

Chapter 2

The Constitution (continued)

General Organization

- ¶200 Each annual conference in the Free Methodist Church of North America shall be a member of the general conference of the same.
- ¶201 The general conference may create a new general conference out of a portion of its area when in its judgment the proposed area has approximated a level of development defined for a general conference in ¶250.
- ¶202
- A. The general conference shall be represented in a World Conference composed of representatives from all general conferences of Free Methodism, the representation to be proportionate to membership on the basis stipulated in ¶253.E.
 - B. The general conference shall submit to the World Conference a copy of all legislation, orders and policies of the general conference, and if question should arise concerning the agreement of any action with the “Basic Principles of Free Methodism,” shall proceed according to ¶253.D.1.
 - C. The general conference shall refer all matters requiring referendum voting by other general conferences to the supervision of the World Conference.
 - D. The general conference, in cooperation with all general conferences, may assign functions other than the foregoing to the World Conference, but in no case shall the World Conference act as a legislative or governing body.
 - E. A general conference or its interim administrative board

may refer to the World Conference, as a representative coordinating agency, any problem that may arise with another general conference involving boundaries, recognition of credentials, and other matters of comity. If no solution satisfactory to both general conferences should be reached, the recommendation of the World Conference shall prevail. If within six months either conference shall register an appeal, the World Conference shall arrange a referendum vote to decide the issue.

¶203 The chief administrative officer or officers of the general conference shall affiliate with such officers of all general conferences in a council of bishops for the purpose of fellowship, mutual understanding and extension of Free Methodism and the worldwide promotion of its ideals.

¶204 The general conference shall recognize the World Conference of Free Methodist churches as a means of promoting evangelistic outreach through fellowship, understanding and cooperative planning among all areas of Free Methodism, according to the constitution and bylaws of said organization.

Restrictive Rules and Methods of Amendment of the Principles of Free Methodism

¶225 ¶100-227 inclusive may be altered, changed, or revoked only by concurrent approval of two-thirds of the aggregate votes cast thereon in all general conferences of Free Methodism and two-thirds of the aggregate votes cast thereon in the annual conferences thereof; but ¶228 may not be amended or changed in any way. To ascertain basis for voting see ¶251.C.

¶226 Upon a two-thirds vote of a general conference, proposals for amendment of ¶250-253, whether originating in an annual conference or in a general conference, shall be referred to the World Conference which shall then supervise the referendum voting on the proposed amendment or amendments in all the general conferences and their constituent annual conferences.

¶227 The Free Methodist Church of North America may not enact, either by vote of the general conference or by concurrent vote of the general and annual conferences, any order, policy, or legislation that conflicts with, changes, subtracts from, or adds to:

1. the Articles of Religion, the Covenant, any condition or standard of membership, any standard or rule of doctrine, as set forth in ¶100-160, or
2. any part or rule of government so as to do away with substantially equal lay representation, or an itinerant (conference appointed) ministry, or the general superintendency, or the free seat system in our churches; but any such change as designated in 1 and 2 preceding may be made only by the procedures set forth in ¶225 above.

¶228 Neither the general conference of the Free Methodist Church of North America nor any or all of the general conferences of Free Methodism by any procedure or method whatever (including deletion or amendment of this ¶228), shall have the power to deprive preachers or lay members of the right of trial by an impartial committee, or the right of appeal.

Interrelation of General Conferences

New General Conferences

¶250

- A. The Free Methodist Church recognizes the need to preserve unity in faith and fellowship, yet allow for the distinctives of nation, language and culture. Therefore, it provides for a regional or national body to develop into a general conference.
- B. A new general conference may be authorized by the sponsoring general conference when the body seeking such status has adopted the provisions of this Constitution which are for all general conferences as defined in ¶251.A, as a part of its Constitution and *Book*

of Discipline, and has been recommended by the general administrative board of the sponsoring general conference on the grounds that the following desirable standards are satisfied:

1. an effective church organization on the local, conference, and/or general levels;
2. effective programs for the nurture and training of members, new converts, children, young people, and lay workers;
3. an effective program for ministerial training;
4. evidence of responsible stewardship of life and possessions including the proper management of funds and the provision for the support of its own pastors, workers, and officers;
5. a definite program of evangelism, church extension and missionary outreach on an indigenous basis;
6. the existence of a property-holding body, or more than one such body if required by local laws;
7. a *Book of Discipline* as approved by the general administrative board of the sponsoring general conference.

