

# Chapter 6

## The Local Church

### Preamble

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- A. The Free Methodist Church of North America is a body of earnest Christians committed to the will of God as revealed in the Bible, Methodist in doctrine and practice, who consider themselves to be members of the body of Christ in the world, the visible and universal church of Jesus Christ.
- B. The membership of the Free Methodist Church of North America is organized into annual conferences, and these into local congregations. These along with the several institutions, auxiliaries, and agencies are united by means of a common constitutionally structured organization and are governed under the authority of the *Book of Discipline* by duly appointed leaders. We thus share forms of worship, fellowship and a common mission.
- C. Each local congregation accepts members on condition of agreement with a covenant commonly approved and accepted by all local congregations of the church.
- D. Each holds its real estate and all of its property and assets in trust for the Free Methodist Church of North America.
- E. Each participates in the formulation of policy and the approval of programs and procedures of the church by duly elected ministerial and lay representation at conference and general levels.

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Bold paragraph numbers and section letters indicate those items which may be changed by the board of administration. All others may only be changed by the general conference.

- F. The Free Methodist Church of North America therefore is a connectional church, a body of Christians whose local congregations are united by a constitution democratically established and ratified which provides a common character and purpose for all. Consequently, all local congregations shall clearly identify themselves with the Free Methodist Church.
- G. The Free Methodist Church admits to no geographic, social, racial, or cultural limitations on Christ's command to preach the gospel of redemption and to share His message of wholeness. We are called, within our power and resources, to introduce all people to Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20). This includes the inner city, the countryside, the villages and the marketplaces around the world.
- H. Mission begins in worship. Therefore we encourage congregations to establish worship centers where through prayers, music, meditation and the preaching of God's Word true worship might take place.
- I. True worship of God demands service to one another within the church and to those outside the church with their varied needs. This service that we define as the mission of the church includes Christian education, evangelism, world missions and social services.
- J. Christian education is a means of teaching the Word of God so that both young and old can understand Christian doctrine and life. To this end we conduct home Bible studies, Sunday schools, weekday activities, and other programs. We establish day-care centers, elementary and secondary schools and institutions of higher education, including seminaries, colleges and universities. Free Methodist Communications produces and markets books, magazines and other literature.
- K. Evangelism is the work of witnessing and bringing people to faith in Christ. To help our members bear

such witness, we provide opportunities for training and experience. We promote evangelism through study, seminars and workshops, college and university degree programs, use of lay witnesses, home Bible studies and outreach ministries. Radio broadcasts, television programs, audio and video tapes and all other means of personal and mass communication are used.

- L. World missions involves sending the gospel message to areas of need around the world. This is done through a missionary endeavor that involves both long-term missionaries and short-term volunteer workers. Evangelism in the mission context is carried on through churches, schools, hospitals, clinics, bookstores and other appropriate means. The goal of our world mission is to minister to the needs of the whole person.
- M. Social service is the activity of the church in caring for human need as an expression of the love of God. At the level of the local church this may range from day-care centers to senior citizen activities. Free Methodists, individually or through the several agencies, cooperate in the support of retirement homes, hospitals and city missions. They also provide care for unwed mothers and unwanted or orphaned children.
- N. Many of these ministries converge in camping programs in all sections of North America. Entire families are united in family camps, youth and children have specialized camping programs, and many other groups are brought together for instruction, fellowship and service.

### **Mission and Vision**

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- A. The mission of the Free Methodist Church is to make known to all people everywhere God's call to wholeness through forgiveness and holiness in Jesus Christ, and to invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith. The biblical Great Commis-

sion (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) commands believers to make disciples in every place and among all peoples.

- B. The vision of the Free Methodist Church is to be a healthy biblical community of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches. The path to this vision requires every church to be a healthy church with Spirit-filled leadership working a plan to fulfill our Expected Outcomes (see ¶6070).

## Characteristics of the Living Church

### ¶6020

- A. The church is the body of Christ in the world. In worship, the church comes together to meet the holy God and to respond in obedience and love. In witness, the church makes known the good news of Christ throughout the local community and to the ends of the earth, calling the lost to repentance and faith. In making disciples, converts are brought into the body, baptized, trained and equipped for service to Christ. In fellowship, redeemed people experience their oneness in Christ by sharing in one another's lives with love and concern. In service, the church corporately cares for the needs of its own and others (Revelation 4; Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20; Ephesians 4:11-13; Acts 2:42; 26:17).
- B. The Free Methodist Church is committed to developing and maintaining caring fellowships. Our societies are to be characterized by understanding, forgiveness, mutual discipline and assistance. To experience Christian fellowship, we must know one another well enough to share strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows. This enables us to build one another up in the faith.
- C. When persons are born of the Spirit of God, they become members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). Church membership offers new Christians the opportunity to pledge publicly their love and loyalty

to Christ and the church, and to identify through membership with a local congregation. It makes them integral parts of a loving community, gives them a sense of accountability necessary to spiritual growth, and through mutual Christian commitment enables them to better carry out their mission in the world.

### **Holiness – The Great Commandment of Our Community**

¶6030 Believers pursue holiness in its most comprehensive meaning of loving God with all their hearts, souls, minds and strength, and our neighbors as ourselves. John Wesley rightly identified happiness as the fruit of holiness; freedom, the result of surrender to God; and peace, as the child of forgiveness. The church calls on God for a renewed and clear vision of holiness that brings the presence of God near to the people of our time. This call to holiness not only reaffirms our historical values, but heightens our responsibility to openly confront sin, be it addiction, selfishness, evil speaking, or anything else that dishonors the name of God.

