we seek to relate to governmental authorities in ways consistent with the church's ultimate allegiance to the mission of Jesus Christ and its respect for governmental authorities.
- C. Accountability and Responsibility. The pastor or lay project leader and the Fellowship shall be accountable to the conference superintendent and the sponsoring agency. The Fellowship shall be guided toward becoming a Free Methodist Society. A written report of progress and needs for further guidance shall be submitted to the superintendent and sponsoring agency

each quarter.

- D. **Membership.** A Fellowship may receive members in all relationships and shall report them in the same manner as societies.
- E. **Financial Matters.**
 1. A Fellowship shall hold and disburse its own funds but the sponsoring agency shall retain authority to audit.
 2. Any real property acquired by a Fellowship prior to recognition as a Society shall be in the name of the conference or the Free Methodist Church USA, rather than in the name of the Fellowship.
 3. In the case of dissolution of a Fellowship, the accumulated assets become the property of the sponsoring agency.
 4. A Fellowship is encouraged to give a tithe of church income to conference and denominational ministries as the first step towards full participation in these financial responsibilities.
- F. **Local Organization.** Members of the Fellowship shall elect a local Board of Administration of no fewer than three members including the secretary, treasurer, and honorary delegate. The pastor-in-charge may nominate officers or members at-large other than the delegate. The local Board of Administration may form other boards and committees as needed.
- G. **Duration.** A Fellowship shall remain in this relationship no longer than three years unless the sponsoring agency grants an extension. In the event of the dissolution of a Fellowship, letters of transfer shall be issued to its members in good standing.
- H. **Conference Relationship.** A Fellowship shall be represented in the annual conference by an honorary delegate who shall have a voice but no vote.

Affiliate Congregations

¶6830

- A. Congregations established outside of Free Methodist sponsorship and wishing to become part of the denomination may enter as Affiliate Congregations.
- B. **Authority to Recognize.** A conference superintendent, with the concurrence of the conference Administrative Committee, may receive a congregation in an Affiliate relationship when
 1. The members of the congregation have received adequate orientation to the doctrine, organization, and mission of the

Free Methodist Church;

2. A document of affiliation has been signed by the governing board of the congregation, the superintendent, and representatives of the conference, affirming the Articles of Religion and the mission statement of the Free Methodist Church and describing mutual responsibilities; and
 3. The group is incorporated or organized under state law and it is duly authorized to transact business in the state where it is located;
 4. The members have given public, joint assent to the document of affiliation and questions for church membership. The requirement to incorporate or organize under state law is applicable to churches in the United States. For new churches of mission origin, we seek to relate to governmental authorities in ways consistent with the church's ultimate allegiance to the mission of Jesus Christ and its respect for governmental authorities.
- C. **Accountability and Responsibility.** The pastor and board of the Affiliate church shall meet periodically (at least twice a year) with the conference superintendent or designated liaison to review and strengthen the connectional relationship and shall participate in conference fellowship, mentoring, and reporting procedures. The pastor and board shall consult with the Ministerial Appointments Committee of the conference regarding any proposed changes in pastoral leadership during Affiliate status.
- D. **Membership.** An Affiliate Congregation may receive members in all relationships and report them in the same manner as societies.
- E. **Financial Matters**
1. An Affiliate Congregation is encouraged to contribute generously to conference and denominational ministries as the first step towards full participation in these responsibilities.
 2. Staff members are eligible but not required to participate in the denominational pension program during Affiliate status if an alternate retirement plan is already in effect.
 3. Those churches who hold property at the time they join the Free Methodist Church may be given the option by the Board of Bishops, with legal counsel, whether or not to adopt the

Trust Clause for their existing property. Denominational assistance for capital improvement shall be in the form of loans repayable if the church chooses not to become a Free Methodist Society.

- F. Local Organization. The governing board of an Affiliate Congregation shall be guided by the *Book of Discipline* and the mission of the Free Methodist Church in its decisions and the development of new ministries but may retain its existing bylaws until recognition as a Society occurs.
- G. Duration. The normal duration of this relationship shall not exceed three years from the adoption of the document of affiliation. At the end of this period the congregation would become a Society, terminate the Affiliate relationship, or request the conference to grant an extension of time for clarification and development of denominational relationships.
- H. Conference Relationship. An affiliated congregation shall be represented in the annual conference by an honorary delegate who shall have a voice but no vote.

Societies

¶6840

- A. A Society is the term for a fully organized local Free Methodist church.
- B. Authority to Form. The conference superintendent, in consultation with the annual conference Administrative Committee, may authorize a fellowship or affiliated church to become a Free Methodist Society when
 1. It has developed a mission statement that is in harmony with the denomination;
 2. It has sufficient members, maturity, and financial stability to function in this relationship;
 3. It has fulfilled the provisions of ¶6820.B and ¶6830.B.
- C. Financial Matters
 1. Those churches who hold property at the time they join the Free Methodist Church may be given the option by the Board of Bishops, with legal counsel, whether or not to adopt the Trust Clause for their existing property.
 2. New societies must acknowledge the Trust Clause requirements in the written document of agreement.
 3. The conference may provide a phased plan to bring new

societies into full participation in all conference and denominational financial responsibilities as soon as possible.

- D. Conference Relationships. Only recognized societies shall be entitled to voting representation in the annual conference, but members of Free Methodist Fellowships or Affiliated Churches shall be counted in conference and denominational totals for all other purposes.

New Societies on Conference Boundary

¶6850 When a Church-Planting Project, Fellowship, or Society is formed near or within a territory or population group also served by or assigned to a denominational entity other than its sponsoring agency, all parties shall seek to establish and enhance fellowship and connectional ties as noted in ¶6810, ¶6820, and ¶6830, while recognizing evangelistic effectiveness as the highest priority.

New Wine and New Wineskins

¶6860 Since we embrace evangelistic effectiveness as our highest priority, we affirm that apostolic activity in the harvest fields will create many different forms of and trajectories for new groups of disciples. In submission to Jesus's teaching about the need for new wineskins for new wine, we choose to trust our apostolic leaders, permit innovation and organizational latitude at the growing edge of the Free Methodist Church, and avoid creating rigid institutional boundaries that constrain rapid kingdom expansion. We trust that, over time, godly disciple makers and church planters will help many of the new disciples and groups to embrace the distinctive realities of the Free Methodist Church as God leads. In keeping with ¶6850, all parties involved shall seek to establish and enhance fellowship and connectional ties while recognizing evangelistic effectiveness as the highest priority.

Chapter 7

Church Order

Preamble

¶7000 The vision of the Free Methodist Church begins with a call and commitment to bring wholeness to the world through healthy, biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups, and churches (¶6000.B). We purpose to follow Paul's instruction to the Galatian church: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6). James 3:17-18 informs us, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness." Therefore we do our part to live in peace with everyone as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18).

Healthy Biblical Community

¶7100 As we learn together from the Word of God, encourage one another in faith and life, practice healthy accountabilities, and serve together in the cause of Christ, we contribute to the health of each person and help keep them from falling away from love for God and others. These principles and practices will support and nurture healthy order in the church. Order in the church is best realized when we "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21), honor our Membership Covenant and ordination vows, and partner together in the mission of the church. The church has a responsibility to disciple each believer. This is done best in transformational communities which purpose to nurture every believer and witness to those who do not know God.

Biblical Principles

- ¶7110 The Bible describes specific behaviors which guide us in creating and maintaining a healthy, biblical community. These include:
- A. We urge all persons to live lives worthy of the calling we have received. We strive to be humble and gentle, patient, bearing with one another in love. In all our actions we make the effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3).
 - B. We urge all persons to maintain a prayerful and Christlike spirit at all times, earnestly seeking to discern, find, and follow the mind of Christ (Galatians 6:1-2; Philippians 2:1-5; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
 - C. We urge all persons to exhibit meekness of heavenly wisdom, which is first pure; then peace-loving, courteous, willing to yield to

reason, full of mercy, compassion, and good fruits; wholehearted and straightforward, impartial, sincere, and without hypocrisy (James 3:17).

- D. We urge all persons in the restoration of a brother or sister to pray that all actions will produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11), to promote holiness of heart and life (Titus 2:11-14), to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3), to serve as a warning to the vulnerable and careless (1 Timothy 5:20), and rescue those who are in spiritual danger of perishing (2 Thessalonians 2:10).
- E. We urge all persons to be submissive (Ephesians 5:21). This submission is to be mutual toward both those under authority and in authority (1 Thessalonians 5:11-13). Discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder are unworthy of healthy, biblical people (2 Corinthians 12:20).
- F. We urge all persons to avoid the adversarial patterns which characterize unredeemed societies (Matthew 5:23-25). We regard ourselves as Christ's ambassadors who strive for peace with one another as we share the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21).
- G. We urge all persons to speak the truth in love as we all grow into Christ's likeness. This mature unity in Christ will join us together in doing our part to create healthy community life (Ephesians 4:15-16).
- H. We do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is substantiated by witnesses and/or evidence (1 Timothy 5:19).
- I. When a person is caught in sin, it is our responsibility to restore them gently and with all humility, aware that we also can be tempted (Galatians 6:1-3) and that we seek to counsel and guide toward healing those who have been harmed by the sin of another (1 Peter 5:10; Luke 10:33). Ideally, the perpetrators and those harmed will find healing and restoration.

Purpose and Goals

- ¶7120 If an accusation is shown to be true, all action by the church is designed to lead to repentance, forgiveness, and return to fellowship with God and the church. The church assumes the responsibility to follow the patterns of Jesus by consistently exercising grace and truth to restore a sinning member to wholesome relationships as made possible through Christ. Where there are persons who are harmed or victimized by a sinning member, the church will offer ministry to them in the protection of a transformational community and through the loving care of individuals, which may include the services of licensed, professional counselors or an advocate for the victim to be chosen

by the victim (see *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*).