Constitution for the General Conferences

¶251

- A. Definition. The Preamble, Articles of Religion, Membership and Covenant, General Organization, Restrictive Rules and Methods of Amendment of the Principles of Free Methodism, and Interrelation of General Conferences (¶¶100-253), shall be binding upon all general conferences and shall be part of each constitution and *Book of Discipline*. These provisions may be translated into various languages and dialects, including colloquial and idiomatic English, provided the meaning is not changed.
- B. Church Name. Wherever the use of the name “Free Methodist Church” is impossible or impractical, a general conference, or in the interim of its sessions, its general administrative board, may authorize an adaptation of the church’s name, subject to the approval of the World Conference.

- C. Amendments. The provisions of this Constitution for all general conferences as defined in ¶251.A, may be added to or amended only by the concurrent approval of all the general conferences by a two-thirds aggregate vote of those present and voting and of all the annual conferences thereof by a two-thirds aggregate vote of those present and voting. An amendment may be initiated by any general conference or by any of the annual conferences. When such an addition or amendment has been adopted as herein provided, the World Conference shall declare the result, and it shall be in effect.

- D. Emergency provision. Whenever any general conference is unable to meet and conduct its business because of an emergency or other unforeseen conditions, or if for any reason any general conference fails to vote on a proposed amendment, the World Conference shall be authorized and empowered to declare the results of the voting, which shall be in effect for all general conferences.

Provisional General Conferences

¶252

- A. One or more annual conferences may petition the general conference to which they belong for status as a provisional general conference when the following prerequisites are fulfilled:
 - 1. evidence of maturity in spiritual leadership;
 - 2. a membership growth pattern spanning several years;
 - 3. evidence of being an evangelistic, sending church;
 - 4. demonstrated loyalty to the doctrines and practices of the Free Methodist Church as set forth in its Constitution;
 - 5. evidence of ability to understand and articulate biblically and theologically the essentials of the Wesleyan-Arminian persuasion;
 - 6. development of its own *Book of Discipline*, including a provisional general conference constitution

- according to guidelines set forth by the general conference to which it belongs;
7. adequate financial strength and stability;
 8. where agreements have been made concerning the deployment of missionaries and management of mission properties, approved by Free Methodist World Missions or its equivalent (see ¶4590).
- B. When the above prerequisites are met, the petition shall be presented to the board of administration which shall have the power to authorize the formation of a provisional general conference (see ¶4580).

Constitution of the Free Methodist World Conference

¶253

- A. Name. The name of this organization shall be the Free Methodist World Conference.
- B. Purpose. The Free Methodist World Conference is an organization whose purpose is the coordination of the worldwide ministries and activities of the denomination.

In harmony with this purpose its responsibilities shall be:

1. to provide for worldwide fellowship among Free Methodist bodies;
2. to encourage the expansion of the kingdom of God through the Free Methodist Church by evangelism in existing conferences and in new fields in harmony with Wesleyan doctrine and practices;
3. to assume defined legislative and judicial powers in matters relating to the Free Methodist Constitution as presented in the current edition of the *Book of Discipline* in ¶251.A, or its equivalent;
4. to assure the integrity of all Free Methodist institu-