### **Disciple-making – The Great Commission of Our Community**

¶6040 The church earnestly engages in evangelization and disciple-making. We are not casual about pointing out the way of life and holiness. We are concerned for the spiritual growth of all those in our charge, whether pre-Christians, new Christians or longtime Christians.

### **Non-Negotiable Fundamentals**

¶6050 All structures, ministries and personnel of the church shall reflect these non-negotiable fundamentals of the Free Methodist Church:

1. We may not live in violation of the Scriptures.
2. We may not live in violation of the Articles of Religion, the Constitution, the Membership Covenant or the mission of the Free Methodist Church.
3. Our pastors may not live in violation of their ordination vows.
4. Our leaders may not lead the church in ways which detract or divert from our mission.

## Operational Values

¶6060 All structures, ministries and personnel of the church shall reflect these operational values:

1. We are a connectional church. We are strengthened most by our relationships based on truthfulness and grace.
2. We believe our mission drives everything we do.
3. We proclaim a grace that is free. Jesus said the crowning work of authentic ministry is this: when the poor have the gospel brought to them. Hence, the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve our particular care.
4. We strive to make the message of the gospel relevant to our culture by remaining faithful to God while showing love and sensitivity to the world.
5. We accept all who come to us, seeing the most desperate sinner with the potential to become a whole and devoted follower of Jesus.
6. We see smaller groups and cells within the larger body of Christ as the best environment for the birth, mentoring, encouragement and care of believers.
7. We view our local churches as mission outposts. Our pastors are appointed not just to a local congregation and building, but to the evangelization of whole communities, towns, or cities.
8. We see ourselves as an apostolic movement. We are a "sent" people, charged with the task of reaching new territories and new populations of people with the gospel.
9. We are Wesleyan in our doctrine and in our practice.
10. We value the guidance of the Scriptures and the consensus of the church throughout her history.
11. We are to be a holy people. Our conduct and our teaching are to reflect the holiness and love of God. We seek nothing less than the healing of mind, body and soul of all who come under our care.

## Expected Outcomes

¶6070 All structures, ministries, and personnel of the church shall produce these expected outcomes:

1. Every church a prayer-saturated congregation
2. Every church a worshipping congregation

3. Every church a discipling congregation
4. Every church an evangelizing congregation
5. Every church a reproducing congregation
6. Every church a culture-engaging congregation
7. Every church a world-mission congregation
8. Every church a purpose-driven congregation

## Membership

¶6100 In harmony with our mission statement that we “... invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith” the New Testament model of repentance, faith and baptism shall constitute the primary requirements for membership. This makes membership in the Free Methodist Church as nearly as possible synonymous with entering into the body of Christ. We are open to all whom God has awakened and support them with the healing and equipping power of the Holy Spirit in His church. The purpose of membership preparation is to identify life issues and receive assistance; identify theological/doctrinal questions and attain answers; and learn the mission of the church and express commitment to it. The principles of Christian conduct as expressed in ¶¶3300-3470 are to be the maturing life goals of all who are invited into membership.

### Admission into Membership

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- A. The conditions for membership in the Free Methodist Church are described in ¶151. Persons meeting these requirements shall be admitted to the privileges of membership. Those members, who rise to leadership, shall also meet expectations described in ¶6200.E. (See *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual* for guidance in membership preparation.)
- B. The ritual of membership is found in ¶8800.
- C. Any person in good standing in an evangelical church may be received into membership upon meeting the requirements of ¶151.

- D. When two or more societies vote to merge, individual membership is automatically transferred to the united society.
- E. Members who withdraw from the church with no complaints against them at the time may by action of the local board of administration be reinstated into membership if the following conditions are met:
  - 1. evidence of present faith in Christ; and
  - 2. reaffirmation of the Membership Covenant.
- F. Members living at a distance physically, spiritually or emotionally from the society in which membership is held and who are not attending, shall send to the pastor a written testimony at least once a year describing their active worship and involvement in a local church of similar doctrinal beliefs. The pastor of that church shall confirm these activities. Distant members who do not write or support their home church financially may, after one year, have their names removed from the active membership by action of the local board of administration. The church shall seek to contact all absentee members annually to ascertain the viability of the membership connections and shall respond accordingly (restore, remove permanently, remove to the inactive list).
- G. When members do not keep the Covenant and habitually violate their vows, it is the responsibility of the pastor(s) and the membership care committee to seek in love to restore them. If such members refuse restoration, they must be dealt with according to the due process of the church (§6330, §7300).
- H. Members whose membership is terminated by any cause except death or transfer to another church shall have their names placed on an inactive list. This list shall be held by the pastor in the hope of restoration to active membership and fellowship in the church. Membership for persons on the inactive membership list may be restored according to



the provisions of ¶6110.E. Inactive members shall not be reported in the *Yearbook* or any other official membership data.

- I. Members whose membership is terminated by death or transfer to another church shall have their names placed on a separate list to be kept as a record of former members.

### **Youth Membership**

#### **¶6120**

- A. All members under sixteen years of age shall be known as youth members. They shall not be counted in the allocation of financial goals by the annual or general conference. Their number shall be kept in a separate column in the statistical report. They are not eligible to vote in business meetings.
- B. The names of youth members shall be reviewed by the local board of administration at least once each year, with a view to character cultivation and Christian nurture.
- C. At age sixteen youth members may be approved by the local board of administration for adult membership. To be admitted as adult members, they must answer satisfactorily the questions for adult membership before a public meeting of the church.

