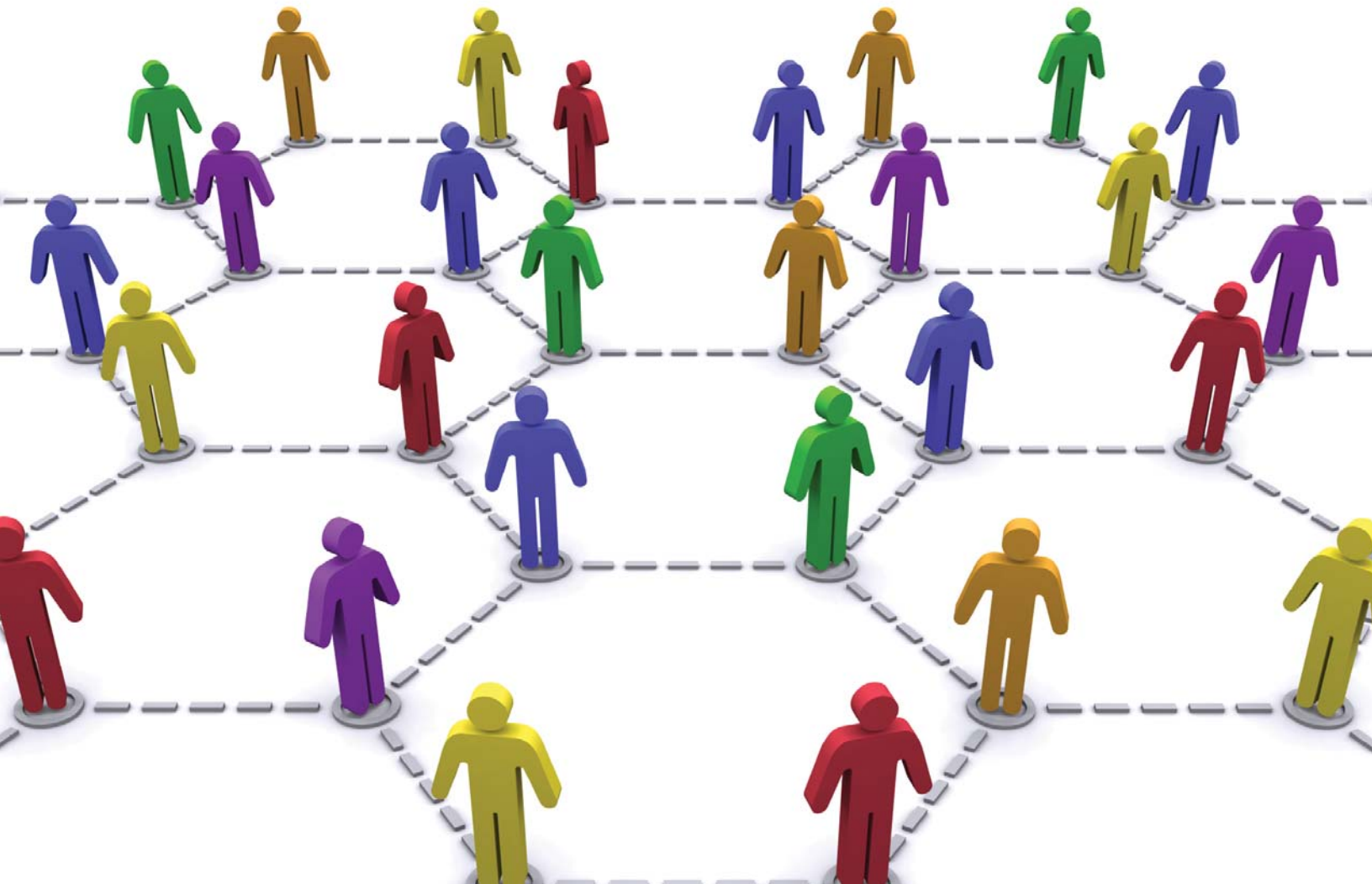




A HANDBOOK FOR

Partnership: Joining the Ministry Community
of your local Free Methodist Church



Components of the Handbook

03

Questions for Joining the Ministry Community

04

Participating in the Ministry Community

05

Free Methodist Family Tree

06

Distinctives of the Free Methodist movement

09

The Ministry Covenant

10

Articles of Religion

15

The Goal of the Christian Journey

25

Leadership Structures of the Free Methodist Church

Preamble

When New Testament writers chose to use the Greek word *ekklesia* to designate Christian faith communities they chose a word already in common usage. It referred to various types of voluntary associations, or “called-out” groups, i.e, groups with specific requirements for participation as well as organizational goals and objectives. (*Biblical uses not referring to “church”; Acts 19:32, 39, 41*)

Personal faith in Jesus and public confession of that faith were intertwined (Romans 10:9,10). Personal faith in Jesus provides entry into the spiritual family, the Body of Christ. Early believers automatically moved on to publicly declare that faith through water baptism. Water baptism was taken to be a requirement for entry into the public communities of Christian believers – *ekklesia*, or churches. A public declaration that “*I am a Jesus-follower.*”

Christians throughout the centuries have thought of this declaration and identification as sealing a kind of “covenant” (or mutual agreement) with like-minded, “like-committed,” people in a specific location to walk together as Jesus’ disciples. This declaration and identification marks the public meshing of our personal story with the story of God’s people, as well as that of a specific, local embodiment of that people.

In Acts 6:1-6 the challenge of leading a community of Christian believers came to be more than the apostles, or designated spiritual leaders, could manage. They asked the community of Jesus-followers to choose from amongst themselves those who would be asked to take on specific ministry responsibilities – like overseeing the distribution of food to widows, and other administrative assignments. A simple but specific qualification was set – they must be “known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom.” Then the community gathered around them while the spiritual leaders laid hands of special consecration upon them.

As the number of Christian believers grew and faith communities multiplied throughout the Middle East and the Mediterranean basin, other organizational forms were developed. They often differed from city to city depending on contextually appropriate leadership practices. It appears clear, however, that there were differing levels of responsibility within those communities, and basic qualifications were required.

This handbook looks at some of the distinctive theology, values, organizational patterns and leadership qualifications that have arisen in the Free Methodist faith community over the years. In each generation modifications and adjustments have sought to respond to changing cultural contexts and accepted ways in which voluntary associations function together.

We believe the partnership covenant asked of those who will contribute to the Ministry Community is consistent with the teaching of the Word of God. Faithfulness to the covenant is evidence placed before their spiritual family of the individual’s desire to sustain their ongoing relationship with Jesus, to bring honour to God, to participate in bringing the kingdom of God on earth, to preserve the unity and harmony of the family of God, and to value the friendship of other believers in the Free Methodist movement and beyond.



Questions for Joining the Ministry Community

Pastor: Folks, you have been baptized into the life of Jesus. You are a subscriber to the family of God. This morning you are indicating your desire to contribute to the ministry community of this congregation of the Free Methodist Church. We're glad that God's mercy has brought you to this point in your journey; and we're joining our prayers with yours as you take this step.

Pastor: Do you have assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus?

Candidate: I do.

Pastor: Do you believe, like we do, that 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?

Candidate: I do.

Pastor: Do you intend, like we do, by God's grace, to be like Jesus in heart and life, inside and out; to be fully open to the cleansing and empowering activity of the Holy Spirit, to be guided by the Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of this spiritual family?

Candidate: In front of my spiritual family, with God's enabling grace and help, this is the person I intend to become.

Pastor: Do you accept, as we do, the founding principles of The Free Methodist Church, like the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and the leadership structures that guide the Free Methodist Church, and will you endeavor to live in harmony with them?

Candidate: Trusting God's power to aid me, I do and I will.

Pastor: As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you actively participate in the mission of our faith community as we actively participate in the mission of God in this world; and will you join us as we give sacrificially of our time, talents and resources to help carry out that mission?

Candidate: With God's help, I will.

Pastor: Traditionally Christians have sealed commitments like this through the ceremonial shaking of hands. You are welcome in the ministry community of this congregation, and likewise, the ministry community of the wider Free Methodist Church. It is our hope that your experience of contributing to this community will enrich both your life and ours.

Participating in the Ministry Community

Prerequisites for Joining the Ministry Community

1. Christian baptism, confession of personal renewal through encounter with Jesus, and a desire to be fully open to the cleansing and empowering activity of the Holy Spirit.
2. Acceptance of the founding principles of the Free Methodist Church, as found in the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and leadership principles and structures that guide our movement.
3. A commitment to support the congregation, to live in harmony with the people of that community of faith, to be an active participant in the ministry of the church, and to seek God's glory in all things.
4. Approval for participation in the ministry community by the official board and by the person's public commitment to the ministry of the congregation.

Privileges of Participation in the Ministry Community

1. To participate in the decision making structures of the local congregation as well as the wider Free Methodist movement.
2. To contribute to shaping the ministry and identity of this faith community in cooperation with other partners in the ministry community.
3. To have opportunity for due process of trial and appeal, if for some reason your involvement in the ministry community is terminated by an action of the official board.