Responding to Disorder

- ¶7130 Overseers, Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards (MEG Boards), and Membership Care Committees (MCC) shall not ignore sin in the church. When it is clear that a member's relationship with Christ or with another person is compromised or damaged by sin, appropriate action shall be taken to speak the truth in love and restore health in the church and in the person(s) involved.
- A. Matters requiring attention include such things as
1. When there is a pattern of behavior of speaking and acting out of selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3);
 2. When there is a breakdown of communication which causes divisions (2 Corinthians 12:20);
 3. When there is a lack of wisdom and/or competence that brings leadership effectiveness and/or call to ministry into question;
 4. When there are unhealthy personal habits which clearly contribute to a lack of fruitfulness in life and ministry;
 5. When there are teachings contrary to our Articles of Religion and/or our Membership Covenant;
 6. When there is a pattern of a lack of submission to an overseer, elder, or church body or when there is a pattern by an overseer, elder or church body toward a person under their care that reveals a lack of reverence to Christ (Ephesians 5:21);
 7. When there is accusation and evidence of a pattern of sin in the life of an elder/member;
 8. When there is evidence of abusive or predatory behavior toward others;
 9. When there is accusation and evidence of a pattern of living in breach of the nonnegotiable fundamentals of the Free Methodist Church (¶6040) or the *Code of Ethics for Ministers of the Free Methodist Church*.
- B. Restoring Order: When there is a breach of order, the response of the church shall be directed toward both the offender and those harmed.
1. With respect to the offender, the response shall include one or more of the following:
 - a. Private Counsel: The first step in restoring order usually begins with private, confidential counsel. The overseer shall address the problem and call the person to deal

truthfully with the issue(s) and follow Jesus with his/her whole heart, including sincere repentance. (See “Checklist For Processing Accusations of Breach of Church Order” in the *Review Board and Court of Appeals Procedure Manual*.)

- b. MEG Board/MCC Counsel: When a person is discovered in their sin by others, or in situations when private counsel has not been effective in stopping the sin, the MEG Board / MCC or the overseer and representative(s) from the respective Board shall address the problem and call the person to deal truthfully with the issue(s) and follow Jesus with his/her whole heart, including sincere repentance.
- c. Covenant of Restoration: If private counsel has been resisted or ineffective, or MEG Board / MCC counsel has been required due to the discovery of sin in the elder’s/member’s life, the MEG Board / MCC shall establish a “Covenant of Restoration” (see *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*, church order, see *Superintendents and MEG Manuals*).
- d. Suspension from Ministry/Membership: The MEG Board / MCC shall suspend a person from ministerial appointment / membership when he/she resists or fails to complete the Covenant of Restoration or when the breach of order threatens the well-being of the church and the mission of Jesus Christ.
- e. Immediate Suspension from Ministry: When an overseer becomes aware of the following cases, he/she shall immediately suspend an elder/member until a MEG Board / MCC can be convened:
 - i. When the elder/member is accused of sin by at least two witnesses or has confessed to sin that reveals a longstanding brokenness in his/her life and relationships of such seriousness that it dictates the necessity of a healing process for the church, all persons involved, and their families;
 - ii. When an elder/member is teaching doctrine that is contrary to our Articles of Religion;
 - iii. When a Board member of a congregation has exhibited behavior in any manner described in ¶7130.A.1-9, the superintendent, in consultation with the local pastor, may remove this member from the Board;

- f. **Contacting State or Local Enforcement Authorities:** In instances of abuse of a minor child, the overseer shall immediately contact state and/or local enforcement authorities in conformity with state and local laws.
 - g. **Immediate Surrender of Credentials:** When an elder is found criminally guilty of sexual misconduct, their credentials shall immediately be declared null and void, without the possibility of reinstatement. The former elder may enter a restoration process which could result in restitution to lay membership but not to the restoration of their credentials.
2. With respect to those harmed or victimized, the individual shall have the opportunity to send the overseer, MEG Board, or MCC a written account of the occurrence and its impact. The victim and his/her advocate may be given a copy of chapter 7 of the *Book of Discipline* so that they can be aware of church expectations and procedures. When the process is complete, the affected individual shall be notified of the outcome (see *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*).

Processing Complaints, Accusations, and/or Admission of Sin

¶7140 Overseers, MEG Boards, and MCCs shall process all complaints, accusations, and/or admissions of sin that are not resolved by private counsel and victim advocacy, by following both the *Review Board and Court of Appeals Procedure Manual* and *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*. When an elder's membership is suspended the suspended elder shall have the right to appeal the suspension to a regional Review Board.

Review Boards

¶7150

- A. **Conference Members** (Elders and Deacons). At each General Conference, a four-person regional Review Board shall be elected from each bishop's area. Candidates shall be nominated by the Nominating Committee of the General Conference. Each regional Review Board shall be comprised of two laypersons and two clergy, at least one of whom shall be a superintendent, and shall include at least one male and one female. Upon a MEG Board's action to suspend or expel an elder, the regional Review Board from the same bishop's area shall review the process, if review is requested by the suspended member:
 1. Examine the MEG Board minutes and review the overseers / MEG Board log of notes and timelines in accordance with the "Checklist for Processing Accusations of Breach of

Church Order” found in the *Review Board and Court of Appeals Procedure Manual*, pp. 5-6.

2. Request from the accused elder the completion of the accountability questionnaires referenced in the *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*, p. 11, ¶B.2.C.
3. Request from any victim(s) involved that their statement(s) regarding the process be sent to the Review Board for consideration.
4. Prepare a report to the conference MEG Board including any recommendations.
5. If, in the opinion of the regional Review Board or the accused elder, injustice has occurred, the regional Review Board shall convene a meeting of the MEG Board and the accused elder. The accused elder shall have the right to be accompanied by another member of the FMC and/or his/her spouse.
6. If there are victims involved, they have the right to attend and participate in the meeting or send their advocate to participate.

The regional Review Board shall listen to all parties, raise any questions, and, in the absence of all parties, deliberate and make a decision. Any party may submit any information, even if new, which lends itself to a discovery of truth. The action of the regional Review Board may be appealed by right (¶213, ¶7200).

- B. **Local Members.** The annual conference MEG Board shall be the conference Review Board. Whenever a Society MCC takes action to suspend or expel a member from ministry and/or membership, the conference Review Board shall, if requested by the suspended member:

1. Examine the MCC minutes in accordance with the “Checklist for Processing Accusations of Breach of Church Order” found in the *Review Board and Court of Appeals Procedure Manual*, pp. 5-6;
2. Request from the accused member the completion of the accountability questionnaires referenced in the *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*, p. 11, ¶B.2.C;
3. Request from any victim(s) a statement verifying the completion of the restoration process;
4. Prepare a report to the local MCC including any recommendations.
5. If, in the opinion of the conference Review Board or the accused member, injustice has occurred, the conference

Review Board shall meet with the MCC and/or their advocate. The accused member shall have the right to be accompanied by a member of the FMC and/or his/her spouse. The victim and/or their advocate shall be invited to attend and have a voice in the proceedings. The regional Review Board shall listen to both parties, raise any questions, and, in the absence of all parties, deliberate and make a decision. Any party may submit any information, even if new, which lends itself to a discovery of truth. The action of the regional Review Board may be appealed by right (¶213, ¶7200).

- C. **Victims.** The annual conference MEG Board shall be the conference Review Board. Whenever a Society's MCC takes action to clear a member from charges, the conference Review Board shall, if requested by the victim:
1. Examine the MCC minutes in accordance with the "Checklist for Processing Accusations of Breach of Church Order" found in the *Review Board and Court of Appeals Procedure Manual*, pp. 5-6.
 2. Request from the member the completion of the accountability questionnaires referenced in the *Restoration Process: A Manual for Superintendents and Ministerial Education and Guidance Boards*, p. 11, ¶B.2.C;
 3. Request from the victim(s) a statement as to whether the restoration process has been completed.
 4. Prepare a report to the local MCC including any recommendations.
 5. If, in the opinion of the conference Review Board or the victim, injustice has occurred, the conference Review Board shall meet with the MCC, the accused member, and the victim and/or their advocate. The accused pastor/elder or member shall have the right to be accompanied by a member of the FMC and/or his/her spouse. The victim and/or their advocate shall be invited to attend and have a voice in the proceedings. The regional Review Board shall listen to all parties, raise any questions, and, in the absence of all parties, deliberate and make a decision. Any party may submit any information, even if new, which lends itself to a discovery of truth. The action of the regional Review Board may be appealed by right (¶213, ¶7200).

Confidentiality

- ¶7160 The confidential care of personal information is a necessary aspect of spiritual care and congregational life. The responsibility to treat personal information confidentially extends not only to elders but also to all persons working within the organizational and

institutional life of the church. The need for confidentiality exists in two general areas: spiritual care and personnel matters.

Confidentiality in Spiritual Care

¶7170 In providing spiritual care, our elders and members maintain a relationship of trust and confidentiality, holding in confidence all information revealed to them whether it is formally or informally shared. If a person gives express consent to reveal confidential information, our elders and members may, but are not required to, reveal this information.

- A. Elders have a responsibility to keep confessional confidences inviolate, breaking this confidentiality only if the risk of imminent bodily harm to a person is present. The exception to this confessional confidentiality includes any confessions of, or concerns regarding, sexual abuse of a minor child or any other conduct required to be reported under federal, state, or local laws.
- B. The confession of one elder to another is an inviolate confidence, unless the conduct is both ongoing and unrepented. This conduct by any elder who continues to take advantage of any person under his/her care is an abuse of position. Such a confession is not confidential, but rather a request to be helped to stop this abuse and removed from the temptations and responsibilities of his/her position until repentance and healing occurs. If there is a victim involved, past or present, they or their advocate shall be allowed to participate in the process in whatever manner they are able or willing. This includes the advocate interviewing the pastor/elder in the presence of witnesses.

Confidentiality in Personnel Matters

¶7180 Respecting the privacy of church personnel requires confidentiality in personnel matters. This confidentiality extends not only to the discussions required in the interviewing, approving, appointing, supervising, disciplining, and dismissing of personnel but also to all records pertaining to these matters (except pursuant to ¶7190).

- A. The requirement that all financial records be public includes all salary and compensation figures of paid personnel.
- B. The appeal of a personnel decision by a committee or board assigned with this responsibility is not confidential. The decision to appeal a decision requires the information on which the decisions were made to be made public at the appeal. All such appeals are held in open session.