- tions under the constraints of the *Book of Discipline* and this Constitution;
5. to advance the biblical Wesleyan formation of Free Methodist leaders in part through the maintenance of an international scholarship fund.
- C. Legislative Authority. The World Conference has the following legislative authority over the general conferences. Its legislative duties shall be:
1. Proposed amendments to the Free Methodist Constitution initiated by a general conference and approved by a two-thirds vote of the Free Methodist World Conference, or amendments to the constitution initiated by a two-thirds vote of the Free Methodist World Conference shall be submitted as referendums to all general conferences. A two-thirds aggregate vote of all general conferences shall be required for approval. When authorized by a two-thirds vote of a general conference a board of administration may vote in its place. Votes taken by boards of administration shall be reported as the corresponding proportional number of votes by the general conference to which the board belongs.
 2. When a general conference or its board of administration does not assemble, vote and report back to the executive committee of the World Conference within four years of the time the World Conference has submitted the amendment proposal, it shall surrender its right to vote on the said issue and the two-thirds aggregate vote shall be based on the general conference or boards of administration that report within the four years allowed.
- D. Judicial Authority. The Free Methodist World Conference shall be charged with maintaining fidelity to the provisions of the Constitution which are for all general conferences as defined in ¶251.A, or the equivalent text in current editions of the *Book of Discipline*, to decide matters of comity and interrelations of general

conferences, and to supervise referendums under the conditions defined by the above legislative authority section.

The World Conference has the following judicial authority over the general conferences. Its duties shall be:

1. To review, through its executive committee, the legislation, orders and policies of all the general conferences to determine whether any act appears to be in conflict with the provisions of the Free Methodist constitution which are for all general conferences as defined in ¶251.A, or its equivalent in the current *Book of Discipline*. When the executive committee rules that an act is in conflict with such provisions, the implementation of said act shall automatically be suspended.

Upon request by a two-thirds vote of the board of administration (or its equivalent) of the general conference whose action is called in question, the action at issue shall await reconsideration by said general conference at its next session.

If the action is rescinded as a result of reconsideration, the process shall be terminated. If a general conference does not rescind the action in question the evidence and related findings shall be submitted to the World Conference.

If the actions in question are upheld by a majority of the votes of the World Conference, the suspension shall be lifted. In the event the ruling of the World Conference Executive Committee is upheld, the action by the offending general conference shall be discontinued (retroactively if possible).

A general conference or general conferences whose case or cases come before the World Conference

shall, after having presented their arguments, refrain from voting on the issue in which they have direct interest.

If the general conference whose action has been called into question should refuse to abide by the referendum, the World Conference shall be empowered to provide, at its discretion, for the reorganization of the loyal elements of the Free Methodist Church within the area of that general conference, and to declare all other ministers and members to be withdrawn from the Free Methodist Church.

2. To decide any matter that may arise between general conferences involving boundaries, recognition of credentials and other matters of comity. If no solution satisfactory to the involved conferences can be reached, the recommendation of the World Conference shall prevail.
 3. To supervise the voting of the general conferences on all matters to be voted on by more than one general conference, including additions or amendments to the provisions of this constitution which are for all general conferences, and when the vote has been completed to declare the results.
 4. To carry out, through its executive committee, the voting on referendums and report the results to the World Conference. A vote of the executive committee by mail or by electronic means may be authorized by the officers.
- E. Organizational Structure. The World Conference shall meet at least once each four years, preferably at the time and place of meeting of a general conference. Special meetings may be called by a two-thirds majority of the executive committee.

Delegates shall be elected from the general conferences as follows:

1. From general conferences: Each general conference shall elect delegates on the basis of total full membership as follows:
2 delegates – up to 5,000 total membership
4 delegates – from 5,001 to 15,000 total membership
6 delegates – from 15,001 to 25,000 total membership
8 delegates – over 25,000 total membership
2. The formula will be reviewed by the World Conference at its regularly scheduled meetings and adjusted as appropriate.
3. In the election of delegates, officers and appointments to commissions, due consideration shall be given to the balance of lay and ministerial representation as well as adequate representation of both genders.
4. Delegates from the general conferences shall include *ex officio*, within the formula, the bishops or equivalent officers from each general conference. They shall be counted as ministerial delegates.
5. In determining representation to the World Conference as well as financial responsibility and other statistical purposes membership shall be determined on the basis of full members only.
6. In addition to the above formula identified in E.1, there shall be two voting delegates from each area fellowship. Two honorary members from each fellowship are permitted. In electing the delegates from the area fellowship, preference shall be given to representatives from annual conferences or other Free Methodist bodies not related to a general conference within the geographical area.
7. Provisional general conferences may elect one ministerial and one lay delegate.