### **Associate Membership**

#### **¶6130**

Free Methodist students and servicemen and women, and their families, living at a distance from their home and church, may be granted associate membership in another Free Methodist church. All rights and privileges except the right to vote shall be granted. Associate members shall be recorded on a separate list.

### **Transfer of Membership**

#### **¶6140**

- A. Members desiring to move to another society or to unite with another evangelical church are entitled to a

letter of transfer, and if in good standing, shall receive it upon request.

- B. Members wishing to transfer to another society must have a letter of transfer from the pastor (see *Pastors Handbook*). When giving a letter of transfer, the pastor shall promptly notify the pastor of the society to which the letter is addressed. The letter of transfer is valid for one year.
- C. Members given a letter of transfer shall remain members of, and be amenable to, the society by which the letter was given. Once the letter is presented to another society and they are received into membership, they shall be responsible to the new society for their conduct.
- D. It shall be the duty of the pastor receiving the letter to notify the pastor who gave it (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*).
- E. Youth members may be transferred to another society by the pastor giving a letter of transfer (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*).
- F. The conference superintendent must give consent for the issuing of a letter of transfer for a licensed pastor in charge of a society (see ¶5640).

### **Membership – Special Circumstances**

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Conferences of mission origin as well as in North America who, for cultural reasons, encounter difficulties with membership procedures as outlined in ¶ 6100-6110 may revise these procedures so long as they do not violate the doctrine or ecclesiology of the Free Methodist Church. Revised procedures shall be sponsored by the Board of Bishops which shall study them to assure that the constitutional requirements and guarantees of membership are carefully safeguarded and submit them to the board of administration for approval.

## Local Church Administration

### ¶6200

- A. A local church is composed of two classes of members: adult and youth. The steps to membership are found in the sections of the Constitution under Membership and Covenant (¶150-160).
- B. A business meeting of the members is called a society meeting and is conducted at least annually. The purposes of this meeting include the election of officers and a review of the year's progress and of plans for the upcoming year.
- C. New societies and smaller churches should view the organization outlined as a goal to be reached as the church grows and ministries expand. Some offices/functions may be omitted or combined in such instances.
- D. Recognizing the diversity in the Free Methodist Church, diversity in board and ministry structures is needed to meet the expected outcomes. Ministry settings vary due to size, goals and culture. The local church is free to organize its boards and ministry structures in such a manner as to maintain Free Methodist values while accomplishing the Expected Outcomes (see ¶6070).
- E. Selecting Leaders
  - 1. Leaders of the local church give substance and direction to the church as they seek to fulfill our Expected Outcomes. They pray, strategize and focus the energies, spiritual gifts and passion of the whole body.
  - 2. Leadership and/or policy-making positions shall be filled by members who:
    - a. live consistently within scriptural guidelines (expectations) for leaders (e.g. Exodus 18:21, Acts 7:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9) and express Christlike attitudes in life and in rela-

- tionships (e.g. Matthew 20:26-28; John 15:12-17; Acts 6:1-7 and Ephesians 4:1-17);
- b. give evidence of spiritual gifts such as leadership, faith and administration;
  - c. agree with and sincerely seek to live out the goals for their maturing life in Christ;
  - d. continue in harmony with our doctrine, membership covenant and mission; and
  - e. are vital in faith, faithful in attendance and financially supportive of their church to at least the level of a tithe.
3. Leadership and/or policy-making positions are defined as: the board of administration, delegate(s), nominating committee, financial chairman and/or treasurer, plus other key ministry or teaching position as determined by the local board of administration.

## **Society Meeting**

¶6250

- A. The society meeting shall be composed of the full members of the society. Youth members are ineligible to vote (see ¶6120).
- B. The pastor shall be chair of the meeting without vote. The secretary of the local board of administration shall be the secretary of the society. The minutes of the society meetings shall be kept in the record book of the local board of administration.
- C. The meeting shall be announced at least ten days before it is held. Absentee voting is not permitted.
- D. Prior to the annual election process, the pastor shall present to the society the scriptural qualifications for lay leadership positions such as those noted in ¶6200.E.
- E. Annual Conference Lay Delegates.
  1. Adult members, with the exception of conference

- ministerial candidates, who conform to the conditions outlined for leaders in ¶6200.E.2, are eligible to be a delegate(s) or reserve delegate(s). However, a delegate who is received as a conference ministerial candidate during the current session of the annual conference shall not be disqualified to serve as a delegate. The society shall, from those nominated by the nominating committee, elect by ballot their delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) to the annual conference, according to the provisions in ¶5010. The election of the delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) shall be by separate ballot and shall each require a majority vote of those present and voting. The secretary will provide a credential(s) for the delegate(s).
2. Delegates serve as liaison between the society and its appointed personnel, as well as between the conference and the society. Their primary tasks include: representing the local church at annual conference; participating in conference activities as requested; representing the church to the superintendent; preserving unity within the body by promoting peace and harmony between the members.
  3. Delegates are to support pastors and staff in the planning and promotion of Great Commission strategies.
- F. The society shall elect a nominating committee (see ¶6310).
- G. The society shall elect adult members from the local church to serve in various capacities on the local board of administration, in addition to those named by virtue of office.
- H. The society may determine the number of stewards and may elect a board of stewards (see *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*).
- I. The board of administration may serve as the trustees

of the church, or others may be elected. All trustees shall be elected as specified in the charter or bylaws or by civil law (see ¶6400.B).