Communication

¶7190 Paul wrote to Timothy, stating, “Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:20). He is speaking here of those who continue to sin even after the church has done what it is able to do to warn and restore the

offender and restore the victim(s) as well. However, if repentance is demonstrated by a change of behavior and restitution sought, communication to the whole church is to be avoided. While each case must be carefully examined, these instructions are to be followed:

- A. If a suspended or expelled elder attempts to seek employment in another conference or denomination, the superintendent and/or bishop shall accept responsibility to make known to appropriate persons in a conference or, if asked, another denomination the status and reasons surrounding the suspension or expulsion of the elder.
- B. If an elder is suspended or expelled, after review the regional Review Board shall send a written communication to each superintendent and bishop in the FMCUSA noting the action taken and the reason for the action.
- C. The presiding bishop of the annual conference or his/her designee shall read to the conference during the reading of Special Appointments a letter from the regional Review Board pertaining to the regional Review Board hearing and decision.
- D. The *Yearbook* of the FMCUSA shall list the name of the offender in one of these ways, appropriate to the case:
 - Under Review;
 - Suspended;
 - Covenant of Restoration;
 - Withdrawn Under Complaint;
 - Expelled.

Processing Appeals

¶7200 The Court of Appeals shall process appeals pursuant to the *Review Board and Court of Appeals Procedure Manual*. A Court of Appeals member is disqualified if he/she has any involvement in the matter or is in a position of conflict of interest.

- A. An elder whose suspension or expulsion has been affirmed by the regional Review Board or a Society member whose suspension or expulsion has been affirmed by the conference Review Board has a right to appeal to the Court of Appeals.
 1. Notice of intent to appeal and the grounds for an appeal must be provided in writing to the secretary of the Board of Administration within 30 days of the regional Review Board's decision for an elder or the conference Review Board for a Society member.
 2. No less than 30 days before the hearing of the appeal, the elder

or member must provide in writing to the secretary of the Board of Administration a statement of the reasons why the decision of the Review Board (regional/conference) should not be affirmed. The statement shall contain all relevant information that is pertinent to the grounds of the appeal and shall not exceed 10 pages, double spaced.

3. If there is a victim in the case, the victim advocate shall be notified and allowed to provide all relevant information that is pertinent to the grounds of the appeal and shall not exceed 10 pages, double spaced.
 4. No less than 14 days before the hearing of the appeal, the designee of the MEG Board / MCC may file with the secretary of the Board of Administration a statement in rebuttal of the elder or member's statement.
 5. No less than seven days before the hearing of the appeal, the elder or member may file with the secretary of the Board of Administration a reply to the MEG Board / MCC's rebuttal. The reply by the elder or member is confined to issues raised in the MEG Board / MCC's rebuttal and shall not restate content from the original statement.
- B. The Court of Appeals shall review all documents from the regional Review Board / conference Review Board, listen to all parties, raise any questions, and, in the absence of all parties, deliberate and issue a decision.
1. If the decision of the regional review / conference Review Board is affirmed, the decision of the Court of Appeals is final.
 2. If the decision of the regional Review Board / conference Review Board is not affirmed, a new review will occur with the Court of Appeals serving as the Review Board.
 3. The action of the Court of Appeals serving as a Review Board shall be final.

Conditions Leading to Restoration of Credentials and Reappointment

¶7210

- A. The MEG Board shall assess the candidate's progress in spiritual maturity, trustworthiness, moral integrity, and ministerial effectiveness as attested to by references from the designated supervisor, the candidate's counselor(s), the victim and the victim advocate, and other persons familiar with the case. The candidate shall be called for a personal interview by the Board.
- B. Upon recommendation of the MEG Board, the annual conference shall make the final decision. Only in exceptional cases will credentials be restored sooner than two years after the initial

disciplinary action and only after the process of restoration. Restoration of credentials does not guarantee reappointment to itinerant ministry.

Chapter 8

The Ritual

Baptism

¶8000 General Directions

Adults and the parents or guardians of every child to be baptized shall have the choice of immersion, sprinkling, or pouring.

All baptized persons (infant, child, or adult) are to be instructed and nurtured in the meaning of the faith, the rights and responsibilities of their baptism, and spiritual and moral formation as persons within God's church. Such persons are formed in a lifelong process through the work and witness of the church. It is the duty of the congregation, led by the pastor(s), to instruct all persons in the meaning of discipleship and model the need to be on mission in all of life's relationships.

There are many occasions as people mature in the faith when the Holy Spirit's confirming action may be celebrated, such as the affirmation of the baptismal covenant. Unlike baptism, which is a once-made covenant and can only be reaffirmed and not repeated, affirmation of baptismal vows is a dynamic action of the Holy Spirit that can be repeated.

We will on no account whatever make a charge for administering baptism, dedication, or affirmation of baptismal vows.

Alternate rituals printed in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual* may be used.

An ordained elder or other carefully chosen, non-ordained person authorized by their overseeing elder, superintendent, MEG Board, or bishop to baptize may in turn authorize any mature member in good standing under their care to baptize others. When this authorization is given it may be either temporary or ongoing and should include an element of accountable oversight by the church through the authorizing individual.

Service of Infant Baptism

¶8010 *The pastor, coming to the font, which is to be filled with pure water, shall say:*

Dear friends in Christ: God, through Moses, made covenant with Israel, saying to the people,

"These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."¹

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Deuteronomy 6:6-7; **Matthew 19:14; ***Acts 2:39

In the days of the New Covenant, Christ Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,”** and on the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter declared, regarding the salvation given through Christ, “The promise is to you and to your children.”***

It is therefore our privilege to present our children to the Lord and our duty to raise them in His ways. These parents now bring *this child* to offer *him/her* in dedication and to pledge in the presence of this congregation to bring *him/her* up in the Lord’s discipline and instruction.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who has made saving covenant with Your people and who, out of Your loving-kindness, has ordained that they should live before You in families: we thank You that it is our privilege to dedicate our children to You, in steadfast hope that they will cleave to Your covenant and live to Your glory. We entreat You for *this child* that *he/she* may be delivered from the power of sin and Satan and be set apart to You by the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray for these parents that they may be given divine aid, so that both by instruction and example they may lead *this child* in the way of everlasting life, and so all may come in unity together to Your eternal kingdom. We pray for this congregation, that we may faithfully discharge our duties to both parents and child, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions to parents

1. Do you, in the presence of God and this church, solemnly dedicate this child to the Lord?

Answer: We/I do.

2. Do you, so far as you are able on *his/her* behalf, renounce the devil and his works, the lure of the world, and the sinful desires of fallen humanity, so that in the training of *this child* you will not be led by them, and so that so far as you are able, you will keep *this child* from following them?

Answer: We/I do.

3. Will you faithfully strive by word and example to lead *this child* to personal faith in Christ?

Answer: We/I will.

4. Do you accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments?

Answer: We/I do.

5. Out of them, will you diligently teach *this child* the commandments and promises of the Most High God,

raising *him/her* in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

Answer: We/I will.

The pastor will say:

Let us acknowledge our duty to strengthen this family with prayers and encouragement, thus aiding the parent(s) and child to fulfill all that has here been promised. The congregation will affirm this by standing.

The pastor shall take the child and say:

Name this child.

_____, I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us pray: O God, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, grant that this child may increase in wisdom and stature, growing in divine and human favor. So guide and uphold these parents that they may lead this child into that life of faith in Jesus Christ whose mark in this world is righteousness and in the world to come everlasting bliss. May *he/she* be brought early to affirm in faith all that has here been pledged on *his/her* behalf, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction: "Now to Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of His glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen."²

In the place of the second prayer, the pastor may offer an extemporaneous prayer, which will include the petitions set forth in the printed prayer.

Service of Infant Dedication

¶8020 *The pastor shall say:*

Dear friends in Christ: God, through Moses, made covenant with Israel, saying to the people, "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."^{*}

In the days of the New Covenant, Christ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these,"^{**} and on the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter declared, regarding

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^{*}Jude 24-25, RSV

the salvation given through Christ, “The promise is to you and to your children.”***³

It is therefore our privilege to present our children to the Lord and our duty to raise them in His ways. These parents now bring *this child* to offer *him/her* in dedication and to pledge in the presence of this congregation to bring *him/her* up in the Lord’s discipline and instruction.

Let us pray: Almighty and everlasting God, who has made saving covenant with Your people and who, out of Your loving-kindness, has ordained that they should live before You in families: we thank You that it is our privilege to dedicate our children to You, in steadfast hope that they will cleave to Your covenant and live to Your glory. We entreat You for *this child* that *he/she* may be delivered from the power of sin and Satan and be set apart to You by the power of the Holy Spirit. We pray for these parents that they may be given divine aid, so that both by instruction and example they may lead *this child* in the way of everlasting life, and so all may come in unity together to Your eternal kingdom. We pray for this congregation, that we may faithfully discharge our duties to both parents and child, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Questions to parents

1. Do you, in the presence of God and this church, solemnly dedicate *this child* to the Lord?

Answer: We/I do.

2. Will you endeavor to live a life before *this child* that will give witness to your faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: We/I will.

3. Do you accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God?

Answer: We/I do.

4. Out of them, will you endeavor diligently to teach *this child* the commandments and promises of the Most High God, so that your child may early come to personal faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: We/I will.

Then the pastor will say:

Let us acknowledge our duty to support this family with our prayers and encouragement, thereby aiding the parent(s) and child to fulfill all that has here been

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*Deuteronomy 6:6-7; **Matthew 19:14; ***Acts 2:39

promised. The congregation will affirm this by standing.

The pastor shall then take the child in his/her arms and say:

Name this child.

Even as Joseph and Mary brought Jesus in the time of His infancy to the temple to present Him to God, so now, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we present _____ in an act of dedication to God, with a prayer that at an early age in life *he/she* may experience His justifying and sanctifying grace. Amen.

Here the pastor shall pray an extemporaneous prayer on behalf of the parents and their child.

Service of Baptism for Children under 12

¶8030 In place of the questions asked to parents or guardians in ¶8010, the pastor may ask the following questions to candidates for baptism who are under 12 years of age.

Questions to candidate:

1. Is it true that you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and that you are here to be baptized in His name?

Answer: Yes.

2. By being baptized today, do you agree that you want the world to know that you are a Christian and that you intend to live for Jesus all the days of your life?

Answer: Yes.

3. Do you believe that the whole Bible is God's Word, provided for us to learn from and follow?

Answer: Yes.

4. Will you ask God to help you make good decisions, in order to avoid temptation and sin?

Answer: Yes.

5. Will you agree to attend and participate in the church as often as you can, to learn how to love God and love people?

Answer: Yes.

The Affirmation of Baptismal Vows

¶8040 *The pastor shall say:*

Dearly beloved, in your infancy your parents presented you at the altar of the church for the sacrament of Baptism. That service was one of both dedication and consecration.

