

Report of the Justice and Advocacy Task (JAT) Force
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The JAT was formed to process three resolutions intended to create a more just and inclusive Free Methodist Church USA: Res 310 Guidelines for Justice Advocacy; Res 507 Supporting Immigrant Pastors; and Res 901 Office of Justice and Reconciliation.

Introduction

The JAT believes we need *more than an office, set of advocacy guidelines or to-dos for justice advocacy, immigration support and diverse leadership development* but rather *culture change and executable methods* to ensure excellent leadership and administration to consolidate and empower Free Methodist forces already inspired by the Holy Spirit to advance the cause of justice within and throughout the FMCUSA. Such change may best take place through systemic development of permanence and power invested into the ongoing work of justice advocacy and inclusion at every level of the church.

Executive Summary

We recommend to GOT for consideration, and the Board of Administration for action, the following:

- 1) (Per Resolution 901) Formation of a denominational Justice Advocacy and Diversity Committee which shall be a properly funded, permanent body of the Board of Administration, composed of an intentionally diverse representation of the church, supported by a coordinator, charged with a) ensuring a singular point of guidance for policy and procedures enacting justice, equity and reconciliation regarding particularly race, gender and class, b) providing coordination and guidance for the public voice of justice, reconciliation and inclusion and c) ongoing development and execution of strategies which cultivate increasingly diverse clergy and lay leadership throughout the FMCUSA.
- 2) (Per Resolution 507) Fund and empower the Human Resources department of the FMCUSA to create clear guidelines for the proper support of immigrant pastors navigating matters of law and compensation, and in conjunction with the Credentialing Task Force, create training material (online, video and print) for use by particularly MEG boards and local churches.
- 3) (Per Resolution 901) Encourage the GOT to affirm simple guidelines for justice advocacy, and to recommend to the Board of Bishops and/or Board of Administration the inclusion of said guidelines in denominational communications, such as web-based resourcing and a future pastor's handbook.

Resolution 901: Office of Justice and Reconciliation

Resolution 901 summarized:

Create an Office of Justice and Reconciliation to cultivate greater equity, justice and reconciliation in our societies and conferences in order to: 1) be a central unifying location for issues of justice, inequity, and reconciliation regarding race, gender and class; 2) act as the public voice of the FMCUSA regarding justice and reconciliation; 3) develop and steward policy and strategies to cultivate increasingly diverse denominational, pastoral and lay leaders throughout the FMCUSA.

The recommendation of the JAT is as follows:

Formation of a denominational Justice Advocacy and Diversity Committee (JADC) which shall be a properly funded, permanent body of the Board of Administration, composed of intentionally diverse church representation, supported by a coordinator, charged with: a) ensuring a singular point of guidance for policy and procedures enacting justice, equity and reconciliation regarding particularly race, gender and class; b) providing coordination and guidance for the public voice of justice, reconciliation and inclusion; and c) ongoing development and execution of strategies which cultivate increasingly diverse clergy and lay leadership throughout the FMCUSA.

Composition

The JADC shall be composed of one bishop, two members of the Board of Administration, and representation by the chairs of (or elected by and from) justice and advocacy networks throughout the FMC as they emerge (currently the African Heritage Network, Association of Human Service Ministries, Red Latina, Free Methodist Justice and Advocacy Network) and a member of the Study Commission on Doctrine.

In addition, the JADC shall be supported by a full-time Justice Advocacy and Diversity Coordinator, appointed by the Board of Bishops.

Appointments shall coincide with the General Conference quadrennium, members of the Board of Administration assigned to the JADC shall be indicated by the nominating committee with approval of the Board of Administration, vacancies being filled by action of the Board of Administration.

The JADC Coordinator, acting under the direction and on behalf of the JADC, contributes to the authorship, edits, reviews of materials, resources, digital communications, coordinates and develops cross-cultural training, provides face-to-face interactive resourcing of denominational and conference leaders guiding matters of justice advocacy and inclusion.