Partnership in the Ministry Community may only be terminated by:

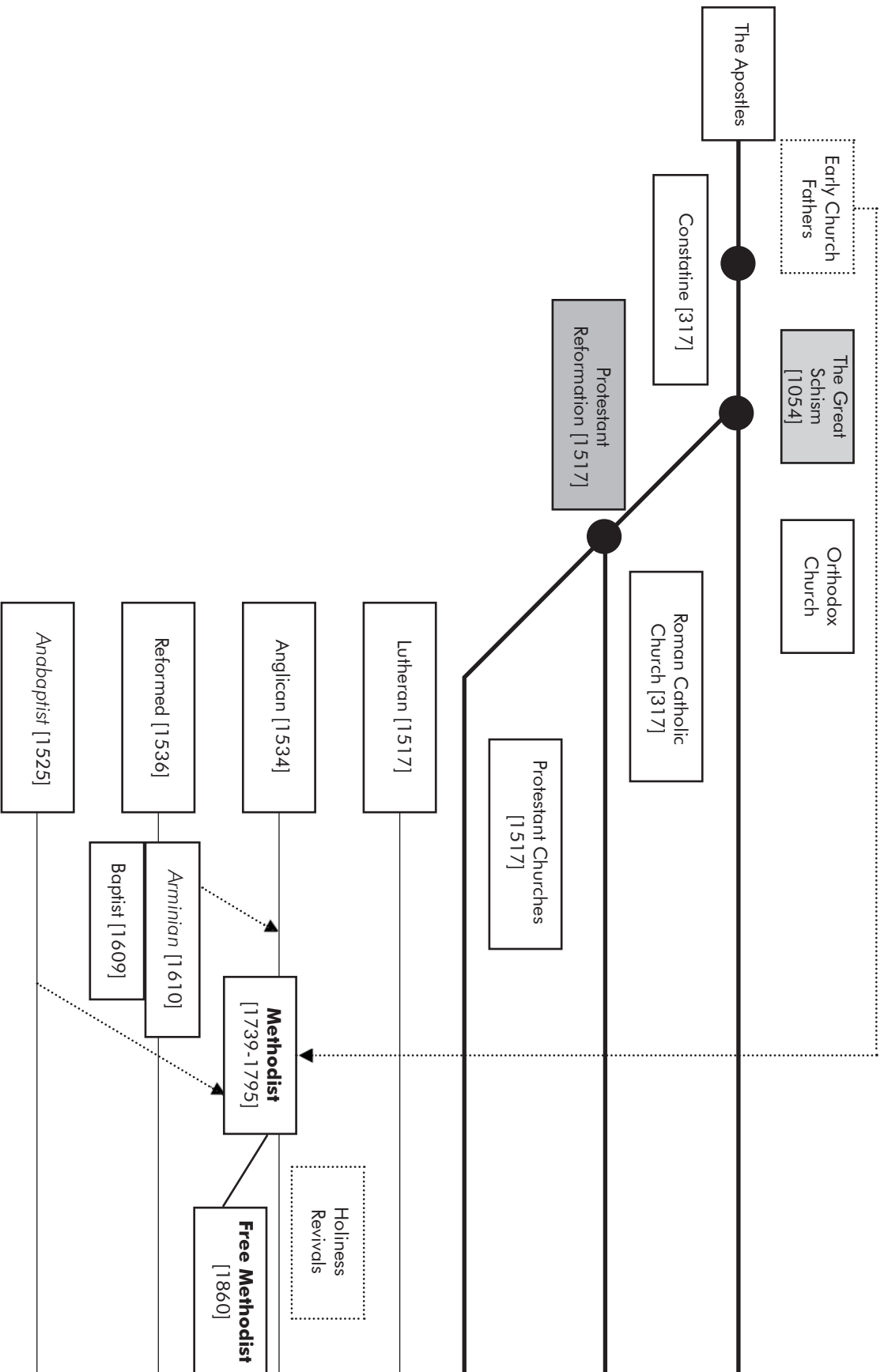
1. Voluntary withdrawal (including permission to withdraw under complaint).
2. Joining another religious denomination or sect or a secret order.
3. Expulsion after proper summary proceeding, or trial and conviction.
4. Persistent neglect of church relationship by a partner residing at a distance from pastoral and church oversight, which is, in effect, voluntary withdrawal.

Accountability

When a participant in the ministry community does not keep the commitments made in this partnership covenant and habitually violates its intentions, it is the responsibility of spiritual leaders and the ministry community to address this failure and to seek in love to restore the partner. If, after these steps have been taken, the partner does not keep his/her commitments, he/she must be dealt with in accord with the due processes of the congregation.



Free Methodist Family Tree



Distinctives of the Free Methodist Movement

The Free Methodist Church ascribes to the basic statement of evangelical faith of the World Evangelical Alliance.

Three Key Attitudes:

- In essential beliefs – we have unity. EPHESIANS 4:4-6
- In non-essential beliefs – we have liberty. ROMANS 14:1, 4, 12, 22
- In all our beliefs – we show charity. 1 CORINTHIANS 13:2



The logo of The Free Methodist Church in Canada

The Apostles' Creed

The essentials of the Christian faith (with which we are in whole hearted agreement) are summarized in the three stanzas of "The Apostles' Creed" written in 390 A.D. The word "creed" comes from the Latin word credo meaning "I believe".

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living 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.

REFLECTIONS ON THE APOSTLES' CREED

As you read the creed, you will realize that we believe:

- God is all powerful.
- God is the Creator.
- Jesus Christ is God.
- The virgin birth, death, bodily resurrection, ascension, second coming and judgment of Jesus Christ are true.
- The Holy Spirit is God.
- The Church is a world-wide fellowship of Christians as well as a local body ("catholic" means "universal").
- Healthy Christians ("saints") share with and assist each other in a local congregation.
- A person's sin can be forgiven.
- There will be bodily resurrection when Christ comes again.
- Beyond this life, there is life that never ends.

The following represents those areas of our theology and practice which mark our particular distinctives as a movement.

Why "Free" Methodist?

The Free Methodist Church began in the USA in 1860, when some Methodist ministers and lay people were put out of the Methodist Church. They were emphasizing several important teachings that the Methodist Church did not support.

1. Slavery of black people was dividing the USA and led to a civil war. These ministers and lay people believed in equality for all people regardless of racial background. So they wanted a "free" church.
2. The Methodist Church had the practice of allowing members to "rent" their seats in their churches as a way of collecting tithes; this meant that poor people were like second-class members because they could not rent their seats. These members wanted "free seats" in the church so that the poor would know they were welcome.
3. The Methodist Church in the USA was adopting very traditional worship practices and rejecting the livelier services of the Holiness Movement that was sweeping across the USA at that time. These members wanted services where "the freedom of the Spirit" was allowed.

4. These members were also troubled about the lack of concern for the message of John Wesley regarding holiness. They wanted a church where they could preach that believers could be “free from the slavery of sin” through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines.
5. Many members of the Methodist clergy at that time were also members of a secret society called the Free Masons. For many of these pastors their allegiance was stronger to this secret society than to the church. The Free Methodist Church requires that all members be “free” from such secret groups outside the church.

Free Methodists have emphasized the worth and value of all human beings, ‘special’ concern for the poor and marginalized, that lives can change in real time and space, and encourage freedom to pursue the direction of the Holy Spirit in worship and ministry.

Christian Living

We believe, as Paul tells us, that we should consider ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God; that sin is no longer our master, we are free from sin’s power. We believe that Christians have the possibility of giving ourselves wholly to God, making choices that lead to holiness and righteousness (Romans 12:1-2).

We believe that Christians can move on to maturity through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, as our choices and actions make us available to God (1Thessalonians 4:3-12; 5:23, 24).

We believe that the most significant sign of the growing presence of God in the individual’s life is the increase of love expressed in actions toward all persons (1John 4:7-21).

Growth and development in love and integrity is possible in this life as we give ourselves increasingly into the shaping hands of God.

Theology

We believe in “prevenient grace” – that God is already working in people’s lives prior to their meeting with the news of the gospel, or Jesus Christ. People of other faiths know something of God’s grace, but they must receive Jesus to fully know the grace of God.

We believe that believers may fall from the grace of God, if they harden their hearts and walk away from God. We do not believe in the eternal security of those who once followed Christ but are not now walking with God.

We do not have a particular opinion about the end times. We believe that Christ will come again to renew creation, and that he will judge sinners and saved. But we do not support any particular version of the end times, such as “pre-millennial” or “post-millennial”, etc.

We believe in both adult and infant baptism and infant dedication. We believe that God honours the intentions of the parents when they bring a child for baptism or dedication – but this baptism or dedication does not guarantee salvation; each child must eventually make their own decision to follow Christ.

We believe that all methods of baptism (immersion, sprinkling, pouring) are acceptable; the most important thing is the heart preparation of the person being baptized.

We believe that the gifts of tongues, interpretation, miracles and healing are all still available to believers today. We do not believe that the gift of tongues is the most important sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit comes into the life of the believer at the point of conversion to faith in Jesus Christ.