- J. The society shall elect a treasurer who shall be an adult member of that society. He/she shall keep a record of all money received and expended by the church and report to the society (see 6300.G).
- K. A financial review or audit shall be performed annually.
- L. The society may elect other personnel to serve the church.
- M. The society may elect a pastors cabinet (see ¶6320).
- N. The society shall determine the propriety of incorporating and identify the local church governing body required by the state (see ¶6400).
- O. The pastor's state of the church, the treasurer's and board or committee reports will be given at the annual society meeting.
- P. The pastor or local board of administration may call a society meeting.
- Q. *Robert's Rules of Order* in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure in the sessions of the society meetings.
- R. A suggested order of business for a society meeting may be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*.

## Standing Boards and Committees

### Local Board of Administration

¶6300

- A. The local board of administration shall be composed of the senior pastor and ministry leaders in the church as determined by the society. It is recommended that

there shall be no less than seven, nor more than fifteen members. At least one delegate and one trustee shall be included. It is also recommended that no member, with the exception of the pastor, serve for more than six consecutive years.

1. In consultation with the conference superintendent, the local church may choose other structures and titles to appropriately reflect operational values and desired outcomes.
  2. Board members shall be representative members of the local church, faithful in worship attendance, involved in ministry, and should also be supportive financially at least to the level of the tithe (see ¶6200.E).
  3. Only adult members of the local church may serve on the local board of administration, except that members of an annual conference may serve on the board if the society elects them.
  4. Whenever practicable, the board shall meet once a month.
- B. The pastor shall be chair of the board, except as provided in ¶5110.D.3-4, and when absent, a chair shall be elected. Annually, the pastor may designate a layperson as presiding officer of the local board of administration, from among those elected to serve on this board, upon mutual agreement and confirmation by the board.
- C. The pastor is an ex-officio member of all boards and committees.
- D. The local board of administration shall work in partnership with the senior pastor to provide vision, general oversight, planning and coordination of the ministries of the church. The purpose shall be to stimulate and ensure the furtherance of the congregation's mission and the spiritual growth and development of the entire body. The board shall provide spiritual leadership for the society. It shall seek to be guided by and strive to model the scriptural admonitions found in

Matthew 28:19-20; Matthew 22:37-39; Ephesians 4:11-16; Matthew 20:25-28; John 17:20-21; that we may be presented to Christ in accordance with Ephesians 1:22-23; John 13:34-35; 1 Corinthians 14:33; Galatians 5:22-23; James 3:17; and Hebrews 12:14.

- E. The pastor, in partnership with the board, is responsible for making provision to accomplish the mission of the church including Christian education, evangelism, missions, church growth and the work of stewards.
- F. The board shall elect a secretary, an adult member of the Free Methodist Church, who shall also serve as the secretary of the society. The secretary shall keep minutes of the proceedings of the local board of administration and of the society meetings, and shall record all marriages and baptisms.
- G. The treasurer of the society shall keep a record of all monies raised and of the manner in which they are expended. The treasurer shall provide a detailed monthly financial statement in writing to the finance committee and the local board of administration, with a full report to the annual society meeting.
- H. To safeguard the treasurer, it is recommended that the board elect tellers who shall count each offering and provide the necessary documentation for the financial review or audit.
- I. A financial secretary may be elected if the size of the congregation and amount of funds handled make it advisable. Duties of the financial secretary shall be defined by the local board of administration.
- J. It is recommended that the local board of administration elect from the members a finance board. The pastor and the treasurer shall be ex-officio members. The finance board shall report regularly to the local board of administration (see ¶6440.A).



- K. Upon the joint request of the pastor and the finance board, the financial books shall be made available for examination.
- L. The members of the finance board shall see that each member of the society is solicited for the support of the local work and urged to give regularly (weekly, monthly, or quarterly) according to his/her means (see ¶6430).
- M. The board shall keep a permanent record of all baptisms, weddings and funerals; a list of the names and addresses of all members, with time and method of reception, date of birth and baptism, completion of pastoral instruction classes of each, and time and reason for termination of membership. Each year the senior pastor will oversee the completion of the local church annual report.
- N. The board shall organize itself to provide oversight for the ministries of the church according to need. It shall give attention to providing leadership for evangelism and church growth, world missions, Christian education and the spiritual health of the congregation.
- O. The board shall provide for a membership care committee consisting of the pastor(s) of the church and up to five additional members of the church who shall be chosen on the basis of demonstrated Christian maturity, and with representation of both women and men.
- P. Where a separate membership care committee is not feasible, these duties may be assigned to an existing committee such as the pastors cabinet (see ¶6320).
- Q. The board licenses local ministerial candidates according to the guidelines provided in ¶6500.
- R. *Robert's Rules of Order* in the latest edition shall be the standard of parliamentary procedure in the sessions of the local board of administration.

- S. A suggested order of business may be found in the *Pastors and Church Leaders Manual*.