Your parents dedicated you to the Lord and took vows on your behalf. They promised to teach you from the Word of God and to train you in the way that you should go.

God in His goodness has brought you to years of responsibility, and you now desire to acknowledge before God and His church the covenant then made on your behalf, to profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to consecrate yourself to Him, and thereby to bind yourself anew to His service.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has said, "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven."⁴

Questions to be asked of those affirming their baptismal vows:

1. Do you confess your faith in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, and do you promise with the aid of the Holy Spirit to be Christ's faithful disciple to your life's end?

Answer: I do.

2. Have you read and considered the vows taken for you in baptism, and do you affirm them with a humble and contrite heart, putting your whole trust in the mercy of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

Answer: I do.

3. Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace, to share faithfully in the worship and service of the church, to give of your substance as the Lord may prosper you, and to give your whole heart to the service of Christ and His kingdom throughout the world?

Answer: I do.

Service of Baptism for Adults

¶8050 *The pastor shall say:*

Dear friends in Christ: Our faith declares that by the sin of Adam, the offspring of Adam are corrupted in their very nature, so that from birth they are inclined to sin; and that new life and a right relationship with God are possible only through the redemptive acts of God in Christ Jesus. Believing these declarations to be true, and in obedience to the command of Christ, _____ [*name*] has come to make public confession that *his/her* sins have been washed away, and by means of baptism with water, to give sign of that inward washing and new life in Christ that are

4 Matthew 10:32

now *his/hers* by faith. We therefore implore you to pray that through this means of grace *he/she* may be further moved to keep covenant with God and so may *he/she* ever experience the constant washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

Then the pastor shall say:

Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, whose covenant is firm and whose promises are always to be trusted, we call upon you for _____ (*name*) that *he/she*, coming to *his/her* baptism, may by this act give clear witness that *he/she* has received Your inner washing through faith in the cleansing blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. May *he/she* ever rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of Your Spirit, the fellowship of the church, and the assurance of resurrection to glory in the world to come.

The pastor shall instruct the congregation to stand and then shall say:

Christ Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁵

You, who present yourself for water baptism, have heard this congregation's prayers that God will continue His loving favor toward you and bring you to His eternal kingdom. And God, who keeps covenant, has promised by His only Son, who offered Himself up for our redemption, to grant you these gracious favors. You must now promise, in the presence of this congregation, to keep covenant with Him, renouncing the life of sin, believing His holy Word, and obediently keeping His commandments.

The Apostles' Creed is to be used by the pastor as an introduction to the candidates' affirmation of their vows.

Let us all reaffirm our faith by proclaiming together the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic* church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.⁶

These questions are to be asked by the pastor to the candidates for baptism in the presence of the congregation.

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?
2. Do you have the assurance that your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ?
3. Do you renounce Satan and his works?
4. Do you renounce the ungodliness of this world and all sinful desires?
5. Will you live in obedience to Christ?
6. Will you actively participate in the life and ministry of His church?
7. Do you accept the Old and New Testaments as the authority for your life?
8. Will you by this act of baptism testify to the world that you are a Christian?

Then the pastor shall baptize each candidate by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion, as desired, saying:

_____ [name], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The pastor shall use this prayer or substitute an extemporaneous one including the same petitions:

God, our Father, who gives to all who repent and believe the gospel the right to be called children of God, may Your grace ever be effectual in this, Your child. And may *he/she* enjoy the greater baptism of the Holy Spirit so that all sinful inclinations may be conquered by Your power and every Christian virtue may live and grow in *him/her*. Grant to *him/her* a place of service in the fellowship of Your church, and may *his/her* witness in the world bring glory to Your holy name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A benediction may be used if the service is ending.

⁶ A slightly different version of the Apostles' Creed may be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, § IV. *Catholic refers to the universal church.

Holy Communion:

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

General Directions

¶8100 Those administering the sacrament should exercise due care to see that the sacrament is administered to those who rightly, worthily, and with faith receive it.

An ordained elder, or other carefully chosen, non-ordained person authorized by their overseeing elder, superintendent, MEG Board, or bishop to celebrate Communion, may in turn authorize any mature member in good standing under their care to consecrate and officiate over the Lord's Supper. When this authorization is given, it may be either temporary or ongoing and should include an element of accountable oversight by the church through the authorizing individual.

All persons properly included in the general invitation may be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper among us.

The officiant may select assistants in the distribution of the elements.

Alternate rituals printed in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual* may be used. Sections marked with an asterisk may be used when an abbreviated service is desired.

Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper

¶8110

*The Invitation

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbors, and who intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God and walking in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort; and humbly kneeling, make your honest confession to Almighty God.

The General Confession

The pastor may pray:

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we confess that we have sinned, and we are deeply grieved as we remember the wickedness of our past lives. We have sinned against You, Your holiness, and Your love, and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.

We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry for all

wrongdoing and every failure to do the things we should. Our hearts are grieved, and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without Your grace.

Have mercy upon us.

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father, for the sake of Your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ, who died for us.

Forgive us.

Cleanse us.

Give us strength to serve and please You in newness of life and to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***The Lord's Prayer**

The pastor may say:

Let us continue our confession as we pray together the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

(To be prayed in unison)

“Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.”⁷

***The Affirmation of Faith**

The pastor may continue the prayer:

O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great mercy has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from our sins, make us strong and faithful in all goodness, and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***The Collect**

The pastor may say:

Let us pray for inner cleansing.

(To be prayed in unison)

Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your

holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Sanctus

The pastor may say:

It is always right and proper, and our moral duty, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Everlasting God.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the inhabitants of heaven, we honor and adore Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying,

(In unison)

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts!

Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.

Glory be to Thee, O Lord most high. Amen.

Then may be sung or recited:

The Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father

And to the Son

And to the Holy Ghost:

As it was in the beginning,

Is now, and ever shall be,

World without end. Amen. Amen.

The Prayer for Spiritual Communion

The pastor may pray:

We do not come to this Your table, O merciful Lord, with self-confidence and pride, trusting in our own righteousness, but we trust in Your great and many mercies. We are not worthy to gather the crumbs from under Your table. But You, O Lord, are unchanging in Your mercy and Your nature is love; grant us, therefore, God of mercy, God of grace, so to eat at this Your table that we may receive in spirit and in truth the body of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, and the merits of His shed blood, so that we may live and grow in His likeness and, being washed and cleansed through His most precious blood, we may evermore live in Him and He in us. Amen.

***The Prayer of Consecration of the Elements**

The pastor may pray:

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love

Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who by His sacrifice, offered once for all, did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world: we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son, Jesus Christ, who in His holy gospel commanded us to continue a perpetual memory of His precious death until He comes again. Hear us, O merciful Father, we humbly ask, and grant that we, receiving this bread and this cup, as He commanded and in the memory of His passion and death, may partake of His most blessed body and blood.

In the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread [*The pastor may take the bread in his/her hand*], and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In like manner, after supper He took the cup [*The pastor may lay hands upon the cups*], and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of this, all of you, for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me."⁸

Amen.

The pastor may first receive the Communion, both the bread and the cup, and then give of the same to other pastors who may be present to assist in the service. After that the pastor shall give to the congregation the Communion, both the bread and the cup.

When the bread is delivered, the pastor may say:

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

When serving the cup, the pastor may say:

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you and be thankful.

If the consecrated bread or cup are used up before all have been served, the pastor should consecrate more by repeating the prayer of consecration. When all have communed the pastor shall return to the Lord's table and place upon it the consecrated elements that remain,

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Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, and Luke 22:17-20, paraphrase

covering the same with a white linen cloth. The pastor may then offer extemporaneous prayer, or speak briefly of the significance of the service, and conclude with a blessing.

The Benediction

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be yours now and forever. Amen.

The Solemnization of Matrimony

¶8200 We will not charge for leading a marriage ceremony. Honoraria may be accepted. Publication of banns shall be made by proclaiming the intended marriage openly, in an audible voice, during divine service, in some church, chapel, or place of public worship of the religious body to which the pastor who is to solemnize the marriage belongs, situated within the local municipality parish, circuit, or pastoral charge where at least one of the parties to the intended marriage has resided for the period of eight days immediately preceding, at one or more services according to the requirements of the local jurisdiction. (Extracted from the British Columbia Marriage Acts.)

The pastor shall declare during the church service:

I publish the banns of marriage between _____ of _____ (place) and _____ of _____ (place). If any of you know cause or just impediment why these two persons should not be joined together in holy matrimony you are to declare it.

¶8210 *At the time set, the man and woman to be married shall stand together facing the pastor, the woman on the man's left, and the pastor shall say:*

Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and the presence of these witnesses to join together _____ and _____ in holy matrimony. Marriage is an honorable estate, instituted by God in the time of creation for the well-being of humankind. It is safeguarded by the laws of Moses, affirmed by the words of the prophets, and hallowed by the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Marriage is a union close and enduring, a relationship in which a man and a woman forsake all others to become one flesh. This abiding union illustrates the holy relationship between Christ and His church. Marriage is therefore not to be entered into by any lightly, but reverently, soberly, and in the fear of God.

Addressing the man and woman, the pastor shall say:

_____ and _____, I charge you both as you stand in the presence of God to remember that covenant love alone will avail as the foundation of a happy and enduring home. Let Christ, who was loyal to His own unto death, be your example. Let the Apostle Paul be your teacher, who wrote: "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."⁹ If you keep this steadfast love ever before you and, remaining faithful to each other, resolutely endeavor to fulfill the vows you now will make, God's blessing will be upon you, and the home you establish will endure through life's every change.

The pastor shall say to the man, using his Christian name:

_____, will you have _____ to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep yourself only for her, so long as you both shall live?

The man shall answer: I will.

The pastor shall say to the woman, using her Christian name:

_____, will you have _____ to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honor and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others keep yourself only for him, so long as you both shall live?

The woman shall answer: I will.

The pastor shall say:

Who gives _____ to be married to _____?

The father of the woman, or whoever gives her in marriage, shall answer: I do.

The pastor, receiving the hand of the woman from her father or other sponsor, shall cause the man with his right hand to take the woman by her right hand, and say after the pastor:

_____, I, _____, take you, _____, to

be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

They shall loose their hands, and the woman, with her right hand, shall take the man by his right hand, and shall likewise say after the pastor:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death us do part, and thereto I pledge you my faith.