We fit in the Wesleyan-Arminian stream of historic, orthodox Christianity, tracing our influences from the teachings of the early fathers, the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Anabaptist movement, the Methodist Church, the Holiness movement and the broad-minded Evangelical movement. Our theology and practices reflect these influences.

Church Government

In the 1850s in the USA, the clergy controlled the Methodist Church, and lay members had no voice in the decision-making of the church. Many mature Christian laypeople objected to this practice. When the Free Methodist Church was formed, it required that all decision-making bodies outside the local church must have equal clergy and lay representatives.

The local church “board” is made up of lay members who work with the pastor in making ministry decisions. The pastor does not control the board, nor does the board control the pastor; they work together in ministry planning and decision-making.

The General Conference, which makes decisions for the movement in Canada, is made up of pastors and lay members from each local church; for every pastor there is one lay delegate. The Bishop works with the General Conference members to make decisions together.

If a General Conference initiates new ministry in a given country, they assume ecclesiastical responsibility for the new mission district until they are able to form their own General Conference.

Today, Free Methodists are found in more than 70 countries. All these countries relate to the rest of the church through their General Conference to the World Conference, our final ecclesiastical authority.

Our system of church government reflects an ongoing process of reform and modification of the historic episcopal

tradition. The focal concern is how church government enables collective vision-casting, ministry connection, lay empowerment, quality assurance and leadership formation.

Ordination of Pastors

There are five things we look for in Ministerial Candidates:

1. *Character* – does this person give evidence of a spiritual relationship with Christ that is being demonstrated by evidence of the fruit of the Spirit?
2. *Reputation* – does this person have a good reputation with both believers and those outside the church; are people attracted to his or her leadership?
3. *Harmony* – does this person believe the foundational truths of Scripture that lead to salvation, and is this person able to serve in harmony with teachings of the Free Methodist Church?
4. *Training* – does this person have adequate training for pastoral ministry and is he or she able to teach and encourage believers in the truths of Scripture and the application of theology to their daily lives?
5. *Experience* – has this person demonstrated their gifts and calling through involvement in the context of a local church, gaining experience in Christian ministry?

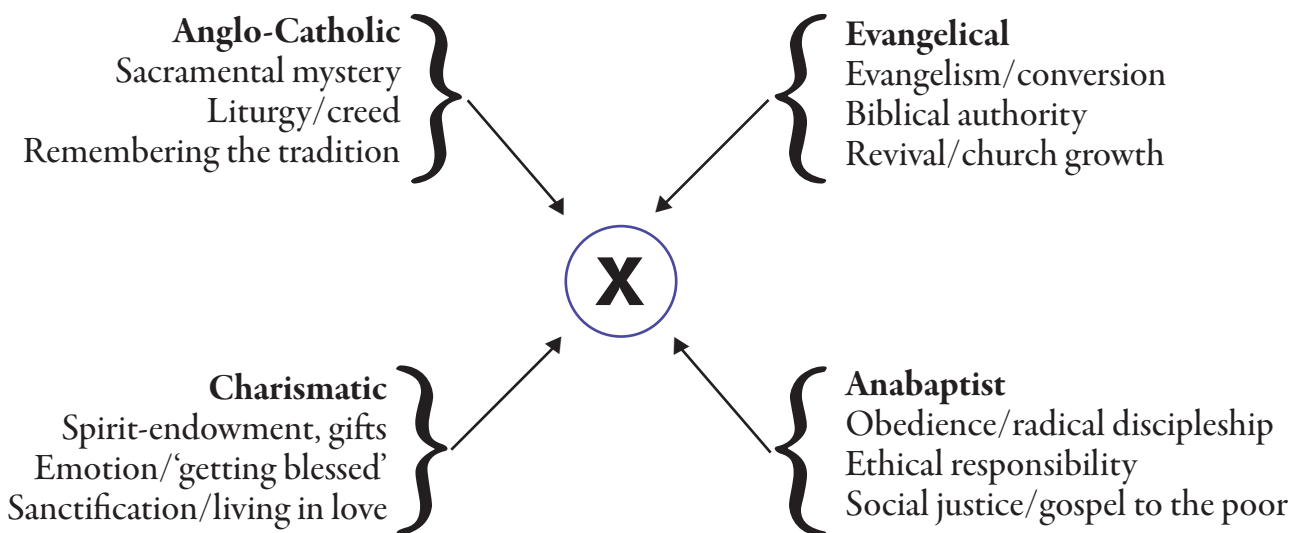
A person who has shown their desire to serve in pastoral ministry through supervised involvement in local church ministry is recommended to the Conference as a Ministerial Candidate. Following this recommendation, each Ministerial Candidate must complete a program of theological and ministry studies, combined with practical ministry service (two years), which is approved by the Conference.

Having completed such a program, the Ministerial Candidate is appointed as a pastor, under the supervision of the Director of Personnel or another ordained pastor, for a period of two years. Following this time, and after the favourable recommendation of the Conference, the interning pastor will be ordained by the laying on of hands by the Bishop.

The Free Methodist Church ordains both men and women as full pastors. This practice is based upon the evidence of spiritual gifts for pastoral ministry as given by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:11) and the belief that all persons are created equal in the sight of God (Galatians 3:28,29).

Our focus in ministry leadership is upon gifts and graces for this work developed in the context of local church ministry. We are concerned for the spiritual, character and professional development of all who serve in pastoral leadership.

Free Methodist Synthesis (Howard Snyder)



[for further reflection see: Howard Snyder’s article on this diagram, on the FMCiC website.]

A partner of the ministry community of a local Free Methodist Church, trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of the other partners of the congregation, will make the following confession and commitments as a covenant with the Lord and the Free Methodist community of believers.

THE MINISTRY COVENANT

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

AS REGARDS GOD

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

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 habits 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

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

- We commit ourselves to honour the sanctity of marriage and the family;
- We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ;
- We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and to pray for all who lead.

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

AS REGARDS THE CHURCH

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.

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION

The Free Methodist Church in Canada developed historically as a renewal movement within the Methodist Church in the northern USA (mid-1800s). The Methodist Church in its turn began as a renewal movement within the Church of England (Anglican) in the mid-1700s. The following statements of belief come to us through this theological lineage, with each generation making adjustments in language and meaning so as to remain faithful to the biblical texts and the common understanding of the Christian faith over 2000 years of history.

GOD

THE HOLY TRINITY

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

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 human 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 Saviour, the one perfect mediator between God and us.

His Resurrection and Exaltation

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

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.

His Work in Salvation

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.

His Relation to the Church

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

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 all 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

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, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II 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.

AUTHORITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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, and salvation, the world and its destiny.

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

HUMANKIND

A FREE MORAL PERSON

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 Saviour and Lord. By God's grace and help, people are enabled to do good works with a free will.

LAW OF LIFE AND LOVE

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 neighbour as yourself. These commands reveal what is best for persons in their relationships 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 sex, race, or colour. 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

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, 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

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.

THE NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

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

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

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

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

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

Christians may be sustained in a growing relationship with Jesus as Saviour 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 the believer liberty to sin and escape the consequences of sinning. God has given responsibility and power to the church to restore a penitent believer through loving reproof, counsel, and acceptance.

THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH

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 honour Christ and obey the written Word of God.

THE LANGUAGE OF WORSHIP

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 a language understood by the people. The Reformation applied this principle to provide for

the use of the common language of the people. It is likewise clear that the Apostle Paul places the strongest emphasis upon rational and intelligible utterance in worship. We cannot endorse practices which plainly violate these scriptural principles.

THE HOLY SACRAMENTS

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

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 Saviour.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 Saviour 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

The beliefs 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

Holy Trinity

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; II Corinthians 13:14.

Son, His Incarnation

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

Son, His Resurrection and Exaltation

Matthew 25:31-32; Luke 24:1-7; 24:39; John 20:19; Acts 1:9-11; 2:24; Romans 8:33-34; II Corinthians 5:10; Philippians 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:1-4.

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

Holy Spirit, His Work in Salvation

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

Holy Spirit, His Relation to the Church

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

THE SCRIPTURES

Authority

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

Authority of the Old Testament

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

Authority of the New Testament

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

HUMANKIND

A Free Moral Person

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

Law of Life and Love

Matthew 22:35-40; John 15:17; Galatians 3:28; I John 4:19-21.

Good Works

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

SALVATION

Christ's Sacrifice

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.

The New Life in Christ

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

Justification

Psalm 32:1-2; Acts 10:43; Romans 3:21-26,28; 4:2-25; 5:8-9; I Corinthians 6:11; Philippians 3:9.



Regeneration

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

Adoption

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

Sanctification

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; I Corinthians 6:11; 12:4-11; Galatians 5:22-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; I Thessalonians 4:7; 5:23-24; II Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 10:14.

Restoration

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

THE CHURCH

The Church

Matthew 16:15-18; 18:17; Acts 2:41-47; 9:31; 12:5; 14:23-26; 15:22; 20:28; I 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; I Timothy 3:14-15.

The Language of Worship

Nehemiah 8:5,6,8; Matthew 6:7; I Corinthians 14:6-9; I Corinthians 14:23-25.