F. Officers of the World Conference

1. The officers shall be president, vice president and secretary-treasurer.

2. The officers shall be members of the World Conference Executive Committee.
3. A nominating committee composed of one representative from each area fellowship may be elected to submit nominations for officers of the World Conference and also members at large of the executive committee.
4. Officers may serve for two terms or until their successors are elected. A term is defined as the period between regularly scheduled meetings of the World Conference.

G. The Executive Committee

1. The executive committee shall meet every two years and shall be composed as follows: president, vice president, secretary-treasurer and three members at large, including the outgoing president. These members at large shall be elected so as to allow equitable representation worldwide.
2. The president shall be the chairperson.
3. The executive committee shall present a budget to the World Conference for approval.
4. The executive committee is amenable for its actions to the World Conference.
5. The executive secretary shall work under the direction of the World Conference Executive Committee and shall implement the policies and decisions of the World Conference; supervise the work of the general office; be responsible for the production of literature; facilitate the exchange of views and information as requested; carry forward such studies and surveys as may be authorized by the World Conference and helpful to member bodies; and, on authorization of the executive committee, visit the member areas as may be necessary in carrying out the instructions of the executive committee. He/She may be employed by the executive committee and shall be amenable to the committee through its president.

- H. The commissions of the World Conference shall be:
Outreach: missions and evangelism
Special Ministries: development, women's ministries
Leadership Development: theological education, scholarships
Constitutional matters: area fellowship constitutions, referendums, world conference constitutions, constitutional compliance
- I. Relationship to Conference Boards of Administration
In each general conference or provisional general conference, the board of administration shall speak officially for its conference and shall be the responsible party in all negotiations with the World Conference and the executive committee. The chairperson of each board of administration shall be responsible for official correspondence with the World Conference. It shall be the duty of the chairperson to keep the board of administration of his/her conference fully informed of the proceedings of the World Conference. Copies of all official correspondence shall be properly filed and available to the bishop or highest administrative officer(s) of the conference and to the board of administration.
- J. Fraternal Members
1. Any body of churches not organically related to the Free Methodist Church, but wishing to become a fraternal member of the World Conference may be admitted after the following has been received:
 - a. a valid request by the governing board of the body making application;
 - b. a statement of agreement of compatibility with Free Methodist doctrine and practice; and
 - c. approval by majority vote of the World Conference.
 2. Such relationship shall be for a period of four years. It may be extended for additional four-year periods by vote of the World Conference.

3. Fraternal members of the World Conference shall be processed according to their appropriate level of development (provisional annual conference, annual conference, provisional general conference) and be recommended by the World Conference for membership in a general conference.
 4. Fraternal members may have one non-voting observer at the World Conference until such time as they are assigned to a general conference.
- K. Amendment of the Constitution. Provisions of this constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting at a quadrennial meeting, provided always that such action is in harmony with the constitution as defined in ¶251.A, or the corresponding paragraph of the *Books of Discipline* of the general conferences, and subject to approval by an aggregate two-thirds vote of the general conferences.
- L. Area Fellowships
1. Area fellowships may be organized where the geographical situation, mutual interests and the need for spiritual counsel and encouragement make it advisable. The area fellowships are to act in harmony with the purposes and the work of the World Conference as set forth in this constitution except for the legislative and judicial functions defined in ¶253.C-D. The area fellowships shall operate under constitutions suited to their own needs and situations.
 2. The constitutions of the area fellowships shall be approved by the World Conference.