

Chapter 1

The Constitution of the Free Methodist Church

Preamble

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

Articles of Religion – God

The Holy Trinity

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

The Son – His Incarnation

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

The Son – His Resurrection and Exaltation

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

The Holy Spirit – His Person

¶105 The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, He is one with them, the eternal Godhead, equal in deity, majesty and power. He is God effective in Creation, in life and in the church. The Incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ were accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He continues to reveal, interpret and glorify the Son.

The Holy Spirit – His Work in Salvation

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

The Holy Spirit – His Relation to the Church

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

The Scriptures

Authority

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

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

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

Authority of the Old Testament

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

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

New Testament

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

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

Humankind

Free Moral Persons

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

Law of Life and Love

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

secure to everyone respect for their person, their rights and their greatest happiness in the possession and exercise of the right within the moral law.

Good Works

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

Salvation

Christ's Sacrifice

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

New Life in Christ

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

Justification

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

Regeneration

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

Adoption

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

Entire Sanctification

¶119 Entire sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to regeneration, by which the fully consecrated believers, upon exercise of faith in the atoning blood of Christ, are cleansed in that moment from all inward sin and empowered for service. The resulting relationship is attested by the witness of the Holy Spirit and is maintained by faith and obedience. Entire sanctification enables believers to love God with all their hearts, souls, strength, and minds, and their neighbor as themselves, and it prepares them for greater growth in grace.

Restoration

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

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

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

The Church

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

The Language of Worship

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

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

Baptism

¶124 Water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord, signifying acceptance of the benefits of the

atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

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

The Lord's Supper

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

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

Last Things

The Kingdom of God

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

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

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

The Return of Christ

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

Resurrection

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

Judgment

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

Final Destiny

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

Scriptural References

¶131 The doctrines of the Free Methodist Church are based upon the Holy Scriptures and are derived from their total bibli-

cal context. The references below are appropriate passages related to the given articles. They are listed in their biblical sequence and are not intended to be exhaustive.

God

The Holy Trinity (see ¶101)

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

The Son – His Incarnation (see ¶103)

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

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

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

The Holy Spirit – His Person (see ¶105)

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

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

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

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

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

The Scriptures

Authority (see ¶108)

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

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

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

The Scriptures – New Testament (see ¶110)

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

Humankind

Free Moral Persons (see ¶111)

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

Law of Life and Love (see ¶112)

Matthew 23:35-40; John 15:17; Galatians 3:28; 1 John 4:19-21.

Good Works (see ¶113)

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

Salvation

Christ's Sacrifice (see ¶114)

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

New Life in Christ (see ¶115)

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

Justification (see ¶116)

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

Regeneration (see ¶117)

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

Adoption (see ¶118)

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

Entire Sanctification (see ¶119)

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

Restoration (see ¶120)

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

The Church

The Church (see ¶121)

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

The Language of Worship (see ¶122)

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