They again shall loose hands. The groomsman may give to the pastor a ring, which the pastor in turn will give to the groom, who will put it upon the third finger of the bride's left hand and, holding the ring, shall say after the pastor:

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

In case of a double ring ceremony, the pastor shall receive the other ring from the bridesmaid and shall deliver it to the woman to put upon the third finger of the man's left hand. The woman, holding the ring there, shall say after the pastor:

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

The pastor shall say:

Let us pray.

O Eternal God, creator and preserver of all people, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life: send Your blessing upon this man and this woman whom we bless in Your name; that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Your laws, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The pastor shall say:

Forasmuch as _____ and _____ have consented together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company and have pledged their faith each to the other and have declared the same by joining hands (and by giving and receiving a ring), therefore, by the authority granted to me as a minister of Jesus Christ, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let not man

put asunder. Amen.

The man and woman then kneel, and the pastor shall pray over them an extemporaneous prayer, prepared especially for the two of them.

The man and woman shall stand, and the pastor shall pronounce over them the following benediction:

Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage. Hold fast to that which is good. Render to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the afflicted. Show honor to all. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

The Burial of the Dead

¶8300 We will not charge for funeral services. Honoraria may be accepted.

The Funeral Service

¶8310 The pastor may use this order of worship at the church or chapel.

The pastor may use opening sentences, such as:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." 10*

*"For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."***

Invocation:

O Eternal God, our Father, from whom we come and to whom we go, grant us the favor of Your divine presence at this time in our earthly pilgrimage; assure us by Your Spirit that the one we serve, even Jesus, has conquered death and is alive forevermore; enable us to view our temporal lives in the light of the eternal; and so may our spirits grow calm and our vision clear. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

10

*John 11:25-26 RSV; **2 Corinthians 4:17-18 RSV

Hymn by the congregation, musicians, or organist
(optional)

Obituary and/or tributes (optional)

Old Testament Scriptures, such as Psalms 23, 90, 121

New Testament Scriptures, such as John 14:1-6;

1 Corinthians 15:35-49; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

Hymn by the congregation, musicians, or organist
(optional)

Meditation

Prayer for the family and community

Benediction (not used if the service is to continue at the graveside)

The pastor shall at the appropriate time at the cemetery say:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."*

"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes"***

"For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it."****

"The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."*****¹¹

This may also be used at the cemetery.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.

"Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*****"

Then the pastor shall say:

11 *John 11:25-26 RSV; **Job 19:25-27; ***1 Timothy 6:7; ****Job 1:21; *****John 14:1-6

Inasmuch as Almighty God, in His wise providence, has taken out of this world our deceased (*brother/sister/child*), we therefore commit this mortal body to the ground, looking for the general resurrection in the last day and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose Second Coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead, and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed and made like unto His own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto himself.

The pastor may pray extemporaneously or use The Collect:

O merciful God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, in whom whosoever believeth shall live though he die, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall not die eternally, we meekly beseech You, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life we may rest in Him, and at the general resurrection on the last day may be found acceptable in Your sight and receive that blessing which Your well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all who love and fear You, saying, "Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." Grant this, we beseech You, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Ordination of Elders

¶8400 *The secretary shall present the ordinands to the president, saying:*

I present to you these persons (*reading the names aloud*) to be ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church.

Then the president shall say to the congregation:

Dear friends in Christ: All persons who belong to Jesus Christ are called to minister His reconciling work through the church. But to lead the church, our Lord calls particular believers to shepherd the people, teach doctrine, administer the sacraments, and keep order. Each person who stands before you testifies to such an inward call of the Holy Spirit to the work of an elder.

God calls men and women, but the church examines them so as to confirm the presence of spiritual gifts and personal graces. These persons who stand before you have been so examined and affirmed by conference leaders for ordination.

When people are set apart for this leadership responsibility, they are ordained by the laying on of hands. Paul remembered this moment in his counsel to Timothy when he said, "I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands."¹²

Whether elders serve as pastors, teachers, missionaries, chaplains, or in unique combinations of these vocations, they provide Spirit-filled leadership. In fulfilling the Great Commandment to love the Lord our God and to love others, and in fulfilling the Great Commission to go into all the world to make disciples, elders are God's gift to the church.

Pastoral leadership focuses on developing healthy, biblical communities of holy people. These communities multiply disciples, mentor leaders, create new groups, and plant new churches. Such Spirit-filled leadership requires vision and courage to move people to obey the Word of God and increase His church.

Rooted in a deep love for Christ and sharing His compassion for people, Free Methodist elders help create congregations that are fervent in prayer, enthusiastic in worship, holy in lifestyle, insistent for justice, caring for the poor, and reaching out locally and globally to bring all people into relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Collect

Almighty God, the giver of all good gifts, who by Your divine providence appointed various orders in Your church: Give Your grace, we humbly pray, to these persons now called to the Order of Elders. So replenish them with the truth of Your doctrine and endue them with holiness of life that they may faithfully serve before You to the glory of Your great name and to the benefit of Your holy church, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

The Old Testament – Isaiah 6:1-8

“In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

“At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’

“Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

The Epistle – 1 Timothy 4:11-16

“Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

“Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

The Gospel – John 10:11-18

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

The president shall say:

Dear friends in Christ (*the ordinands may be called by name; and the president shall say to them*):

Each of you has heard in the lessons taken from the Scriptures what dignity and importance belong to this office to which you are called. We have good hope that you have considered these things and that you have clearly determined, by God’s grace, to give yourself completely to the fulfillment of your call. It is our hope that with all your strength you will apply yourself wholly to this one thing and direct all your concerns and studies in this direction. May you continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Savior, Jesus Christ, for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that by daily reading and weighing of the Scriptures you may grow stronger and more mature in your ministry. May you endeavor repeatedly so to sanctify the lives of you and yours and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ so that you may be wholesome and godly examples for the people to follow.

And now, so that this congregation of Christ, here assembled, may also understand your mind and will in these things, and that your promise may all the more move you to fulfill your office, you shall answer plainly these questions which, in the name of God and His church, we ask.

Questions for Elders

1. Do you confidently believe that you are called, according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to serve His church as an elder?

Answer: I so believe.

2. Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain all doctrine necessary for eternal salvation; and out of these Scriptures are you determined to instruct the people committed to your care, teaching nothing as necessary to salvation except what can be concluded from or proved by the Scriptures?

Answer: I am.

3. Will you then faithfully give diligence always so to minister the doctrines and sacraments and discipline of Christ, as the Lord has commanded?

Answer: I will do so by the help of the Lord.

4. Will you be ready with faithful diligence to banish all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word; and will you use both public and private warnings and exhortations both to the converted and unconverted as need shall require and occasion be given?

Answer: I will, the Lord being my helper.

5. Will you be diligent in prayers, the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and whatever study shall enrich your knowledge of the same?

Answer: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

6. Will you diligently regulate and pattern your life (and that of your family) according to the doctrine of Christ so as to make (both) yourself (and them), as far as you are able, wholesome example(s) and pattern(s) for the flock of Christ?

Answer: I will be diligent to do so, the Lord being my helper.

7. Will you practice and encourage, so far as you are able, quietness, peace, and love among all Christian people and especially among those who are committed to your care?

Answer: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

8. As an elder of the Free Methodist Church, and in

keeping with the Holy Scriptures, will you respect and be guided by those in authority over you?

Answer: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

The ordinands shall kneel, the elders shall be called forward for the laying on of hands, and the president shall say:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, of Your infinite love and goodness You have given us Your only and dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our redeemer and the author of everlasting life. To You we render most hearty thanks. We praise and worship You, and we humbly pray that we may continue always to be thankful for these and all Your other benefits to us. May we daily increase and go forward in the knowledge and faith of Him who died for us, who rose from death and even now lives to make intercession for us. May Your holy name be forever glorified and Your blessed kingdom enlarged, through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

The president and the elders present shall lay their hands upon the head of each of them, and the president, addressing each by name, shall say:

The Lord pour upon you the Holy Spirit for the office and work of an elder in the Free Methodist Church now committed unto you by the laying on of our hands. Amen.

They shall continue to kneel; and the president shall deliver the Bible to each one of them in succession and shall say:

Take authority to minister the Word of God. Faithfully proclaim His Word, declare His forgiveness, celebrate the sacraments, shepherd His people.

Closing Prayer

Most merciful Father, we beseech You to send upon these, Your servants, Your heavenly blessings, that they may be clothed with righteousness and that Your Word spoken by their mouths may have success. Grant us also that we may have grace to hear and receive what they shall deliver out of Your most Holy Word, or shall speak in agreement with the same, as the means of our salvation. May we, in all our words and deeds, seek Your glory and the increase of Your kingdom through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assist us, O Lord, in all our doings with Your most gracious favor and further us with Your continued help, that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in You, we may

glorify Your name and finally, by your mercy, obtain everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessings of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

The president will present credentials to each and offer congratulations.

Consecration of Deacons

¶8500 The service may be either a special service with appropriate music and preparation or as a part of a Sunday worship service.

The pastor or designee shall present to the superintendent the one who is (those who are) to be consecrated, saying:

Superintendent _____ (name), I present to you _____ (name or names) to be consecrated deacon in the _____ (name of church), a Free Methodist congregation.

The superintendent shall say to the pastor:

Have you diligently examined *this person / these persons*, whom you present to us, to be capable and qualified? *Has he/she / Have they* prepared *himself / herself / themselves* educationally and spiritually, so that *his / her / their* life and ministry will bring honor to God and edify His church?

The senior pastor shall respond:

He has / She has / They have been so examined and we believe *him / her / them* to be a *person / persons* God has called to be a Consecrated *Deacon / Deacons* in this church.

The superintendent shall say to the congregation:

Dear friends in Christ: We purpose, God willing, to consecrate as a deacon *this person / these persons* who *stands / stand* before you. *He has / She has / They have* been examined and *has/have* been found to be a *person / persons* called by God to this ministry and suited for the same. We ask you, people of God, to declare your assent to the consecration of *this person / these persons*.

Do you trust that *he is / she is / they are* worthy, by God's grace, to be consecrated?

People: We do. Thanks be to God.

Superintendent:

Will you uphold *him / her / them* in *his / her / their* ministry?

People: With God's help, we will.

Superintendent:

Let us stand together as we pray in unison the prayer our Lord taught us to pray:

People: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Superintendent:

You may be seated.