### **Nominating Committee**

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- A. At the annual meeting, the society shall elect by ballot from its adult membership a standing nominating committee of not fewer than three nor more than nine persons, plus the senior pastor. The society shall consider persons for this committee who are spiritually mature and who understand and actively pursue the mission of the church. The society shall determine the size of the nominating committee, the duration and rotation of terms and any term limits. The nominating committee may not present nominations for the next nominating committee; however the society may allow for nominations from the membership to be received in advance of the annual meeting. In this case, a form for nominations shall be provided at least thirty days prior to the election. The local board of administration shall process these nominations and provide a ballot including the names of all available nominees. In addition, the society may determine whether nominations will be allowed from the floor and set a standing rule in advance to that effect.
- B. The objective of the nomination process is to identify persons of spiritual maturity, giftedness and fruitfulness in ministry, and to provide appropriate roles for each to participate in the overall mission of the church.
- C. The society and the board of administration shall ensure a member's right to submit nominations.
- D. The nominating committee shall:
1. recommend to the society persons to serve in the leadership roles of all standing committees or boards;
  2. nominate annual conference delegates, if the society so chooses, presenting at least two nomina-

- tions for each delegate position for election by ballot (see ¶6250.E);
3. consult ¶6200.E when considering persons for the position of delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s) to annual conference and for all leadership positions. The board of administration shall establish a procedure whereby the pastor and/or cabinet can review the nominations and remove from the final ballot the names of members who have shown inadequate growth in Christian practice or Christ-likeness. Prior to the annual election process, the pastor shall remind the society and/or nominating committee (whichever is most appropriate) of the scriptural qualifications for leadership positions as defined in ¶6200.E; and
  4. make their report available to the society at least ten days prior to the election.

### **Pastors Cabinet**

#### **¶6320**

- A. Each society may elect a pastors cabinet. It shall be composed of not fewer than three nor more than nine lay members, including representation by delegate(s) to annual conference. The pastor may nominate one-third of the cabinet and shall serve as chair. A lay vice-chair may be chosen to serve in the event of the pastor's absence or to consider congregational complaints when necessary. No meeting shall be held without the pastor's knowledge and consent.
- B. The cabinet is to assist the pastor in making his/her ministry more effective in these ways:
  1. serve as a prayer cabinet;
  2. be available for counsel;
  3. keep the congregation informed concerning the nature and function of the pastoral office;
  4. keep the pastor advised concerning conditions within the congregation as they affect relations between pastor and people;

5. serve as a planning committee;
6. serve as a personnel committee, offering counsel on staff employment, reviewing compensation and making recommendations relative to pastoral and staff compensation to the appropriate committee or board;
7. assist in selecting suitable supply pastors when the pastor is to be absent, groups for special services and special speakers, unless otherwise provided for by the local board of administration;
8. serve as the church calendar committee;
9. serve as the membership care committee when so designated by the local board of administration; and
10. assist the pastor in counseling and guidance of local ministerial candidates (see ¶6500).

### **Membership Care Committee**

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- A. The local church may have a membership care committee. It shall consist of the pastor(s) of the church and up to five additional members of the church who shall be chosen on the basis of demonstrated Christian maturity, and with representation of both genders.
- B. When the local board of administration so decides, the duties of the membership care committee may be assigned to an existing committee.
- C. If cases arise for which the membership care committee can find no disciplinary direction, it shall refer the matter to the conference superintendent who may confer with the area bishop (see ¶6110.G).
- D. The membership care committee shall:
  1. assist the pastor(s) in identifying and recruiting members;
  2. review the membership rolls at least annually;
  3. counsel with members whose conduct and relationship to the church may be cause for concern, such as

- the threatened breakup of a marriage (see ¶3440.A);
4. make recommendations to the local board of administration regarding the membership status of those who have been counseled;
  5. provide continuing ministry to former or inactive members (see ¶6110.H); and
  6. perform the duties of discipline prescribed in ¶7300.C-D.

## **Christian Schools**

### **¶6340**

- A. The Free Methodist Church of North America shall encourage and promote the establishing of Christian day schools (see ¶4320.P, ¶5270).
- B. It is recommended that such schools be designated Light and Life Christian Schools.
- C. Light and Life Christian Schools are expected to maintain a Christian emphasis and exceed state educational standards.
- D. Responsibility for the operation of Light and Life Christian Schools shall rest with the local board of administration, which may elect a board of directors to give specific oversight. If a Light and Life School board of directors is in place, it shall provide financial and statistical reports to the local board of administration at least once each quarter. The Light and Life School board of directors, of whom at least two-thirds shall be members of the Free Methodist Church, shall cooperate with the conference board in accord with the guidelines established by the board and the annual conference.
- E. The local board of administration which has responsibility for the operation of a Christian School, Preschool or Day Care program shall require an annual financial report to be completed by a qualified auditor or accountant.
- F. A person shall be employed by a local church to be prin-

cipal of its school only after meeting these criteria:

1. the local board of administration has determined that the candidate's educational and spiritual leadership is appropriate;
  2. the conference ministerial education and guidance board, upon examination of the candidate's qualifications, has given employment approval to the local society;
  3. the local board of administration approves the candidate for employment; and
  4. the candidate is, or upon employment will become, a member of the Free Methodist Church.
- G. The leadership commitments, mission commitments and connectional commitments as found in ¶4810 for Denominational Institutions shall apply, as appropriate, to Light and Life Christian Schools. Any complaint of violation of any of these principles shall be directed to the Light and Life Christian Schools board of the conference in which the school is located. Should the complaint be found to be valid, the board shall apply such penalty to the school found guilty as it deems appropriate. Such school, however, shall have the privilege of appeal, with full hearing, to the conference administrative committee.

## Property and Finance

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- A. Before an annual conference, a pastoral charge, or a society purchases real estate, the articles of incorporation, wherever the law will permit, shall provide that the corporation be subject to the rules, regulations, doctrines, and *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church, incorporated as "The Free Methodist Church of North America," as from time to time adopted by the general conference of that church insofar as they do not contravene the civil laws. When incorporation is complete, the deed(s) shall be made out directly to the owning body in its corporate name

and shall without exception contain the trust clause in ¶6400.D.