The Holy Sacraments

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

Baptism

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

The Lord's Supper

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

LAST THINGS

The Kingdom of God

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

The Return of Christ

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

Resurrection

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

Judgment

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

Destiny

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

THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

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; I 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; II 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 "with all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." (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 "to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christ-like 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 revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

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

1. THE WAY OF SALVATION

This section, on the way of salvation, 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, in their statements on Humankind and Salvation. 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 Christ-like maturity. The 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.

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' 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 awaiting 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.

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.

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 whenever possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zaccheus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 9:8; 3:8). Neither repentance nor restitution save, however. Salvation is by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

TRUST / FAITH

Trust, also known as faith, is utter reliance upon God (II Corinthians 3:4-5; I 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 (I Timothy 6:17).

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 judgement 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 (I John 3:14).

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; I 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 the pre-eminence. 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).

SANCTIFICATION

Christ gave himself "even unto death" for the cleansing of His church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 13:12). His disciples are called to be holy (I Peter 1:15-16; II 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" (I Thessalonians 5:23-24). Sanctification begins with regeneration. It continues throughout the believer's life, as the believer co-operates with the Spirit. A deeper relationship with Christ is possible when the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; I John 1:5-2:1).

God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier (I Thessalonians 4:7-8; II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 1:2). Coming into the 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; I John 4:12-13).

Accepting the promise of God by faith, believers will enter into a deepened relationship with Christ (II Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7). They will be enabled to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and their neighbour as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:25-62). They will know an inner surrender to all the will of God, and their lives will be transformed from inner conflict with sin to glad obedience (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16-25).

Inward sanctification cleanses Christians from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (I Peter 3:2-3; I 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).

2. GENUINE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

This section describes how genuine Christian character may grow. This statement has its roots in the scriptures and in classic descriptions of the Christian life that have been written through the centuries. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote comparable descriptions such as *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* and *The Character of a Methodist*. Christian character begins with life in the Spirit, and is nourished by the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life.

Christians have a new relationship with God and a new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. In new Christians, the joy of this new life in Christ may for a time obscure the need for growing up in Christ. People who have been Christians for some time can sometimes become complacent. Therefore, every Christian must ultimately choose between growth and decline.

This section describes some of the spiritual disciplines that are essential for Christians. Through the exercise of these and other spiritual disciplines, growing Christians will become increasingly sensitive to both good and evil, steadily learning to distinguish between them. The Holy Spirit will guide them, in harmony with the Scriptures. Growing Christians learn to be alert to the Spirit's directives, so they may resist temptation and respond to God's call to higher living.

PRAYER

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christ-likeness. 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; 10:5).

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 behaviour.

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. Believers

should 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 must 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 fruits of fellowship.

SERVICE AND MINISTRY

Growth comes with the acceptance of full responsibility for the use of natural talents and spiritual gifts in service and ministry. The Holy Spirit endows every believer with natural abilities for service and ministry. These are a trust. They must be used only in ways that will glorify God. To use God-given abilities well is to nurture personal growth. The Holy Spirit also distributes, as He wills, spiritual gifts of speech and service for the common good and the building of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10,11). Spiritual gifts are to be exercised under the lordship of Christ with His love and compassion, and are not to be the cause of division in the church. The believer is to seek as the evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness, not the gifts themselves, but the character and power of the Holy Spirit.

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 a Christian's relationships with others affects the quality of their own 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 will 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 Saviour of the world.

3. CHRISTIAN LIVING IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

This section arises from the experience of Free Methodists as they have lived out Christ's command to holiness in the world. Therefore, it describes a Christian response to pressing issues in the contemporary world.

There is no claim made that this is a complete or final description of an appropriate Christian response to all of the important issues faced in the modern world, or that such a description could ever be written. Rather, the approach taken in the following paragraphs illustrates the ways in which a Christian must form a responsible and biblically appropriate response to contemporary issues.

A member of The Free Methodist Church adopts the following description of Christian life in the world as an authoritative guide to living an authentic Christian life today. The church

recognizes however that a Christian's conscience is not bound by this description as though it were a new law that is above the gospel itself. Rather, this vision of the Christian life is an expression of how we believe God's Word leads us to live a genuine Christian life today. We trust that the following description of genuine Christianity may be used by God to help Free Methodists form their consciences according to God's Word. We trust that the Holy Spirit's guidance will lead each member of the Free Methodist Church into a conviction about how he or she ought personally to grow into the likeness of Christ in every part of life.

The statements of principle set out below arise out of the direct, clear teaching of scripture and have as their authority not human tradition but God's Word [*statements of principle are indicated by italicized text*]. The application statements that follow each statement of principle arise from God's Word, but we do not claim that they represent in every case the direct, clear, unambiguous teaching of scripture. Rather, these paragraphs represent the historic understanding of Free Methodists concerning the implications of central Biblical principles to pressing issues in contemporary life. Therefore, the teachings of these paragraphs do not constrain us with the same authority as the principle statements, though they have the authority to instruct our consciences. Ongoing helps in applying some of these principles are available on The Free Methodist Church in Canada website.

We believe that a life lived according to all of the following statements would be a life that is "worthy of the calling to which we have been called" (Ephesians 4:1).

REGARDING GOD

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, NIV). 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 (I John 2:16).

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 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 labours 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.

Divine Healing

All healing, whether of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God who is "above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6). God may heal by the mediation of surgery, medication, change of environment, counselling, corrected attitudes, or through the restorative processes of nature itself. God may heal through one or more of the above in combination with prayer, or by direct intervention in response to prayer. The Scriptures report many cases of the latter kind of healing in connection with the life and ministry of Jesus, the apostles and the early church.

A truly Christian perspective on healing reflects the New Testament view of salvation, which holds together God's sovereignty, God's loving goodness, and God's ultimate wisdom. These divine realities reach beyond what humans can fully grasp. We hold together our confidence that salvation is something that has already happened (e.g. Ephesians 2:4-8) and that it is something that is happening right now (e.g. II Corinthians 2:15), and also that we still await at the final coming of Christ (e.g. Philippians 3:20-21). Thus there are two erroneous approaches to healing: One is to stress only healing now (because in Jesus, and through the gift of the Spirit, salvation has indeed fully and powerfully come). The other is to expect healing only in the resurrection (because the final redemption will come only when Jesus returns). Both perspectives alone are distortions which miss the creative "already/not yet" tension of New Testament thought.

Consistent with the Scriptures, therefore, we urge our pastors and group leaders to help people to seek healing of every sort - physical, psychological, emotional, relational, spiritual, etc. We make opportunity for the sick, afflicted, and broken to come before God in the fellowship of the body of Christ in confidence that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is both able and willing to heal (James 5:14-16). We recognize that although God's sovereign purposes are good and we are sure that He is working toward a final redemption that assures wholeness to all believers, He may not grant healing for all or full healing in this life. We believe that in such cases God still receives glory both now and then through the resurrection to life everlasting.

The ministry of healing is not to be ignored in the church. We do not expect that the emphasis on, or means employed in, the varied ministries of healing will be the same in different churches (or in different small groups, or in individual Christians) or in the same church or group or individual believer at different times. We call the church to both examine and prize our differences in this regard, always aware of the

'already/not yet' scriptural tension outlined above.

To illustrate this dynamic tension in Scripture, we must note that all healing has spiritual implications (Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 11:2-5, Romans 8:18-23, 35-39). In any situation where healing is desired, mature discernment and wisdom are required. In some instances in the New Testament Jesus addresses a physical need through deliverance from demonic influence (Mark 5:15, Matthew 17:14-18). The New Testament, however, also presents us with other occasions of divine healing that occur without any reference to the demonic (John 9:1-7, Acts 3:1-8). As noted above, healing can come through a variety of means. What many would consider a natural remedy (e.g. surgery, medication, or therapy) remains an act of the work and grace of God.

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 (II Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, we abstain from solemn oaths of secrecy shared with unbelievers which cloud our witness.

Those voluntary associations which demand an oath, affirmation, promise of secrecy, or a 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 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.

We do not require those who become members of the church to cease all payments necessary to keep in force insurance benefits previously contracted through lodge membership.

REGARDING MYSELF AND OTHERS

Worth of Persons

We are committed to the worth of all humans regardless of sex, race, colour, or any other distinctions (Acts 10:34-35) and will respect them as persons made in the image of God (Gen. 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 neighbour (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, or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27). 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 worth, rights and needs of others.

Self Discipline

One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Scriptures instruct us to honour the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (I 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 or 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.

Possessions

As Christians we regard all we possess as the property of God entrusted to us as stewards. We are people who exercise critical judgment about what we acquire and possess. We do not make possessions or wealth a priority (Matthew 6:19-20; Luke 12:16-21). Rather, as stewards we are people who give generously to meet the needs of others and to support ministry (II Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13).

As Christians we refrain from income generation in all forms (through employment, investments, grants/bursaries, etc.) from sources inconsistent with the ethics and practices of our faith.

Income generated through gambling lacks both the dignity of wages earned and the honour of a gift. Even as entertainment, it excites greed, destroys the initiative of honest toil, exploits a neighbour, and often results in addiction. We refrain from gambling in all its forms for conscience' sake, and as a witness to the faith we have in Christ.

