

Chapter 1

The Constitution of the Free Methodist Church

Preamble

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

Articles of Religion – God

The Holy Trinity

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

The Son – His Incarnation

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

The Language of Worship (see ¶122)

Nehemiah 8:5, 6, 8; Matthew 6:7; 1 Corinthians 14:6-9, 23-25.

The Holy Sacraments (see ¶123)

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

Baptism (see ¶124)

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

The Lord's Supper (see ¶125)

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

Last Things

The Kingdom of God (see ¶126)

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

The Return of Christ (see ¶127)

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

Resurrection (see ¶128)

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

Judgment (see ¶129)

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

Final Destiny (see ¶130)

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

Membership

Privileges and Requirements

¶150 The privileges and requirements of full membership in the Church are constitutional, and changes therein may be made only by amendment according to ¶/225-228. Nothing shall be included in the membership ritual that is con-

trary to the following definitions of conditions and privileges of membership.

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

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

- ¶153 Church membership may be terminated only by:
- A. voluntary withdrawal (including permission to withdraw under complaint);

*When not in conflict with local laws in matters of church government.

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

Membership Covenant

Privilege and Responsibility

¶154 Membership in the Church is a high privilege and responsibility. We believe the Covenant required of members is consistent with the teaching of the written Word of God. Faithfulness to the covenant is evidence of the individual member's desire to sustain a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord, to bring glory to God, to advance the cause of God on earth, to preserve the unity of the body of Christ and to cherish the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church.

¶155 When a member does not keep his covenant and habitually violates his vows, it is the responsibility of minister and members to point to the failure and to seek in love to restore the member. If, after these steps have been taken, the member does not keep his commitments, he must be dealt with in accord with the due processes of the church.

¶156 Members of the Free Methodist Church, trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of the other members of the church, make the following confession and commitments as a covenant with the Lord and the church.

The Confession and Commitment

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

As Regards God

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

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

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

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

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

As Regards Ourselves and Others

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

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

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

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

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

As Regards the Institutions of God

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

We commit ourselves to honor the sanctity of marriage 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 we pray for all who lead.

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

As Regards the Church

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

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

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

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

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

exercise care regarding our recreational activities. We face a multitude of entertainment media such as television, videos, movies, recorded music, the Internet, dances, magazines and novels. Since many of these are pursued in the home, our choices regarding them cannot be legislated from afar; we must make them from within, 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 that 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 honor Christ in everything.

Therefore when making choices with regard to entertainment, before the Lord we should forthrightly answer such questions as: Does this activity enhance or reduce my witness as a Christian? Does it contradict the teachings of Scripture? Is my conscience clear? Will participation expose me to unnecessary temptation? Is this activity in any sense enslaving?

Misuse of Substances

¶3390 *As Christians we believe that life is full, abundant and free in Jesus Christ (John 8:35; 10:10). Therefore, we abstain from whatever damages, destroys or distorts His life in us.*

Illicit drugs are prime offenders. 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 neighbor as ourselves, we advocate abstain-

ing 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 neighbors. 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 honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

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 endeavor 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 de-



sire 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

¶3400 *The Scriptures warn that those who participate in sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). Therefore as Christians we avoid participation in these evils or in the glorification of these evils that is found in the many forms of pornography.*

Pornography excites sexual lust, which is the debasement of a gift of God. It depicts and may encourage indecent and deviant sexual conduct such as fornication, incest, rape, sodomy, child molestation and bestiality. It may cause a progressive decay of moral values, beginning with addiction, followed by a desensitizing of conscience, and tending toward the wanton acting out of perverted sexual conduct. It often victimizes the innocent and unsuspecting.

For society, pornography is a rampant degenerative force. It damages and destroys. As Christians, we oppose the abomination of pornography by every legitimate means.

Homosexual Behavior

¶3410 *Homosexual behavior is regarded by the Scriptures as immoral because it is a distortion of God’s created order, a practice contrary to nature. The sanctity of marriage and the family is to be protected against all manner of immoral conduct (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:23-28; Leviticus 20:10-16). The Scriptures speak explicitly against homosexual practice (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9,10; 1 Timothy 1:8-10).*

Persons with homosexual inclinations are accountable to God for their behavior (Romans 14:12). For those who have fallen into the practice, the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and deliver (1 John 1:9;

B. War and Military Enlistment

We believe 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.

C. Swearing Oaths

Vain and rash swearing is forbidden by our Lord (Matthew 5:34; James 5:12). We hold that the Christian religion does not prohibit the taking of an oath when it is required by a public official. In every case, the Christian must speak in justice and truth (Jeremiah 4:1-2; Ephesians 4:25).

Resources for Churches

¶3500

A. Understanding Lifestyle Issues in the Membership Covenant

Because the Membership Covenant is a part of the Constitution, the recent changes are a result of a referendum decision made by Free Methodists around the world. In essence, the Covenant moved from a legal base (with a longer list of specific behaviors and attitudes) to a principle base (with a shorter list of guiding, overarching principles).



For example, when the Covenant addresses lifestyle issues it says, “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”

This principle maintains the denomination’s longstanding position of calling people to be committed to living healthily by avoiding addictive substances like alcohol and tobacco. It also reminds us, for example, not to overeat or overwork.

When the Membership Covenant is principle-based, then the question is raised as to when one may be considered a member of the fellowship of God’s people. Our previous approach saw membership as the graduation diploma at the end of a discipleship process that prepared people to live within specific requirements. The present approach sees membership as the doorway into the discipleship process. As members continually allow the Holy Spirit to make new applications of the Covenant’s principles at deeper levels, we will become healthier Christians.

Therefore, we fix our eyes on Jesus, and with the Holy Spirit’s enabling we commit to live in joyful obedience, setting aside everything that keeps us from becoming more like Christ (Hebrews 12:2).

B. Further Resources

Additional resources are available through *Light and Life Communications* at www.LLCom.net.