Resourcing the JADC:

- 1) The JADC Coordinator shall be a full-time position, located from within and partially supported by a Conference, providing oversight, training and coordination of the systemic promotion of justice advocacy, promoting diverse leadership throughout the church, and consulting with leaders regarding decision making impact upon the whole of the church.
- 2) The JADC shall have access to not less than 10 hours a month of administrative support through the FMCUSA home office team.

- 3) Committee meeting costs shall be denominationally supported, with no fewer than two annual in-person or virtual meetings which may coincide with BOA and/or GOT meetings.
- 4) A portion of the Light and Life Communications budget shall be allocated to resource creation of digital, video and written tools for training, inspiring and including minority and marginalized groups for use by conferences, MEG boards and local churches.
- 5) Actions approved by the BOA at the recommendation of the JADC shall freely integrate with denominational resources as appropriate, including Human Resources, Light and Life Communications, and Ministerial Credentialing.

Activities of the JADC may include:

Provision of a singular, clear point of reference for Free Methodist positions, policy and procedures enacting justice, equity, and reconciliation regarding particularly race, gender, consistent with the doctrine of the church.

Provide coordination and guidance for the public voice of justice, reconciliation and inclusion throughout the FMCUSA.

Enable the concerns, hopes, grievances, and spiritual and practical wisdom of the widest possible array of people comprising the FMCUSA, with particular attention to insights from minority voices and experiences, to be systematically heard and embedded within, among and through denominational executive leadership.

Provide better coordinated communication of justice advocacy and inclusion through: developing, reviewing and improving materials for Ministerial Credentialing purposes, in partnership with Ministerial Credentialing, that encourage the training, accessibility and resourcing of our pastoral training systems for fuller inclusion and; advising the Board of Administration and Board of Bishops regarding how intended communications and actions will likely impact or be perceived by non-white, non-male, non-citizen, non-married groups within the FMCUSA.

Res 507 Supporting Immigrant Pastors

Summary of Resolution:

The Free Methodist USA shall develop clear guidelines to guide Annual Conferences and local Societies regarding the ordination and support of fruitful, undocumented church workers and pastors who are not citizens of the United States, or presently living and working in the country without a legally recognized status.

JAT response

The JAT recognizes that an increasing number of fruitful and godly pastoral leaders within the United States, who for various reasons, are leading ministries and churches without legal permission to work and earn a wage, must find competent, supportive partners in the FMCUSA who may assist them in their spiritual, leadership and legal issues.

Clear guidance is already offered via SCOD and the Board of Bishops regarding ordination and appointment of pastoral leaders being grounded in biblical and ecclesial realities rather than functions of federal and state regulation.

The JAT recommends the following:

1. That the Board of Administration direct FM Human Resources to develop, in cooperation with legal consult, global Area Directors, representatives of the Immigration Task Force and Red Latina, resources that provide clear guidance to Annual Conference MEG Boards, Superintendents and Local Churches for the hiring, creative compensation and ethical, legal support of immigrant pastors.
2. That the Credentialing Task Force, as it improves current ordination systems, ensures that immigration status be incorporated into the LMC/CMC/Elder process, not as a barrier to ministry but to ensure that healthy practices are followed.
3. That the Justice Advocacy and Diversity Committee (should it be formed) cooperate with Light and Life Communications to maintain an online resource providing links pertaining to immigration, including state-by-state resource connections.
4. That Light and Life Communications, in cooperation with the Credentialing Task Force, and Justice Advocacy and Diversity Committee (should it be formed) provide healthy voices welcoming and guiding immigrants and boards which hire or appoint immigrant leaders, with a few simple videos that may be employed to welcome, instruct and invite immigrants and non-English speaking fruitful leaders into the FMCUSA.
5. That the Board of Bishops continue to foster and promote increased partnerships between conferences and churches with The Immigration Alliance in developing certified immigration centers throughout the United States.
6. That the systems, communications and resources developed to support immigrant pastors are reviewed annually by the Justice Advocacy and Diversity Committee (should it be formed) and/or other appropriate departments to ensure authoritative revisions are made in an ongoing manner.

Resolution 901 Justice and Advocacy Guidelines

Summary of Resolution

That the FMCUSA Board of Administration delegate to the appropriate group the development of simple guidelines for justice advocacy in a political world, and publicize the same, recommending the "Pastoral Primer on Justice Advocacy in a Political World" by Dr. Michael Traylor and Mark Adams as a basis of the work.