While customs and community standards change, there are changeless scriptural principles of moderation and modesty 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 (I Corinthians 10:31-33). We therefore avoid extravagance and apply principles of simplicity of life when we make choices as to the values that we project through our possessions.

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 3:22-41). Our concern for justice is primarily a concern to do justice and only secondarily a concern to obtain justice.

We believe that all persons have the privilege to be gainfully employed irrespective of sex, race, colour, 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 labour 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 favour a problem-solving approach to disagreements.

We endeavour 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).

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 NIV).

In a culture where pleasure is ardently pursued, we must exercise care regarding our recreational activities. We face a multitude of entertainment media - television, videos, movies, recorded music, the internet, dances, magazines, novels, etc. Since many of these are pursued in the home, we cannot be legislated into wise choices; we must make them from a renewed heart. In the case of children and young people living at home, however, our convictions as Christian parents should prevail.

Our choices regarding entertainment must recognize some modern diversions promote violence, excite sexual desire or awaken greed, and certain atmospheres encourage and

promote tolerance of vice and vulgarity.

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 honour 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?

Misuse of Substances

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

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

Because Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves, we advocate abstaining from the use of alcoholic beverages (Mark 12:30-31). The abuse of alcohol, a legalized drug, is damaging to individuals, families, and society. It is unpredictably addictive and its destructive effects cannot be fully measured. Its abuse leaves a trail of broken marriages, family violence, crime, industrial loss, ill health, injury, and death. As concerned Christians, we advocate abstinence for the sake of health, family, and neighbours. Moreover, we see the adverse social consequences as so pervasive that we seek by advocating abstinence to make a united social witness to the freedom Christ gives.

Because we believe Christians are to treat their bodies as sacred trusts, we advocate abstaining from the use of tobacco. It is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as being an expensive and socially offensive addiction. 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 honour God with your body" (I Corinthians 6:19-20 NIV).

Because drug dependency of any kind inhibits fullness of life in Christ, we guard against the indiscriminate use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs. 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 believe that 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 endeavour by God's help to be understanding and supportive toward those who come to Christ with problems of addiction. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we acknowledge the difficulties of overcoming the bondage of addictions, and desire to give whatever help and support are needed while fellow Christians seek full deliverance.

As a further evidence of an awakened conscience, we advocate refraining from the cultivation, manufacture, or promotion of these substances which are harmful to health.

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. Therefore as Christians we abstain from pornography and oppose its use and work toward removing its legitimacy and availability.

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 to pornography.

Sexual Intimacy

The biblical vision for healthy sexual intimacy is that it is a gift from God reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. Sexual intimacy creates a unique life-long bond that Scripture describes as "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). When expressed within the commitment of the marriage covenant, sexual intimacy is a great blessing and source of fulfillment. The marriage covenant is designed to protect this one man and one woman bond against that which is destructive and harmful to the couple, their children, the extended family, and society as a whole when one acts contrary to God's design for sexual intimacy.

- The biblical word for "fornication" or "sexual immorality" includes pre-marital sexual intimacy and lists it along with other forms of immorality as sin (Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5). Bonding sexually to a person to whom one has not covenanted in marriage robs the bond of an eventual marriage of its exclusivity. Similarly, sexual intimacy outside of a marital union occurring after divorce or the loss of a spouse is also fornication

and undermines the biblical design for healthy sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

- Extra-marital sexual intimacy, which Scripture calls "adultery," transgresses God's moral law and betrays the marriage covenant. Adultery damages the one flesh union in that it contaminates the exclusive bond of marriage and undermines trust (Exodus 20:14, Mark 7:20-23).
- Same-sex sexual intimacy is regarded by the Scriptures as immoral because it is a distortion of God's creation design. The Scriptures speak explicitly against same-sex sexual intimacy as sin (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:21-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Same-sex sexual behavior is different from same-sex sexual attraction; and persons with same-sex inclinations, like all others, are accountable to God for their choices and actions.

In all of the above instances, all persons are accountable to God for their thoughts, words and deeds (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Because Christians are part of fallen humanity we must deal with many inclinations to sin. We trust the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and transform (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25, 9:14).

The church has a corporate responsibility to be God's agent of transformation to persons as they learn to live a Christian life that pursues the best of God's design for healthy sexuality. This transformation can best occur as the church provides a loving and supportive environment. Because the sexual desire is so powerful, counseling is recommended as a part of the church's pastoral care.

The biblical vision for healthy sexual intimacy is in contrast with that of our culture. We support the biblical vision that opposes all cultural mores and practices that promote and legitimize pre-marital, extra-marital, and same-sex sexual intimacy.

Sanctity of Life

All persons are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). As such, all human beings have inherent dignity and worth. As Creator, God is sovereign over life (Acts 17:24-26). Further, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the center of our conviction that God is also sovereign over death (1 Corinthians 15). Thus, as his creation, we cannot claim absolute sovereignty over our lives. We are stewards rather than sovereign possessors of our life. As stewards, we must value, respect and protect life at every stage. The Bible provides a general prohibition against the deliberate, intentional taking of innocent life (Exodus 20:13). For all these reasons, we affirm the sanctity of life.

The complex issues surrounding the sanctity of life 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 or the possibilities of safe medical procedures.

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.

Abortion

Abortion is the intentional termination, by surgical or other means, of a person's life after conception and before birth. We consider abortion to be a violation of the sanctity of human life.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy involves religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Population or birth control, personal preference or convenience, avoidance of suffering, the anticipated quality of life of the unborn child, and social or economic security are not moral justifications for abortion.

Christian morality demands that we consider both biblical commandments and the human situation in which decisions must be made. We recognize that in some rare cases of very extreme and exceptional medical conditions, following a process of careful discernment with the assistance of Christian professional counsel, an abortion may possibly be morally justifiable.

In all situations, compassionate alternatives and long-term care should be offered to those considering abortion.

In responding to all situations and decisions involving abortion, the church must seek to be a redemptive community of grace.

End of Life Care

For the Christian, death is not the end of life, but the transition into eternity (John 5:24-25). Therefore, physical death is not the ultimate enemy, but part of our journey.

Christians must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living. Chronic disease, diminished physical capacity or ongoing disability do not constitute the end of life. 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 whose love sustains us all through life, even to the end. He ministers to us personally and through the healing environment of Christian community. Divine wisdom in the face of end of life issues comes to us through Scripture, prayer, godly counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

"Sanctity of life" must not be confused with "quality of life." Because we affirm the sanctity of life and the consequent worth of all persons, there can be no justification for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

We recognize and support the right of a competent individual, who is facing the end of life, to decide the aggressiveness of his/her care. If an individual is incompetent to make or

incapable of making this decision, then a substitute decision maker, who respects the wishes of the individual as far as they are known, can make this decision on his/her behalf.

A request that life not be sustained by heroic measures does not constitute euthanasia or assisted suicide. We recognize that treatment, or lack of treatment, which carries the risk of shortening life, is permissible so long as the intent is to provide relief or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death.

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, genetic engineering and testing, and gender identity issues.

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.

REGARDING DIVINELY APPOINTED INSTITUTIONS

There are at least three divinely appointed, earthly institutions. One of these is marriage and the family. A second is the church. A third is the secular government. Only the church, among these institutions, will last in eternity. Nevertheless, the Scriptures have clearly placed a great deal of importance on how we act with respect to each of these institutions, before the return of Christ.

This section is intended to describe a Christian point of view on these important institutions. Important principles are the focus: there is no attempt to be comprehensive. Principle statements, represent what we believe are the central, clear teaching of scripture on these institutions. We also believe that the application statements that accompany the principle statements are clear inferences from the Scriptures, but they are presented here to assist our churches and members in applying scriptural principles.

THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Principles Regarding Marriage

Nature of Marriage: At creation God instituted marriage for the well being of humanity. Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong, covenant relationship which the Scriptures call "one flesh." (Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:6-9). The Scriptures also say that this covenant relationship illustrates the enduring, holy relationship between Christ and His Church. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

We believe therefore that marriage 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.

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 honored (Hebrews 13:4, I Corinthians 7:3-5). Marriage is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage.

Nurturing Healthy Marriages

The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the apostle's command (II Corinthians 6:14), we expect them to marry only believers. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnize a marriage. While our ministers may officiate at the marriage of two unbelievers, those who unite believers to unbelievers go contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures. Before entering into marriage, our people should counsel with their Christian leaders. Young people contemplating marriage should seek parental consent. Our ministers shall not officiate at the marriage of any person under age, unless parents or guardians are present or have given written consent, and unless two witnesses are present who know the couple. There are wedding guidelines available from the director of personnel's office that you need to follow with respect to requests to officiate at marriages.

We desire that our churches provide instruction in sex education and preparation for marriage. Pastors shall see that all candidates for marriage have received premarital guidance, using materials consistent with denominational teaching. We further encourage local churches to provide resources such as seminars and retreats to strengthen marriages and build Christian homes.

Healing Troubled Marriages

The church which is alive to God has spiritual resources for marriages in trouble. The chief resources are the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the Word, prayer and the sacraments, counsel and support. Through the church's ministry, God can bring healing and reconciliation.