Superintendent continues in prayer with the Collect:

Let us pray: Almighty God, who appointed ministers in Your church and inspired Your apostles to consecrate as deacon Your first martyr, Stephen, with others; look with mercy upon *this, Your servant / these, Your servants*, whom You have called to the same order and administration; may *he/she/they* be replenished with the truth of Your doctrine and adorned with blamelessness of life, so that both by word and good example, *he / she / they* may serve You faithfully; so may Your name be glorified and Your church built up, through the merits of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

The superintendent may assign readers:

Mark 10:42-45 (NIV)

“Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NIV)

“In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing

dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

1 Peter 4:10-11 (NIV)

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If you speak, you should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If you serve, you should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

The superintendent shall then say to the candidate(s):

My brother / sister / brothers and sisters, you are to be consecrated to the ministry of deacon in this church.

God has called you to represent to the church the ministry of servanthood in the world, a ministry to which all Christians are called in baptism but to which you are called in a special way. You are to be a coworker with your pastor(s) (*and other deacons*), serving this congregation in the area of your gifting and calling. In the name of Jesus Christ you are to serve all people, particularly the poor, the sick, and the oppressed. You are to interpret to the church the needs, concerns, and hopes of the world. At all times, by your life and teaching you are to show Christ’s people that in serving the helpless they are serving Christ.

So that we may know that you believe *yourself/yourself* to be called by God and that you profess the Christian faith, we ask you the following questions:

1. Do you believe you are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit to take upon you the ministry of a deacon in this church, to serve God, promoting His glory and edifying His people?

Answer: I so believe.

2. Are you persuaded that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments contain all things necessary for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and are the inspired and authoritative standard for the church’s faith and life?

Answer: I do so believe and am persuaded.

3. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and do you accept the beliefs and teachings of the Christian faith?

Answer: I do so confess and accept, by the grace of God.

4. Will you be faithful in prayer, in the reading and study of the Holy Scriptures, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, continually rekindle the gift of God that is in you?

Answer: I will, with the help of God.

5. Will you apply all diligence to regulate and fashion your own life (*and the lives of your family*) according to the doctrine of Christ, and to make (*both*) yourself (*and them*), as far as you are able, (*a*)wholesome example(s) of the flock of Christ?

Answer: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

6. Deacons express their ministry under the guidance and authority of an elder, being faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ as they participate in the life and work of the church. Will you do this gladly and willingly?

Answer: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

7. Will you be loyal to the Free Methodist Church, accepting its polity, doctrine, and discipline?

Answer: I will, with the help of God.

May God, who has given you the will to do these things, give you grace to perform them, that the work begun in you may be brought to completion. Amen.

Laying on of Hands and Prayer

The superintendent says to the congregation:

As *this person is / these persons are* consecrated by God and the church for the ministry of deacon, to which we believe *he/she/they* have been called by the Holy Spirit, let us silently pray for *him/her/them* as they kneel before God.

The candidates kneel.

The people pray for them in silence.

The superintendent addresses the candidate(s):

My brother / sister / brothers and sisters, from the time of the apostles, persons with suitable gifts and graces have been set apart by the laying on of hands and prayer for

a ministry of service in the church of Jesus Christ our Lord. We trust that the Spirit of God has called you to the ministry of deacon. As earnest prayer is made for the fulfillment of the Spirit's gift in you, your church now calls you to receive the laying on of hands as the seal of your vocation by the Spirit.

The superintendent (and other elders, as well as Consecrated Deacons who may be present), laying hands upon the head of each candidate in turn, shall say:

Take authority to execute the office of a deacon in this congregation, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

After all have received the laying on of hands, the superintendent, facing the candidates, with both hands extended over them, says:

Let us pray. We give thanks to You, Lord God, that in Your great love You sent Jesus Christ, Your only begotten, to take the form of a servant for the sake of us all, becoming obedient even to death on the cross. We praise You that You have highly exalted Jesus Christ, Your servant, whom You have made to be Lord of all, and that You have taught us, by His word and example, that whoever would be great among us must be servant of all. Increase within the lives of *this Your servant / these Your servants* the gift of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ your Son, for the ministry of a *Deacon / Deacons* in Your church. Give *him / her / them* grace to be faithful to *his / her / their* promises, constant in *his / her / their* discipleship, and always ready for the works of loving service. Make *him / her / them* modest and humble, gentle and strong, that, having the assurance of faith and rejoicing in hope, *he / she / they* may be rooted and grounded in love. Give *him / her / them* a share in the ministry of Jesus Christ, who came not to be served but to serve; who now lives and reigns with You, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Recognition and a Bible or other gift may be given to each deacon.

The superintendent addresses the deacon(s):

We now welcome you to your ministry as Deacon(s). You have given assurance of your faith and Christian experience. You have confirmed the vows of your consecration and committed *yourself / yourselves* to uphold faithfully the Free Methodist Church. We rejoice that you have been called to serve among us and pray that the Spirit of God may guide your ministry.

Presenting each deacon with his or her credentials, the superintendent says:

_____ (name), we now recognize you as a
 deacon in the _____ (name of church), a Free
 Methodist congregation.

Benediction

Dedication of Churches

¶8600 *After the congregation has assembled, an appropriate hymn shall be sung. This is to be followed by an extemporaneous prayer and Scripture readings.*

Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 84

New Testament Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-25

An appropriate hymn may be sung.

The pastor shall deliver a sermon suitable to the occasion.

An offering may be received.

One of the trustees shall say to the pastor:

We present unto you this building, to be dedicated as a church for the service and worship of Almighty God.

The pastor shall request the congregation to stand, as he/she repeats this declaration:

Dearly beloved, it is meet and right, as we learn from the Holy Scriptures, that houses erected for the public worship of God should be specially set apart and dedicated to religious uses. For such a dedication we are now assembled. With gratitude, therefore, to Almighty God, who has signally blessed His servants in their holy enterprise of erecting this church, we dedicate it to His service, for the reading of the Holy Scriptures, the preaching of the Word of God, the administration of the holy sacraments, and for all other exercises of religious worship and service, according to the *Book of Discipline* and usages of the Free Methodist Church.

A dedicatory prayer shall be offered.

Ministerial Membership: Local Ministerial Candidate

¶8700

- A. Questions for a Local Ministerial Candidate before the local Board of Administration:
1. When and how did you come to know Christ as Savior and Lord?

2. Describe your life as it relates to the fullness of the Holy Spirit.
 3. Describe the call of God in your life to full-time ministry.
 4. What preparations and plans are you making in order to follow God's will for your life?
 5. What do you see as your primary spiritual gifts?
 6. In what ways do you plan to witness and minister as a Local Ministerial Candidate?
- B. Questions for a Local Ministerial Candidate before the congregation:
1. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and do you offer yourself in service to Him as a Local Ministerial Candidate in the _____ Free Methodist Church?
Answer: I do.
 2. Recognizing that being a Local Ministerial Candidate in this congregation is an important step in confirming the call of God on your life, do you pledge to diligently seek the Lord's will for your life through prayer and study?
Answer: I do.
 3. Will you seek and accept the guidance of your pastor and the local Board of Administration in order to fulfill these goals?
Answer: I will.
- C. The pastor will present a certificate to the Local Ministerial Candidate.

Conference Ministerial Candidate

¶8710 *At an appropriate time the Conference Ministerial Candidate(s) shall be called before the annual conference or the Administrative Committee if so authorized by the annual conference, and the chair shall say:*

The leaders and members of this annual conference, having observed your Christian life and conduct, feel you are endowed with the gifts of ministerial leadership. The Ministerial Education and Guidance Board has carefully inquired into your qualifications and has presented you as a candidate for membership. We offer our words of encouragement and congratulations. We know you take seriously this step towards ordination. We expect you to give yourself diligently in prayer and study in preparation

for effective pastoral ministry. That you may fix your eyes more clearly upon your goal we ask you the following questions:

1. Do you acknowledge Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and offer yourself in service to Him as a Conference Ministerial Candidate in the _____ Annual Conference of the Free Methodist Church?

Answer: I do.

2. Recognizing that being a Conference Ministerial Candidate in this annual conference is an important step toward full membership and ordination, do you pledge to equip yourself spiritually, morally, and intellectually for the Christian ministry?

Answer: I do.

3. Will you seek and accept the guidance of your superintendent and the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board to fulfill these goals?

Answer: I will.

The president of the conference shall present a certificate to the newly received Conference Ministerial Candidate(s).

Member of the Annual Conference

¶8720 *The Conference Ministerial Candidate seeking to become a full member of the annual conference shall answer these questions:*

1. Have you faith in Christ?

Answer: I do.

2. Have you present assurance that your sins are forgiven?

Answer: I do.

3. Do you experience purity of heart and life and empowerment for service, through the fullness of the Spirit, and will you continue to grow in this experience and so lead your people?

Answer: Yes.

4. Are you resolved to devote yourself to God and the work to which He calls you, expressing Christian love?

Answer: As God is my helper, I am so resolved.

5. Will you partake of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper when it is offered?

Answer: I will.

6. Will you endeavor to effectively communicate the gospel?

Answer: I will, God being my helper.

7. Will you see that all people under your care are disciplined to be obedient followers of Jesus Christ?

Answer: I will.

8. Will you visit, ministering to those within and without the church?

Answer: I will.

9. Will you recommend fasting and prayer, both by teaching and example?

Answer: I will.

10. Will you endeavor to fulfill the mission and vision of the Free Methodist Church and its ministries in building the kingdom of God?

Answer: I will, God being my helper.

Lay Membership:

Adult Membership

¶8800 *Those who are to be received into membership shall be called forward by name, and the pastor, addressing the people, shall say:*

Into this holy fellowship the persons before you, who have received the sacrament of baptism, who have learned the nature of these privileges and duties, who have been instructed in the teachings and mission of the Free Methodist Church, and who have been approved by the local Board of Administration, come to be welcomed into membership. We now propose, in the fear of God, to question them as to their faith and purpose, that you may know that they are ready to be admitted into this Society.

Addressing those seeking admission, the pastor shall say:

Beloved in the Lord, you have been baptized into Christ and come now to be received into membership in the Free Methodist Church. We rejoice with you in all God's mercies that have brought you to this hour; and we join our prayers with yours as you make this sacred undertaking.

1. Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: I do.

2. Do you believe the Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit, and do you accept its authority for what you must believe and how you must live?

Answer: I do.