JAT Response

The JAT clarified said guidelines and recommends the following:

1. These guidelines are to be recommended to the Global Overseers Team for amendment and, by common consent, endorsement for immediate informal use as a practical guide for conferences and local churches.
2. These adopted guidelines shall be submitted for appropriate review to the Board of Administration and, with their emendations, included in the denominational publications they deem appropriate, such as the *Pastor's and Church Leader's Manual*.
3. These guidelines may, having been potentially used and tested over the quadrennium, be submitted as an addition to the constitution, under article 3331, "The Christian and the State" or some other appropriate chapter of the *Book of the Discipline*, at the next General Conference.

Guiding Principles for Advocacy and Activism

Advocacy is public support for or intentional recommendation of a particular cause or policy, while activism is vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change. Biblical prophets and leaders, church leaders through the ages, and leaders emerging from the streams of the Methodist movement have from time to time believed it to be their moral and civic duty to champion particular causes and to speak for or against particular issues in the public arena as advocates and activists.

As Free Methodists we are first citizens of the kingdom of God, with our first allegiance always to Jesus Christ and His Body on earth, the Church. We are also called to "actively participate in civic life by involvement in efforts for the improvement of social, cultural and educational conditions. We oppose degrading cultural influences. We exercise the right to vote" (*Book of Discipline*, ¶3331.A).

The following guidelines for advocacy are consistent with Free Methodist practice and principles:

- 1) As a corporate entity, the Free Methodist Church USA, Annual Conferences, and local Free Methodist congregations shall refrain from affiliation with or tangibly support for any particular political party or candidate.
- 2) While the denomination, conferences and churches may not affiliate with any particular political party, individual Free Methodists may engage in party politics as their conscience dictates, informed by the theology and practice of the FMCUSA.
- 3) Church leaders and members are encouraged to be informed of local and global issues that impact the well-being of individuals and society, or that degrade the same, and to exercise the right advocate and vote their conscience, informed by the church's principles.

- 4) Church leaders and members are called upon to respect differences in political and social issue perspectives among Free Methodists, to refrain from passing judgement, and to act in an attitude of love toward those who hold opposing views of political, cause, policy or issues.
- 5) Church leaders and members are encouraged to engage in advocacy around the priorities of Jesus and Scripture overall, consistent with the *Book of Discipline*, which includes (but is not limited to) advocacy and activism on behalf of:
 - a. The poor and disenfranchised.
 - b. The foreigner, immigrant, and refugee.
 - c. Opposing personal and systemic racism, sexism, and any system of dehumanization.
 - d. Opposing human trafficking, worker exploitation and personal and corporate greed.
 - e. The sanctity of human life, including the right to life for the unborn and dignity for the differently abled.
 - f. Access to both physical and mental health care and treatments designed to prevent and restore lives trapped by addictive substances and behaviors.
 - g. Diplomacy, reconciliation, and restitution rather than violence and war as the first means to resolve interpersonal and international conflict.
 - h. Healthy marriage and family life, single celibate relationships and friendships, and those societal structures which contribute to the same.
 - i. Good stewardship of the environment which the Creator entrusted to human care.
- 6) Free Methodist leaders and congregations shall, in the cause of advocacy and activism, seek to promote civil discourse and cooperation where possible, never demeaning another even when those in opposition do not behave in an equally charitable manner.
- 7) Be mindful that any public statement or action on behalf of any issue or group of people will be viewed positively by some and negatively by others, even among Christian brothers and sisters. Therefore, expect to be mislabeled, misunderstood, criticized, held in contempt, or even persecuted for righteousness' sake when advocating for a cause.
- 8) Commit to steadfast prayer for every leader, even those opposing Free Methodist values and positions, remembering that public service is a generally thankless job bringing constant criticism. Encourage and cooperate with public officials whenever possible.

**“He has told you, human one, what is good and what the Lord requires from you:
to do justice,
embrace faithful love,
and walk humbly with your God.”**

Micah 6:8