Therefore, if our members find their marriage in crisis, we encourage them to seek the counsel of the pastor and submit to the guidance of the church. Professional counsel may be necessary.

We recognize that domestic violence, emotional and/or physical, does occur in church-related families. It often jeopardizes the safety of a spouse or children and may threaten life itself. These family members need both spiritual and emotional healing.

Separation should not be entered into lightly, or as a matter of convenience. When after counsel with the pastor, it is recognized that a deteriorating situation is destroying the marriage relationship, Christians may separate. In all cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (I Corinthians

7:10-11). Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union.

Principles Regarding Divorce

When one marriage partner is a Christian and the other a nonbeliever, we believe that the Christian may not for that reason divorce the unchristian mate (I Corinthians 7:12-13), because Christian love may redeem the unbeliever and unite the home in Christ (I Corinthians 7:16, I Peter 3:1-2).

When a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union. Where reconciliation is impossible, a divorce may be allowed (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

Desertion is the abandoning of a marriage without just cause. We believe that a person denies the faith that deserts a spouse deliberately and for an extended period of time. When the desertion leads subsequently to divorce, the deserted partner is no longer bound by the marriage (I Corinthians 7:15).

Where reconciliation is impossible in a troubled marriage, we acknowledge that divorce may be unavoidable (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). When marriages break down completely, we recognize that, in the words of Jesus, "hardness of heart" is implicit on one or both sides of the union (Matthew 19:3-8; Mark 10:5-9).

Though the Scriptures allow divorce on the grounds of adultery (Matthew 5:32) and desertion (I Corinthians 7:10-16), it does not mandate divorce and we advise counsel with church leaders to seek other alternatives. One of these may be for both to live celibately.

Recovery After Divorce

Divorce always produces trauma. It is the breaking of a covenant, thus violating God's intention for faithfulness in marriage (Malachi 2:13-16). For this reason divorced persons should be helped to understand and remedy the causes for the divorce. They should seek pastoral counsel. Professional counsel may also be necessary. If unhealthy patterns of relating exist, they must be helped to replace them with new attitudes and behaviours that are Christ-like (Colossians 3:1-15). Repentance and forgiveness are crucial to recovery. The goals of the process are personal healing and restoration to wholesome participation within the church. The church must extend its concern to family and others affected by the divorce.

Remarriage After a Divorce

A divorced member or one who is considering marriage to a divorced person must come under the authority, counsel and guidance of the church.

Persons who have been involved in divorce while in a state of unbelief shall not for that reason alone be barred from becoming members, even though they remarry. Similarly, believers are not prohibited from marrying a person who was divorced while an unbeliever. A member of the

church divorced from an adulterous spouse or, deserted by an unbelieving mate, after attempts at forgiveness and reconciliation have been rejected, may remarry (I Corinthians 7:15).

Refusal of Counsel

When a member divorces a spouse in violation of the Scriptures, 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 official board. Corrective action shall include removal from leadership, and may include suspension, or expulsion from membership.

Exceptional Cases

Cases may arise for which the pastor or the membership care committee can find no explicit direction in this *Manual*. In such cases, the pastor, after consultation with the committee, shall confer with the bishop.

Same-Sex Unions

The Free Methodist Church in Canada holds that Christian 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 and polity of our church for ministers or members of The Free Methodist Church in Canada to conduct a Christian blessing of a union between a same-sex couple, or to perform the marriage of a same-sex couple. In light of our beliefs, ministers and members of The Free Methodist Church in Canada reserve the right of conscientious objection to any demands to perform marriages of same-sex couples.

The Free Methodist Church in Canada holds that its congregations are stewards of the church property. The blessing of a union between a same-sex couple or the performance of a same-sex marriage in any Free Methodist church would be a violation of consecrated Free Methodist property. Therefore, such blessings or marriages may not be performed at Free Methodist churches.

Use of Free Methodist Church Facilities

It is the policy of The Free Methodist Church in Canada that the facilities of Free Methodist churches are to be rented or used only by individuals or groups that are not incompatible with the goals, values, policies and statements of The Free Methodist Church in Canada and for purposes which are not incompatible with the goals, values, policies and statements of The Free Methodist Church in Canada.

EDUCATION OF 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 public, private or Christian institutions of education.

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 home schooling, we also support them in their decision. We request that our children be excused from assignments and activities which conflict with the values held by the denomination. When conflicts arise, we request of the school that the student’s academic standing not be jeopardized, and when necessary, other assignments be given.

The church is concerned that concepts of first origins shall have fair consideration in our public schools. Instructional materials are available that permit a scientific treatment of the several concepts of origin, including special creation (that all basic life forms and life processes were created by a supernatural Creator). We therefore urge that the concept of special creation be presented in, or along with, courses, textbooks, library materials, and teaching aids dealing with the subject of first origins.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The Christian and the Church

The church is part of God’s eternal plan to make a people for himself who would be “holy and blameless before him.” 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 must be visible and local.

The church is also 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 live in independence from the church may not forfeit their faith but will deprive themselves of the spiritual resources and opportunities God Himself has ordained. Consistent with the Scriptures, we affirm membership in the church.

Membership in the church is a biblical reality noted from the earliest days after Pentecost (Acts 2:47). When the Holy Spirit gives new life in Christ, at the same time He effects our spiritual entrance into the church (I Corinthians 12:13). The Free Methodist Church in Canada is one denomination among the many other legitimate visible churches in Canada and the world. Entrance into the membership of one of our churches is a visible and local sign of entrance into the universal church.

Membership in the Church

In accordance with this, our church provides means by which persons who are born of the Spirit may enter into a Membership Covenant and register their membership in

a local church in a public way. We provide categories for believers under the age of majority and adults. As an aid to Christian development we provide membership instruction, which may be followed by entrance into membership.

Leadership in the Church

Leadership in the church is an honour that has accompanying responsibilities and sacrifices. The Scriptures provide descriptions of the qualities of leaders in such passages as: Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and 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 in Canada, the principles of the Membership Covenant and of the goals for Genuine Christian Life, and Christian Life in the World. They must live personal and public lives that clearly exemplify these principles.

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

The Christian and the State

As Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God and of this world. We receive benefits from and bear responsibilities to both relationships. Our first allegiance is to God, but that does not release us from responsibilities to our own country if such relationships do not conflict with the clear teachings of the Scriptures (Romans 13:1-7). We recognise the sovereign authority of government and our duty to obey the law (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7). Thus, we bear the responsibilities of good citizenship.

Civic Participation

As Christians we pray for “all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:2) and are “subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.” (1 Peter 2:13). We actively participate in civic life by involvement in efforts for the improvement of social, cultural, and educational conditions (Matthew 5:13-16). We oppose degrading cultural influences (1 Peter 2:4-10). We exercise the responsibility to vote.

War and Military Enlistment

We believe, however, that military aggression, as an instrument of national policy is indefensible (Isaiah 2:3-4). The destruction of life and property, and the deceit and violence necessary to warfare are contrary to the spirit and mind of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 9:6-7; Matthew 5:44-45). It is, therefore, our duty as Christians to promote peace and goodwill, to foster understanding and mutual trust among all people, and to work with patience for the renunciation of war as a means to settle international disputes (Romans 12:18; 14:19).

It is our firm conviction that none be required to enter military training or to bear arms except in time of national peril and 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.

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; Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12).

CARE OF CREATION

The Care of Creation

As Christians we affirm with Scripture that all creation declares the glory of God (Psalm 19:1-4). Since we worship the Creator and believe that Christ’s redeeming work “... reconciles to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven...” (Colossians 1:20), we value creation and participate in activity that restores, protects, and respects the earth. This demonstrates our love for God.

Leadership Structures of the Free Methodist Church

Many of the following provisions are required by law for non-profit charitable organizations; others are processes that local churches have found helpful through trial and error and have come to be regarded as “best practices” within our movement.

SOCIETY

1. The **society** (a Methodist term for the members of a local church) is the fundamental unit of organization of a fully organized local Free Methodist church.
2. **Membership:** A Free Methodist society shall be composed of all members of the local church. Members under the age of majority, as defined by applicable provincial or federal legislation, are youth members without vote.
3. **Authority:** The ongoing business of the local church is generally carried out by the official board that is elected by the society. The official board and all committees, groups or organizations functioning within the church are ultimately amenable to the society. The society has authority in the following areas:
 - 3.1 Final approval of the organization plan for the official board committees and service positions of the church.
 - 3.2 Officials to be elected at the annual meeting
 - 3.2.1 Officers which must be elected:
 - official board
 - nominating committee
 - 3.2.2 Unless otherwise approved according to the other local church approved policy, the following must be elected:
 - secretary and treasurer
 - delegates and reserve delegates
 - auditor and other financial officers
 - the trustees
 - the pastor’s cabinet
 - 3.3 Final approval of all major decisions, such as:
 - i) a recommendation to plant another church
 - ii) a recommendation to purchase, mortgage or otherwise encumber, or sell real property, erect a building or undertake major renovations, lease property, and to relocate. (Also subject to conference approval)
 - 3.4 Recommendations regarding the addition of full-time, paid ministerial positions.