- B. The board of administration of an annual conference, a pastoral charge, or a society of the Free Methodist Church shall have and hold in trust (see ¶6400.D) any and all property committed to it. Whenever local law requires church property to be held by trustees, references in the *Book of Discipline* to “Board of Administration” may be construed to be synonymous with “Board of Trustees.” The board of administration shall be elected by ballot where civil law requires. The task of caring for property and facilities may be referred to a separate properties committee.
- C. The board of administration of the owning body shall see that titles are good; that deeds are drawn in harmony with civil law; that they are immediately recorded; and that abstracts and other valuable papers are safely stored.
- D. **Trust Clause.** All property, whether real, personal, or mixed, acquired by any local society, pastoral charge, annual conference, or other body, whether incorporated or unincorporated, shall be held subject to the foregoing trust whether appearing in the evidence of title, or whether left out of such evidence of title, by mistake, inadvertence, willfully, or otherwise; and can only be released pursuant to the provisions of ¶6400.F of the *Book of Discipline*.

“In trust for the use and benefit of the Free Methodist Church of North America, incorporated under the name of ‘The Free Methodist Church of North America,’ subject to the *Book of Discipline*, usages, and ministerial appointments of said church, as from time to time authorized and declared; and, if sold, the proceeds shall be disposed and used in accordance with the provisions of said *Book of Discipline*, and the civil law; and in further trust and confidence that in the houses of worship now constructed or that may here-

after be constructed on said promises hereby conveyed, the seats shall be forever free; and in further trust and confidence that the said trustees and their successors in office shall permit at all times the preachers who may be duly authorized according to the *Book of Discipline* of the said Free Methodist Church, to hold religious services in said houses of worship according to said *Book of Discipline*.”

- E. An annual conference, a pastoral charge, or a society shall not accept a deed which contains a clause by which the land conveyed may revert to the original grantor, the heirs, or assigns, nor shall it permit church property to be sold, mortgaged, or otherwise encumbered for current expenses. No other denomination shall be permitted to hold stated appointments in any Free Methodist churches without the consent of both the pastor and a majority of the local board of administration of the pastoral charge or society.
- F. Whenever it becomes advisable and the electing body so authorizes, the local board of administration may sell or encumber or otherwise dispose or convey church property by securing the consent of the superintendent of the conference in which the property lies and of the Board of Directors of the Free Methodist Church of North America, provided that in all cases the proceeds of such sale or encumbrance shall be used for the purchase or improvement of property for the same local church, or held subject to the order of the annual conference in which the property lies. If within three years of the date of sale or encumbrance the proceeds have not been so used, the administrative committee of the annual conference may name a committee to cooperate with the local church to lay plans for using such proceeds. If after two years of such cooperative effort satisfactory plans have not been developed, the annual conference may take control of the proceeds. In the case of annual conference property, the authority so given may either be limited to specific property or may be a general authorization pertaining to any or all of its property.



- G. Whenever any property is no longer used permanently for church purposes and it is so declared by the annual conference, the local board of administration, if any remains, shall sell it and turn over the proceeds of the sale to the annual conference or convey the same to the conference in its corporate name. If the local church board should refuse to do so, their offices shall be declared vacant by the annual conference and shall be replaced by the conference designees. If no such board remains, the annual conference shall take possession of the property by due process of law. The annual conference may sell and convey such property and the proceeds of sale may be used as the conference may direct, in accordance with the civil law.

### **Construction of Churches**

#### **¶6410**

- A. Church buildings are a visual testimony to the surrounding community of the church's faith in God; therefore architecture, interior arrangements and landscaping shall convey honor and reverence for God. All churches shall clearly identify themselves as Free Methodist. All structures shall be built in compliance with zoning laws and building codes, and shall be compatible with the prevailing architecture of the neighboring area. New buildings shall be easily accessible to the physically handicapped. All seats shall be free. Interior arrangements shall assist in making the preaching of the Word central in our services. Careful planning is necessary, including consideration of utility and maintenance costs, safety, acoustical features, and the long-term needs of the church.
- B. No step shall be taken involving pecuniary liability in constructing houses of worship or parsonages, or in purchasing real property of any kind, until the finance plan is approved in writing by the proper conference boards as determined by the annual conference.
- C. Each annual conference may appoint a buildings and locations committee of not less than three or the ad-

ministrative committee may serve this function. No real property shall be purchased or building constructed within the bounds of the conference without this committee's approval in writing both of the location and the plan of the building, and of the title of the property. When a church building is involved, this committee shall make sure that proper accommodations have been made for the projected ministries before giving its approval.

- D. No houses of worship, parsonages, or other buildings shall be purchased or constructed on leased ground, except on reservations or in other places where it is impossible to secure a deed in fee, or without the unanimous written consent of the administrative committee of the annual conference in whose territory the property is situated.

### **Church Merger/Closing**

¶6420 The determination of the continuance, merger, or closing of a local church by an annual conference, when recommended by its conference administrative committee, shall be based on the following considerations; recent growth patterns, proximity to other Free Methodist churches, the present and long range priorities of the location, facilities and financial ability. In the event that membership of a society declines below a minimum of ten supporting adult members, or is deemed by the conference board of administration to be incapable of adequately supporting the society, the conference administrative committee may at its discretion assume responsibility for the property.

### **Raising of Funds**

¶6430

- A. The support of the church is to come from the tithes, offerings and gifts of its people. The membership is requested to cooperate heartily by giving not less than one-tenth of their income for the Lord's work (see ¶6200.E, ¶8800.5).