3. Do you here resolve, by God's grace, to be Christlike in heart and life, opening yourself fully to the cleansing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of the Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of the church?

Answer: By God's enabling grace, I do resolve.

4. Do you accept the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and the government of the Free Methodist Church, and will you endeavor to live in harmony with them?

Answer: Trusting God's power to aid me, I do.

5. As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you embrace the mission of the Free Methodist Church within and beyond this congregation and will you join us in giving sacrificially of your time, talents, and resources to help us carry out that mission?

Answer: With God's help, I will.

6. I offer you the right hand of fellowship. I welcome you into the Free Methodist Church. May the experience of membership in this body enrich your life and the life of our church; and may your contribution to its life strengthen both you and all of us.

The pastor shall introduce each candidate by name to the congregation and shall continue as follows:

You, my fellow members of this congregation, have heard the vows of these who have completed the requirements for membership in the Free Methodist Church. Let us now welcome them into our fellowship.

(The method of welcoming shall be left to the discretion of the pastor.)

The pastor may offer an extemporaneous prayer.

(Optional) Those to be received into membership shall kneel and the pastor, laying hands upon each of them in turn, shall say:

_____, I receive you into the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church. May the Lord confirm you in the faith and fellowship of the true disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Those being received shall rise and the pastor addressing the candidates shall say:

We rejoice to recognize you as members of the Free Methodist Church and bid you welcome to all its privileges; and in token of our love we give you the right hand of fellowship and pray that you may be numbered with His people here and with His saints in glory everlasting. May the church be a blessing to you, and may you be a blessing to the church.

The pastor shall say to the congregation:

Friends in Christ, I commend to your love and care these persons whom we this day recognize as members of our church. Do all in your power to strengthen their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love.

Preparatory Membership

¶8810 Instructions related to the optional use of preparatory membership are found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*, Section V.

Youth Membership

¶8820 Ritual other than questions and answers is optional.

Those who are to be received as youth members shall be called forward by name, and the pastor shall say:

Beloved, our Lord Jesus, by His Holy Word, has expressly given to everyone who believes in Him a place in His kingdom and church. Before you are admitted into the church, it becomes my duty to inquire of you as to your purpose of mind and heart.

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ has forgiven your sins and is now your Savior?

Answer: Yes.

2. Have you received Christian baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized?

Answer: Yes.

3. Will you attend classes of instruction on living the Christian life and serving God through your church?

Answer: Yes.

4. Can the Free Methodist Church count on you? Will you pray for the church, attend regularly, give to your church, and help wherever you can?

Answer: Yes.

5. Will you show your friends by the way you live what it means to be a Christian and will you try to win them to Christ?

Answer: Yes.

The pastor may offer an extemporaneous prayer. Optional: those to be received as youth members shall kneel, and the pastor, laying his / her hands upon each of them in turn, shall say:

I receive you into the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church as a youth member. May God confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Membership by Transfer

¶8830 *Those who are to be received into membership by transfer shall be called forward by name and the pastor, addressing the congregation, shall say:*

The Free Methodist Church is a welcoming fellowship which provides a home for those committed to the advancement of Christ's kingdom. We count it a privilege to receive these members into our fellowship by transfer. Their letters of transfer read:

The pastor shall read only the first letter in each category of membership in its entirety. The others can be named along with the name of the church from which they are transferring.

The pastor shall lead in an extemporaneous prayer.

The pastor shall welcome each new member.

Members transferring from another evangelical denomination must previously have met the requirements of ¶6110.

Chapter 9

Appendices¹

Articles of Incorporation of The Free Methodist Church of North America

¶9000 Under the Laws of California² Office of the Secretary of State

Know All Men By These Presents:

That we, the undersigned, a majority of whom are citizens and residents of the State of California, have this day voluntarily associated ourselves together for the purpose of forming a corporation under Title XII, Article I of the Civil Code of the State of California.

And We Hereby Certify:

1. That the name of the corporation shall be The Free Methodist Church of North America³
- 2.+ That the purposes for which it is formed are religious, and charitable, and especially:

To conduct religious services; to cultivate social intercourse among its members and assist in improving and ameliorating the moral and social conditions of humanity; to purchase, own,

1 The 1999 *Book of Discipline* Appendices included several forms (Application for Permission to Sell or Mortgage Church Property, Declaration of Trust, Suggested Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, and several ministerial and lay licenses, etc.) that may now be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*. The historical documents on the Free Methodist Church, including the historical Constitution of the Free Methodist Church of North America, General Rules, and The Ministry, may be found in previous editions of the Free Methodist Church of North America *Book of Discipline* and on the website: <https://fmcusa.org>.

2 Editor's Historical Note (1943): Originally the church was incorporated under the laws of the state of New York, April 30, 1873, as "The Free Methodist General Conference of North America." The General Conference of 1916 authorized the board of trustees of the General Conference to incorporate in the state of Illinois. Pursuant to this order, a charter was granted by the state of Illinois, December 2, 1915, under the title "The Board of Trustees of the Free Methodist Church of North America." This incorporation was approved by the General Conference of 1919 and was duly authorized to assume all the duties and exercise the prerogatives of the original incorporation. The General Conference of 1931 ordered a consolidation of the several boards into a Board of Administration. The General Conference of 1935 authorized the Board of Administration to form a new incorporation. Pursuant to this order, a corporation known as "The Free Methodist Church of North America" was formed in 1937, whose articles of incorporation are set forth above.

3 Although the Church's corporate name is The Free Methodist Church of North America, by action of the Board of Administration (April 2011) the Church now does business as The Free Methodist Church USA.

sell, mortgage, and lease real estate and other property as may be necessary for the purposes of this corporation; to receive donations, to receive, manage, take, and hold real and personal property by gift, grant, devise, or bequest, and to sell or dispose of the same; and to do every thing necessary, suitable, or proper for the accomplishment of any of the purposes herein enumerated, or which shall at any time appear conducive or expedient for the protection or benefit of this corporation.

To take and hold by donation, gift, grant, devise, or otherwise any property, real, personal, or mixed, in any state in the United States, or in any other country in behalf of and for the benefit of The Free Methodist Church of North America or any of its subsidiary interests, and the same to manage, grant, and convey, lease, or otherwise dispose of, and to execute such trust or trusts as may be confided to said corporation, the whole to be under the supervision of and amenable to the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church of North America.

To carry on a general publishing and printing business including that of stationers, printers, lithographers, stereotypers, electrotypers, photographic printers, photolithographers, engravers, diesinkers, book printers, account book manufacturers, dealers in parchments, dealers in stamps, advertising agents, designers, draftsmen, ink manufacturers, booksellers, publishers, paper manufacturers, and dealers in the materials used in the manufacture of paper, and dealers in or manufacturers of any other articles or things of a character similar or analogous to the foregoing, or any of them, or connected therewith for the furtherance of the general objectives of this corporation.

To receive property by devise or bequest, subject to the laws regulating the transfer of property by will, and to otherwise acquire and hold all property, real or personal, including shares of stock, bonds, and securities of other corporations.

To act as trustee under any trust incidental to the principal objects of the corporation or for the benefit of any of its members, or members of their families, and to receive, hold, and administer and expend funds and property subject to such trusts.

To convey, exchange, lease, mortgage and encumber, transfer upon trust, or otherwise dispose of all property, real or personal.

To borrow money, contract debts, and issue bonds, notes, and debentures, and to secure the same.

To do all other acts necessary or expedient for the administration of the affairs and attainment of the purposes of the corporation including the conduct of any business for profit, providing said profits are used for the objects of said corporation and not distributed to the members thereof.

- 3.+ That the principal office for the transaction of business of said corporation is to be located in the County of Los Angeles, State of California.
- 4.+ That the term for which said corporation is to exist is perpetual.
- 5.+ That it is a corporation which does not contemplate pecuniary gain or profit to the members thereof, and therefore there shall be no capital stock.
- 6.+ That this corporation shall be successor to and take the property of the following corporations which are hereafter to be dissolved:

The Board of Trustees of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation.

The Board of Conference Claimants of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation.

The Board of Education of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation.

The Board of Church Extension of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation.⁴

This corporation shall also become the successor of the Free Methodist Publishing House, an Illinois Corporation, and the General Missionary Board of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation, whenever the same shall be dissolved and ordered this corporation by an order of the Board of Administration of the Free Methodist Church of North America.

⁴ Editor's Note (1943): On October 28, 1943, the Board of Administration of the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church of North America in session at Winona Lake, Indiana, took the following action: That the respective officers of the Board of Trustees of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation, the Board of Conference Claimants of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation, the Board of Church Extension of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation; the Board of Education of the Free Methodist Church of North America, an Illinois Corporation, take any necessary steps or execute any necessary papers for the dissolution of these corporations and to transfer any and all of the assets of said corporations to the Free Methodist Church of North America, a California Corporation, their successor.

7. That said corporation shall be subject to the rules, regulations, and *Book of Discipline* of The Free Methodist Church of North America as from time to time adopted by the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America insofar as the same do not contravene or conflict with the laws of the State of California or the several states of the United States.

The *Book of Discipline*, rules, and regulations of The Free Methodist Church as from time to time adopted by the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America shall at all times be a part of the bylaws of this corporation.

8. That the names and addresses of the persons who are to act in the capacity of directors until the selection of their successors, and who shall be known as trustees, are:

| <i>Names</i> | <i>Addresses</i> |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Claude A. Watson | Los Angeles, California |
| B.E. Iler | Santa Monica, California |
| A.G. Ball | Los Angeles, California |

That the number of trustees may be changed by a bylaw duly adopted or amended by the members, authority for which is hereby expressly conferred.

In Witness Whereof, for the purpose of forming this corporation under the laws of the State of California, we, the undersigned, constituting the incorporators of this corporation, including the persons named herein above as the first directors of this corporation, have executed these Articles of Incorporation this fifteenth day of January, 1937.

Claude A. Watson, B.E. Iler, A.G. Ball

¶9100

Bylaws of The Free Methodist Church of North America

Article I – Members

1. The members of the Board of Administration of The Free Methodist Church of North America, elected by the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America, shall constitute the members of this corporation.
2. All meetings of members shall be held according to the bylaws, as directed by the corporation or by its Board of Directors.
3. The regular annual meeting of the members shall be held at a time and place to be fixed by the Board of Administration or a committee designated by them.