SOCIETY MEETINGS

1. The society shall meet at least annually at a time and place to be determined by the society or official board. The annual meeting shall be announced at least 30 days in advance. Absentee voting is not permitted.
2. The pastor (or, in his/her absence or refusal to do so, the majority of the official board) may call a special meeting of the society when in their judgment the interests of the church require it.
3. Special meetings shall be announced at least 15 days in advance, except in emergency situations. A special meeting may only consider the limited list of agenda items specified in the announcement.
4. Either the pastor (without vote) or the chairperson of the official board may chair the society meeting. In the absence of the pastor, or the board chairperson, members present may elect a chairperson pro-tem by ballot.
5. Minutes of society meetings shall be kept in the minute book of the official board.
6. Robert’s Rules of Order in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure. Tellers may be appointed to distribute materials and count ballots.

THE ANNUAL MEETING

1. During the annual meeting, the society will elect members to the official board and, based on the organization plan and policies approved by the society, other committees and personnel to staff the various service positions of the church. Leaders in the church should meet the leadership qualifications indicated on page 24 regarding *Leadership in the Church*.
2. **Official Board**
 - 2.1 The society shall elect an official board of no less than three and no more than 14 members.
 - 2.2 No office shall be filled by the same person for more than six consecutive years. (In the case of delegates, see other comments below) Where the nominating committee recommends that a longer term is necessary, the election shall be by at least a two-thirds majority. It is recommended that the members of committees and the board serve on rotating terms to provide some continuity along with change.

- 2.3 Officers of the Society and Official Board: The society will elect persons to serve as secretary and treasurer of the society and official board, or grant authority to the official board to appoint such officers.

3. Delegates

- 3.1 The delegates serve a number of functions. They serve as the ongoing liaison between the local church and the General Conference, and its national leadership team. They will also serve on the Pastoral Leadership Task Force if the local church enters into a pastoral transition (change of pastors) during their term of office. They also serve as the voting representatives of the local church during General Conference sittings.
- 3.2 Reserve delegates will serve in the place of delegates at the conference sitting if delegates are not able to serve.
- 3.3 The number of delegates to be elected depends on the number of members in a local church and the number of pastors appointed to the local church. If a church has one appointed pastor (ordained, commissioned, ministerial candidate), it is entitled to one delegate. A church without an appointed pastor is entitled to send one delegate

Where two pastors share a single full-time lead pastor appointment, the society is entitled to only one lay delegate corresponding to this pastoral position.

If there are additional appointed pastors who are full members of the conference (i.e. ordained), who serve the local church at least half-time, the society is entitled to one additional delegate for each additional pastor.

If the society has more than 75 members over the age of majority, one additional delegate may be elected. One additional delegate may be elected for each additional 75 members.

- 3.4 The number of delegates to be elected shall be according to the number of appointed pastors/ and members at the time of the deadline set by the conference for submitting the names of delegate(s).
- 3.5 The delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) may be elected by the society without nomination, each by a majority vote, by a separate ballot. The society may choose to empower the official board to appoint delegates from its members.

They shall be elected or appointed at the first society/official board meeting immediately following the sitting of conference, and will serve until the next such election.

The delegates should normally serve for a maximum of three consecutive terms. Delegates to be elected for additional consecutive terms must be elected by at least a two-thirds majority.

- 3.6 The delegate, or where more than one is elected, the first delegate elected, shall serve on the official board. The role of the delegate and board chair should not normally be filled by the same person. It may be advisable for all delegates to serve on the official board if this does not unduly increase the size of the board.

4. Other Officers

- 4.1 *Signing Officers (financial)*: The society, or in its place, the official board, shall elect financial signing officers who will have the authority to sign cheques, and other financial documents.
- 4.2 *Auditors*: The society, or in its place, the official board, shall elect an auditor who will have the responsibility of auditing the accounts of all organizations or groups within the local church. The auditor shall report in writing to the annual meeting of the society. External auditors may be used.
- 4.3 *Financial Tellers*: The society, or in its place, the official board, shall elect financial tellers who shall assist the treasurer to count offerings and complete signed offering reports stating the date and the amount of the offering.
- 4.4 *Financial Secretary*: A financial secretary may be elected by the society, or in its place, the official board, to assist the treasurer in the keeping of financial accounts.

5. Committees of the Local Church

- 5.1 The society shall elect the members of local church committees, unless otherwise provided for by local policy adopted by the society.
- 5.2 The following committees shall be elected:
- 5.2.1 *Trustees*: The trustees shall be elected by the society by ballot vote. There shall be no fewer than three trustees, two thirds of which shall be members of the local church. The society may optionally elect to have the official board serve as the trustees of the society for legal and financial matters and make provision for another committee to care for maintenance and other property matters.

5.2.2 *Pastor's Cabinet*: The pastor's cabinet shall be elected by the society. It shall have no fewer than three members and no more than seven, who shall be members of the society. The society may optionally elect to have the official board serve as the pastor's cabinet. At least one delegate shall be a member.

5.2.3 *Nominating Committee*: The nominating committee shall be elected by the society by ballot. The senior pastor is an ex officio member.

5.3 Local churches are encouraged to ensure that at least a majority, preferably two-thirds of the members of church committees, are members of the local church.

of the church according to the directions of the official board. The treasurer also provides periodic reporting of the financial status to the official board and society.

OFFICIAL BOARD

1. Membership:

The official board shall include the officers of the society, and one or more of the delegates. If so provided in the organization plan, the society may also include additional members-at-large or representatives of various ministry areas of the local church. All members of the official board shall be members of the local church, and be of legal age and meet the leadership qualifications found below. At the discretion of the senior pastor, other pastoral staff may attend official board meetings.

To comply with Income Tax Act regulations regarding charities, more than 50% of the members of the official board must be "at arm's length" (i.e. unrelated by blood, adoption, marriage, or employment). (See Canada Revenue Agency - Taxation Information Circular 80-10 and Interpretation Bulletin IT-419).

2. Officers of the Official Board

2.1 *Chair and Vice-Chair*: The official board shall elect its chair and vice-chair from among its lay members. The chair is a facilitator of the group process of the board when it meets and should consult in advance of meetings with the senior pastor to facilitate the creation of effective, prioritized agendas. The senior pastor shall receive notification of all board meetings and minutes, and shall be entitled to be present and to participate fully without vote in all board discussions except for those held in an executive session of the board.

2.2 *Secretary*: The secretary serves as the recording officer, and is responsible for keeping the minutes and other records of the society and official board.

2.3 *Treasurer*: The treasurer is the "chief financial officer" of the society. The treasurer is entrusted with administration of the financial resources

3. Responsibilities and Authority

The official board is responsible for the general supervision of the ongoing operation of the local church and all of its ministries. The official board is at all times amenable to the directions of the society. This includes the responsibility to:

3.1 Plan for the organization and development of the church and its ministries. The official board shall meet at least once each year for the purpose of developing/refining the church's ministry plan. This plan should include measurable goals for each of the ministry areas of the local church.

3.2 The official board also has responsibility to:

- approve admission to lay membership in the local church;
- a recommendation from the membership care committee that a lay member be allowed to withdraw, or that membership be terminated;
- approve licenses for lay ministers and recommend lay ministers deemed suitable for ministerial candidacy to the conference ministerial education guidance and placement committee;
- elect members of local church ministry committees if so provided in local by-laws;
- after receiving nominations from the nominating committee, elect replacement official board or committee members if a position becomes vacant in the interim between annual society meetings;
- approve recommendations for any expenditures not covered in the approved budget. (Recommendations for major changes in expenditures should be approved by the society);
- develop and approve changes to the ministry plan and organization plan of the church that are within the general direction of the previously approved plans.

And authority to recommend to the society:

- proposals for major changes to the ministry plan and organization plan of the church;
- proposed annual budgets or major changes to the budget;
- proposals to purchase, mortgage or otherwise encumber, or sell real property, erect a building or undertake major renovations, lease property and to relocate (subject to conference approval);
- the parenting of a new congregation.

4. Meetings

- 4.1 The official board shall meet regularly. The interval between meetings should not exceed two months.
- 4.2 Members who are unable to attend should notify the chair in advance. Members who attend less than 50% of the meetings may be replaced.
- 4.3 Robert's Rules of Order in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure. The official board may adopt standing rules provided that they are not in conflict with Robert's Rules of Order.

COMMITTEES

Various committees serve within the local church to administer the ministries of the church. The pastor shall be an ex-officio member of all church committees. Where there is more than one appointed pastor, the senior pastor may designate who will serve as the pastoral representative on each committee. All committees are ultimately accountable to the official board.

PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

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

It is the long held conviction of the Free Methodist Church that both men and women are eligible to hold any office of the church, including membership on the Official Board of a local church, or to be ordained to any of the church's ministries, or to be elected to the office of Bishop.

Both gifts and graces characterize men and women the church ordains. Gifts are special endowments of ability. Graces are special qualities of character. Both have their source in the enabling Holy Spirit. Although the church must discern who have such endowments, ordination is always first and foremost an act of God's calling and appointment.