- B. Other methods for the raising of funds may be used by constituents of our churches providing that:
  - 1. they are not a substitute for the giving of tithes and offerings;
  - 2. they are consistent with the ethics and practices of our faith; and
  - 3. the church itself does not serve as a marketing agency for the commercial products of its constituency.
- C. The church may support community-wide efforts to raise funds for worthwhile projects so long as the fund-raising effort does not benefit the Free Methodist Church, and is consistent with the ethics of our faith and membership covenant.
- D. All fund appeals to be made by local churches outside of their annual conference must first be cleared by the administrative committee of the conference(s) into whose area the appeal is to be sent.

### Support of Pastors

¶6440

- A. It shall be the duty of the finance board to consult with the pastor and then prepare an estimate of the amount necessary for the support of the pastoral staff. This estimate is to be presented to the local board of administration for action (see ¶6300.J).
- B. If a pastor chooses not to occupy the parsonage, the local board of administration may rent it out to others and shall pay the pastor a housing allowance not less than the rent received, less any additional taxes or insurance required.

### Resources

¶6450

- Superintendents, pastors and lay members are encouraged to make frequent use of resources such as:
- Chaplains Guidelines Manual,*
  - Deacon Handbook,*

*Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook,*  
*Ministerial Education and Guidance Board Manual,*  
*Pastors and Church Leaders Manual,*  
*Superintendents Manual,* and the  
*Working Together in the Twenty-first Century* booklet.

## Local Ministerial Candidates

### ¶6500

- A. A local ministerial candidate is one who is seriously considering a call to full-time Christian ministry and who has completed the processes of licensing. Local ministerial candidate status provides the opportunity to explore the perceived call to ministry with the pastor in the context of the local church. Prior to being approved to work toward a local ministerial candidate license, the person shall have been a member of the church long enough to have given evidence of possessing the developing qualities and gifts normally expected of a Christian minister: a heart for God and the mission of the church, leadership potential, good conduct and the ability to work with people.
- B. Persons who do not show adequate potential of being an elder who can lead a congregation to fulfill the mission of the church and our expected outcomes, should be counseled at an early time to consider the support and service role of a deacon.
- C. The pastor shall enter into a mentoring relationship with the potential local ministerial candidate, establishing a learning contract (see *Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook*). The pastor shall journey with the individual through licensing as local ministerial candidate, and possibly even through licensing as a conference ministerial candidate. A local ministerial candidate shall be amenable to instruction, supervision and related discipline to assure growth in grace, knowledge and leadership skill (see ¶6300.Q, ¶6320.B.10).

- D. Licensing as a local ministerial candidate is contingent upon:
1. membership in the Free Methodist Church;
  2. exploring a call to ordained ministry in a mentoring relationship with pastor/ designee (see *Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook*);
  3. an interview with and approval by the local board of administration upon satisfactory answers to the questions provided in ¶8700.A; and
  4. receiving a local ministerial candidate certificate before the congregation upon satisfactory answers to the questions provided in ¶8700.B.
- E. Following licensing, the new local ministerial candidate opens a file with Ministerial Credentialing Services (see *Local Ministerial Candidate Handbook*).
- F. The names of all local ministerial candidates shall be reported to the annual conference ministerial education and guidance board.
- G. A local ministerial candidate shall maintain membership in the church that licensed him/her, unless appointed as a licensed pastor (see ¶6500.H).
- H. A local ministerial candidate appointed as a licensed pastor shall hold membership in the church served (see ¶5640).
- I. A local ministerial candidate's license is subject to annual review and renewal by the local board of administration.
- J. A local ministerial candidate, who after four years does not actively progress toward conference ministerial candidacy leading to elder's orders, shall choose to study for the diaconate or to serve in another lay capacity, thus discontinuing the local ministerial candidate license.
- K. A local ministerial candidate appointed by a ministe-

rial appointments committee to have charge of a society may administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper and solemnize marriages in that place if civil law permits.

- L. Finally, the local board of administration recommends to the conference ministerial education and guidance board that the candidate be accepted as a conference ministerial candidate.

## Deacons

### ¶6600

- A. Deacons are members in good standing in the Free Methodist Church. They are persons of good reputation, full of wisdom and the Spirit, whose spiritual gifts from God have been confirmed by their local churches. In response to God's call on their lives, deacons offer servant-leadership in particular areas of congregational life, according to the gifts and graces God has given and they have developed. Complementing the work of elders, deacons serve the local church by assisting and leading the membership to carry out its ministries to one another and the world.
- B. The specialized ministries of the deacons include, but are not limited to, ministries of:
  - 1. care and mercy
  - 2. worship and music
  - 3. administration and organization
  - 4. spiritual nurture and counsel
  - 5. outreach and service
- C. Under the leadership of the pastor(s), local congregations will help people recognize, accept and use their gifts in ministry. In due course, God will call some to lead the body in specialized ministries, assisting the pastor(s) in equipping the people for ministry and dedicating significant time to this work.