The annual meeting of the members and of the Board of Directors may be held either in or out of the state of incorporation, as fixed by the Board of Administration or by its Board of Directors.

4. Written notice of the annual meeting of members shall be given to the members at least two weeks before the meeting.
5. Special meetings of the members may be called at any time for any purpose by the president, Board of Directors, or three or more members.
6. Written notice of special meetings of the members, stating the time and in general terms the purpose or purposes, shall be given to the members at least one week prior to the date of the special meeting.
7. When all the members are present at a meeting, however called or notified, and sign a written consent, or when the members present, and the members not present at the meeting, give their written consent, and the written consent is made a part of the records of the meeting, the proceedings are valid, irrespective of the manner in which the meeting is called, or the place where it is held.

Any member of the Board of Directors of this corporation may be removed from office according to the Free Methodist *Book of Discipline* and any amendments to the *Book of Discipline* duly adopted by the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America.

8. At any meeting of the members, a majority of the members shall constitute a quorum to transact business.

9. Any regular or special meeting of the members may adjourn from time to time, without further notice, until a quorum is present.
10. The president, or, in his/her absence, the vice president, or, in the absence of the president and vice president, a chairman elected by the members present, shall serve as the presiding officer.
11. The secretary of the corporation shall act as secretary at all meetings of the members, and in his/her absence the presiding officer may appoint any person to act as secretary.
12. At the regular annual meeting of the members following the meeting of the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America, the members of the corporation shall elect by ballot a Board of Directors as constituted by these bylaws and the Articles of Incorporation of this corporation.
13. Meetings of the members may take place by conference telephone or similar communications equipment by which all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other. Participation in a meeting in this manner constitutes presence in person at the meeting.
14. An action of the members may be taken without a meeting if the action is approved in writing, including by fax, regular mail, or electronic mail, by a number of members constituting at least a quorum, so long as all members have been notified at least one day before the time required to submit a vote. The approval shall be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the Board. After receiving notice of a requested action and before the time required to submit a vote, any member may call for a meeting to consider the action, and the action may then only be taken at a duly noticed meeting.

Article II – Directors

1. The corporate powers, business, and affairs of the corporation shall be exercised, conducted, and controlled by a Board of Directors of five members.
2. No person shall be elected a director unless he/she is a member in good standing of The Free Methodist Church of North America. If a director shall cease at any time to be a member in good standing of The Free Methodist Church of North America, he/she shall cease to be a director, but this shall not invalidate any act of the corporation, its officers, or directors. Directors shall be members of the Board of Administration of The Free Methodist Church of North America.
3. Each director shall hold office for eight years or for a shorter period as elected until his/her successor has been elected.

4. Any vacancy occurring in the office of director by reason of death, resignation, or otherwise, except vacancies caused by the removal of the Board of Directors pursuant to the provisions of §310 of the Civil Code of the State of California, shall be filled by an appointee of the majority of the remaining directors, though less than a quorum. The newly elected director shall hold office until a successor is elected at the next annual meeting, or at a special meeting called for that purpose.

When one or more of the directors gives notice of his/her/their resignation to the Board, the Board shall have the power to fill the vacancy/vacancies. Each director so elected shall hold office during the remainder of the term of office of the resigning director(s), or until a successor(s) is elected.

5. Immediately after the election of directors at the annual meeting of the members, following the meeting of the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America, the directors shall meet to organize, elect officers, and transact other business.
6. The annual meeting of the Board of Directors shall be determined by the Board of Directors with the date fixed by them in connection with the annual meeting of the corporation.
7. Special meetings of the Board of Directors shall be called at any time on the order of the president or on the order of two or more directors.
8. Written notice of special meetings of the Board of Directors, stating the time and purpose of the meeting, shall be mailed or sent electronically, not later than ten days before the meeting. If all the directors shall be present at any directors' meeting, however called or noticed, and sign a written consent that is entered on the record of the meeting, or if the majority of the directors are present, and those not present sign a written waiver of notice of such meeting, whether prior to or after holding the meeting and the waiver is filed with the secretary of the corporation, and entered on the record of the meeting, any business transacted at the meeting shall be as valid as if the meeting had been regularly called and noticed.
9. A majority of the directors shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business, and every act or decision of a majority of the directors present at a meeting at which a quorum is present and duly assembled shall be valid as the act of the Board of Directors. The directors may adjourn from time to time until a quorum is present.
10. The Board of Directors shall have full power and authority to borrow money on behalf of the corporation, including the power and authority to borrow money from any of

the members, directors, or officers of the corporation, and otherwise to incur indebtedness on behalf of the corporation, and to authorize the execution of promissory notes, or other evidences of indebtedness of the corporation, and to agree to pay interest thereon; to sell, convey, alienate, transfer, assign, exchange, lease, and otherwise dispose of; mortgage, pledge, hypothecate, and otherwise encumber the property, real and personal, and the franchises of the corporation; to purchase, lease, and otherwise acquire property, real and personal, on behalf of the corporation; and generally to do and perform, or cause to be done and performed, any and every act which the corporation may lawfully do and perform.

11. The directors of this corporation shall serve without compensation except for their actual expenses.
12. The Board of Directors may appoint an Executive Committee and may delegate to the committee any of the powers and authority of the Board of Directors, except the power to adopt, amend, or repeal the bylaws. The Executive Committee shall be composed of members of the Board of Directors and shall act only in the intervals between meetings of the Board of Directors, and shall be subject at all times to the control of the Board of Directors.
13. Meetings of the Board of Directors may take place by conference telephone or similar communications equipment by which all persons participating in the meeting can hear each other. Participation in a meeting in this manner constitutes presence in person at the meeting.
14. Actions of the Board of Directors may be taken without a meeting if all directors individually or collectively consent in writing, including by fax, regular mail, or electronic mail, to that action. The written consent(s) shall be filed with the minutes of the proceedings of the Board.

Article III – Officers

1. The executive officers of the corporation shall be the president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.
2. All of the officers of the corporation shall be elected by ballot by the Board of Directors except the treasurer. The general church treasurer shall be the treasurer of the corporation.

Article IV – President

1. The president shall be the chief executive officer of the corporation. He/she shall preside at all meetings of the

corporation and of the Board of Directors. He/she shall have general charge of the business of the corporation, shall execute, with the secretary, in the name of the corporation, all deeds, bonds, contracts, and other obligations and instruments authorized by the Board of Directors to be executed.

2. The president shall have any other powers and perform any other duties as may be assigned to him/her by the Board of Directors.

Article V – Vice President

1. The vice president shall be vested with all the powers and shall perform all the duties of the president, in case of the absence or disability of the president.
2. The vice president shall have any other powers and perform any other duties as may be assigned to him/her by the Board of Directors.

Article VI – Secretary

1. The secretary shall keep minutes of all meetings of the corporation and of the Board of Directors. He/she shall provide notices of all meetings to the members and of the Board of Directors. The secretary shall execute, with the president, in the name of the corporation, all deeds, bonds, contracts, and other obligations and instruments authorized by the Board of Directors to be executed, and, with the president, shall sign all certificates of membership of the corporation. He/she shall be the custodian of the corporate seal of the corporation, and when so ordered by the Board of Directors shall affix the seal to deeds, bonds, contracts, and other obligations and instruments. The secretary shall keep and have charge of the minutes of the meetings of the corporation and Board of Directors, the bylaws, and other papers as the Board of Directors may direct. He/she shall, in general, perform all the duties incident to the office of secretary, subject to the control of the Board of Directors. (The secretary shall perform the duties of the treasurer in case of the absence or disability of the treasurer.)
2. In case of the absence or disability of the secretary, or his/her refusal or neglect to act, notices may be provided by the president, vice president, or a person authorized by the president, vice president, or the Board of Directors.

Article VII – Treasurer

The treasurer shall ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept. He/she shall receive and deposit, or cause to be received and deposited, all moneys and other valuables of the corporation in the name and to the credit of the corporation, in such depositories as may be designated by the Board of Directors. The treasurer shall disburse, or cause to be disbursed, the funds of the corporation only as directed by the Board of Directors of the corporation and shall take proper vouchers for such disbursements. He/she shall provide the president of the Board of Directors and to the members, whenever they may require, accounts of all his/her transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the corporation. He/she shall, in general, perform all the duties incident to the office of treasurer, subject to the control of the Board of Directors.

Article VIII – Indemnification of Directors and Officers

1. All persons who are directors or officers of the corporation, or members of its Pension Board, shall be indemnified by the corporation against all costs and expenses (including counsel fees) actually and necessarily incurred by or imposed upon them in connection with or resulting from any action, suit, or proceeding of whatever nature to which they are or shall be made a party by reason of their being or having been a director or officer of the corporation or member of such committee or board (whether or not they are a director or officer of the corporation or member of such committee or board at the time) they are made a party to such action, suit, or proceeding, or at the time such costs or expenses are incurred by or imposed upon them, except in relation to matters as to which they shall be adjudged in such action, suit, or proceeding to be liable for negligence or misconduct in the performance of their duties as such director or officer or committee or board member; provided, however, that in the case of an action or proceeding which is settled or compromised, such right of indemnification shall be applicable only (a) if such a settlement or compromise is approved by the court having jurisdiction of such action, suit, or proceeding; and (b) to the extent provided in the terms of such compromise or settlement so approved. All persons shall be entitled, without demand by them upon the corporation, or any action of the corporation, to enforce their right to such indemnity in an action at law against the corporation.
2. The right of indemnification provided above shall not be deemed exclusive of any other rights to which any such person may now or hereafter be otherwise entitled and specifically, without

limiting the generality of the foregoing, shall not be deemed exclusive of any rights, pursuant to statute or otherwise, of any such person in any such action, suit, or proceeding to have assessed or allowed in his/her favor, against the corporation or otherwise, his/her costs and expenses incurred therein or in connection therewith or any part thereof.

Article IX – Seal

The Board of Directors shall provide a suitable seal for the corporation, which shall be in circular form, which will contain the following inscription: The Free Methodist Church of North America, Incorporated Jan. 15, 1937, Los Angeles, California.

Article X

The *Book of Discipline*, rules, and regulations of The Free Methodist Church as from time to time adopted by the General Conference of The Free Methodist Church of North America shall at all times be a part of the bylaws of this corporation.

Article XI

The bylaws of this corporation may be amended at any annual meeting of the members of the corporation by a majority vote of those present and voting.

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