Ordained Free Methodist ministers may carry out their task under appointment to a particular congregation, or they may be given other assignments. In either case, their work will include preaching and teaching the Word of God, intercessory prayer, the administration of the sacraments, pastoral care, and other ministerial activities. Central to the task of the minister is the proclamation of the saving gospel and the winning of people of all ages to Christ. Because vital worship, Christian nurture, evangelistic outreach and social concern characterize a healthy church, ordained ministers commit themselves to equipping the whole body

of believers to these ends.

The ordained ministry is both a calling and a profession. It is a calling in that it is a response to a divine summons. It is a profession in that this service is worked out under the direction of the church that sets ministers apart as leaders and requires accountability.

Free Methodist ministers are called to be leaders of God's people. Leadership requires vision, a willingness to dare, an ability to move people to action and the readiness to live with the turbulence change brings. For the person called to leadership, all this is rooted in a deep love for Christ and his compassion for human need. God's resources are abundantly available for all that embrace this task courageously and in radical obedience.

There are three stages to becoming a minister in The Free Methodist Church in Canada. The person feeling the call of God to the ministry is first licensed as a lay minister. The call is tested by service in the local church where initial training begins. Step two involves acceptance by the conference as a ministerial candidate. During this period the candidate prepares for the third step, conference membership as a commissioned minister (honorary) or an ordained minister (full).

ADVICE GIVEN FOR THE PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF THE PASTOR

CORE VALUES

Regularly review the eight core values of The Free Methodist Church in Canada and allow them to shape your ministry of leadership.

LEADING THROUGH PREACHING AND TEACHING

Discipline yourself to uninterrupted time for study and prayer so that you come before your people adequately prepared. Seek the Lord's help. Preaching is only effective when anointed by God's Spirit. Use suitable Scriptures for each occasion. Prepare your messages thoroughly. Stay with your subject. Preach to the needs of the people. Expound the scriptures systematically. Seek divine leadership in choice of subjects. Consult the Christian calendar to give balance to your preaching. Communicate profound truths with simple words and speak with conviction. Practice what you preach.

Teach with clarity. Present truth in an orderly way, using a variety of methods. Give opportunity for dialogue.

Seek by preaching and teaching to bring about change in understanding and behaviour.

LEADING IN WORSHIP

Plan services of worship with care. Incorporate prayers, Scripture readings, singing, and preaching. Seek a balance between ordered and spontaneous worship. Focus

attention on God in all His attributes. Lead the people and teach them to worship. Be aware that you set an example by the way you worship yourself. Involve the congregation, using lay persons wisely and giving appropriate attention to the children.

Give careful thought to your pastoral prayers in advance. Deliver all prayers from your heart. Expect people to experience the presence of God. Whatever the theme of the service, always try to encourage the people before they leave.

LEADING THROUGH PASTORAL CARE AND EVANGELISM

See that attention is given to the care of your people. Balance strategic personal contact with care given through trained volunteers and/or staff. Find creative ways to ensure that a full range of pastoral care is given – e.g. visits, phone calls, cards and notes.

Give special priority to finding, befriending and introducing seeking people to Jesus. Model a personal commitment to the Great Commission yourself and see that others are trained and involved in outreach.

Ensure that attention is given to the sick, elderly, confined, and distressed. See that someone is with your people when they pass through crucial moments: the birth of a child, marriage, tragedy, the bestowment of honour, death.

Make provision for the pastoral counseling of people who seek guidance. Convey by your attitudes and words that you too are interested in their welfare. Ensure that counseling takes place in a professional manner in appropriate settings. Know the limits of your own counselling competencies/capacities and make responsible referrals when necessary, particularly with regard to legal, financial and medical matters, or other areas beyond your expertise. Interact with those under your care with honesty and love.

Be understanding. In controversy, arrange if possible, for another arbitrator/counsellor, so that you will be free to minister to both parties. This will also keep either party from accusing you of favouritism.

Maintain high professional standards. Conduct yourself always as in the presence of Christ. Do not be careless with confidentialities.

Ensure that new believers, newcomers, children and teens of the congregation are encouraged to join the church and care groups if they are available. See that membership instruction opportunities are provided regularly.

LEADING THROUGH LEADERS

The breadth and strength of any ministry is determined by the quality of its leadership. Resolve to develop Spirit-empowered, growing leaders and readily entrust responsibility to them according to their capacities of spiritual maturity, skill and availability.

Lead your leaders in planning and help them to set goals. Work to extend Christ's kingdom. Mobilize and train your laity for ministries beyond the boundaries of your present congregation. Regularly promote the vision of starting an additional service and and/or a new congregation/church.

Oversee the administration of the church. By good administration, promote the congregation's vision and mission, and work for harmony and growth. Do things in an orderly manner. Try, where appropriate, to make decisions in a consultative manner and to search for consensus so that different views are heard and people respected in the process.

Ensure that boards and committees meet regularly. See that your people have opportunity to discover and use their spiritual gifts and to develop ministry skills.

Keep abreast of the activities of the major departments of your church. Have careful records kept of your ministries. Maintain and give summary reports regularly to your official board and conference leaders.

Cooperate with those in authority over you. Model loyalty to your organizational association. See that requested reports are sent promptly. Use resources of the movement. Participate in the support of CORE ministries and promote the Giving Streams and other general church ministries.

PASTORAL EVALUATION

The official board will ensure that an annual performance appraisal of the lead pastor (and other appointed staff) is done according to guidelines provided by the director of personnel's office. The evaluation is to be based on the pastor's current official board-approved job description (built locally and reflecting the congregation's current vision and stated mission).

If the 360 performance appraisal is used and results in an overall average score below 5.5, the results will be referred to the bishop and the ministerial education, guidance and placement committee (MEGaP) who will consult with the pastor and church.

PASTORAL TRANSITIONS

1. From time-to-time the conference ministerial education guidance and placement (MEGaP) committee will approve changes in pastoral appointments. The related process is called a "pastoral transition". The bias of the committee is toward long tenures.
2. An overview of the process for a pastoral transition is described briefly in *The Manual of The Free Methodist Church in Canada 1875* and in detail in the "Transitions Handbook" which is available from the director of personnel's office.

3. A pastoral transition is announced by a letter sent by the bishop. It may be initiated in a number of ways:
 - by a signed letter of request jointly from the board and pastor to the bishop
 - by a signed letter of request from the pastor to the bishop
 - as a result of a performance appraisal which indicates to the MEGaP committee a need for a pastoral transition
 - by a signed letter of request to the bishop from the chair of the official board and delegate indicating that a strong majority (75%) of the official board has expressed in a recorded vote at a duly called meeting (see ¶325.4) that they have lost confidence in the pastor's capacity to lead the congregation. Prior to the board's request being sent, if necessary, a pastoral vote can be taken as provided for below.
 - by a decision of the MEGaP committee that a transition is necessary for the health of either the local church or the pastor
 - by a decision of the MEGaP committee to appoint the pastor to another charge
 - due to disciplinary action which necessitates a change in pastoral leadership
4. Situations where a pastoral vote may be requested are:
 - a pastor needs a formal indication of the congregation's level of support.
 - a division in the congregation is challenging the leadership of the pastor
 - the pastor's relationship with the official board and/or congregation has seriously deteriorated.
5. In these instances, the official board and/or pastor may request the bishop's permission to conduct a vote of confidence with respect to the pastor's leadership at a duly called special meeting of the society (see ¶315.3). The bishop may also request that a vote be taken. Only those who have attained the age of majority may participate. If non-members and inactive members vote, their ballots shall be of a different colour. (For the purposes of this vote, inactive members means those who have intentionally withdrawn from fellowship with the church and have not complied with the requirements of their membership commitment including: failing to attend the church for at least 3 months and not supporting the church with their resources.)

The chair of the meeting (appointed by the bishop) and the secretary of the official board shall count the ballots privately, but the results of the vote shall be kept confidential. The tally and the ballots will be sent to the bishop who shall verify the count and then confer with the pastor and official board.

The vote of the active members will be regarded as the direction of the congregation. The votes of adherents and inactive members will be regarded as opinion to be considered by leaders when the results of the vote are known.

A ballot shall typically say: "I agree that Pastor ___ continue as pastor of this church." Yes___ No___

If the affirmative vote of the membership is less than seventy-five percent, the bishop and/or director of personnel may begin to work with the official board and pastor to arrange for the church to go into transition.

If there is a discrepancy between the results of the vote and the pastor's preference, normally the vote of the members will take precedence.

6. The *Handbook on Local Church Organization* provides additional guidance to the pastor and official board on this process.
7. The pastor or local church shall normally receive a minimum of 60 days notice of an approved pastoral transition, except for transitions resulting from disciplinary action. This period of notice may be waived if a written agreement is approved and signed by the director of personnel, the pastor and the delegate (acting on behalf of and with the knowledge of the official board). The 60-day period begins on the date that the request for a transition is approved by the bishop or by the request for a transition is approved by the bishop or by MEGaP decision. It ends with the termination of the pastoral appointment and related pastoral duties.

[Several pages throughout this document represent portions of chapters from the official *Manual of The Free Methodist Church in Canada.*]