- D. Under the guidance of the pastor(s) and the local board of administration, persons called to such ministry will be recognized, encouraged, mentored, trained, examined and certified for the diaconate.
1. The local board of administration shall guide prospective deacons in a process of study and mentoring appropriate for their areas of ministry and according to denominational standards. In the process, the local board of administration will give due consideration to character, calling, gifting, training and fruitfulness in ministry (see *Deacon Handbook*).
  2. When a prospective deacon or his/her spouse has been divorced, clearance for ministry shall be required, according to denominational guidelines used by the bishops. The ministerial education and guidance board will review and recommend clearance for ministry to the local board of administration for final approval. The file will go to the conference office, so that if the deacon were later to proceed to elder's orders, the bishops would have access to the previous endorsement.
- E. Upon meeting the requirements and completing the process of preparation, the local board of administration shall approve the candidate for consecration as deacon within the local church. The conference superintendent or designee shall consecrate the deacon with the assistance of the pastor(s) and other deacons. The local Free Methodist Church shall issue a certificate of consecration to the newly consecrated deacon.
- F. On an annual basis the local board of administration shall review and approve deacons within their care as to their character and performance in ministry. When appropriate, with due process, the local board of administration may discontinue certification.

## The Deacon's Role

¶6610

- A. Deacons remain members of the local Free Methodist Church with no official standing in the annual conference. Deacons may therefore serve as lay delegates to annual conference and general conference.
- B. The deacon's particular ministry role is defined by his or her individual gifts, passions and calling from God. Deacons may therefore serve the local congregation in a variety of ways.
- C. Deacons may administer the sacraments only when authorized by an elder.
- D. The consecration of a deacon will be valid only in that local church. Whenever a deacon transfers membership to another Free Methodist Church, the receiving pastor may decline to recognize the prior consecration. If the pastor chooses to affirm the transferring deacon's consecration, the person may be approved for ministry in the new congregation after review by the pastor and local board of administration of the receiving church.
- E. A composite record or list of deacons will be kept at the conference office and not listed in the denominational *Yearbook*. They shall be clearly distinguished from ordained located deacons who are listed in the *Yearbook*.

## Pastoral Staff Assistants

¶6700

These guidelines apply to part-time or full-time paid local church pastoral staff, ordained, consecrated deacons or lay, such as associate/assistant pastors, ministers of visitation and outreach, ministers/directors of music, ministers/directors of Christian education, and ministers/directors of youth. These provisions do not apply to short-term appointments of less than four months or to unpaid positions.



## Selection/Appointment

### ¶6710

- A. When a local church determines that additional pastoral staff is needed, the senior pastor shall consult the conference superintendent before any local action is taken. The superintendent shall represent the ministerial education and guidance board and the ministerial appointments committee in the initial stages of selecting a suitable person for the proposed position.
- B. The process of selecting a staff member shall involve the senior pastor, the local church, the ministerial education and guidance board, and the ministerial appointments committee.
  1. The senior pastor shall have the privilege of nominating pastoral staff. They shall be in harmony with the doctrine of the church, agreeable with the pastor's approach to ministry and willing to work under leadership.
  2. The local board of administration shall select a personnel committee which may be the pastors cabinet, and must include the senior pastor. This committee shall establish a job description which delineates the responsibilities of the staff member and recommends salary and benefits. The committee shall screen and interview candidates, using conference applications and reference forms, and present its report to the local board of administration. If the local board of administration accepts the recommendation of the pastor and personnel committee, it shall then forward the recommendation to the ministerial education and guidance board for approval.
  3. The ministerial education and guidance board shall review the application and recommendation from the local church.
  4. If the ministerial education and guidance board approves the recommendation and the prospective staff member is (or anticipates being) in con-

ference relationship, the recommendation shall be referred to the ministerial appointments committee, which shall have final jurisdiction regarding appointment.

## **Supervision**

### **¶6720**

- A.** The pastoral staff assistant shall work under the supervision of the senior pastor, in accordance with the job description. The pastor and assistant(s) shall meet regularly (preferably weekly) for prayer and planning. They shall meet at least once yearly with the personnel committee to review the relationship of the assistant(s) to the senior pastor and to the church.
- B.** In case of a problem between the pastor and the assistant, the following procedure is recommended:
  - 1. The pastor and the assistant shall first seek to resolve the problem themselves.
  - 2. If they cannot resolve the problem, the matter shall be referred to the personnel committee for counsel and assistance.
  - 3. If, after a reasonable period of time, the problem is still unresolved, the pastor or the assistant shall request a formal hearing with the personnel committee. The committee shall listen to both the pastor and the assistant and make recommendations for resolution.
  - 4. If this procedure fails at the local church level, the pastor or the assistant or the personnel committee shall consult the conference superintendent who may convene the ministerial education and guidance board or the ministerial appointments committee to take whatever steps are necessary to solve the problem.

## **Change in Appointment**

### **¶6730**

- A.** Appointment of pastoral staff assistants shall be on a yearly basis, ending with the annual conference. An

assistant who desires a change shall notify the senior pastor who shall notify the personnel committee.

- B. The assistant shall also notify the conference superintendent and, if in conference relationship, the ministerial appointments committee.
- C. If for whatever reason the senior pastor finds it impossible to work effectively with the assistant, the conference superintendent shall be notified. The senior pastor shall then communicate this information to the assistant, the personnel committee of the church and, if the assistant is in conference relationship, the ministerial appointments committee. The personnel committee or the ministerial appointments committee, as appropriate, may then take action. This shall not occur prior to the annual conference without due cause and process.
- D. If the ministerial appointments committee wishes to appoint the assistant (when that person is in conference relationship) to another church, the conference superintendent shall first consult the senior pastor, then the assistant, the delegate(s) and the personnel committee of the church where the assistant serves.
- E. If the senior pastor is to be moved, the incoming pastor shall be given the responsibility of deciding whether to retain the existing assistant(s). Letters of resignation from all staff pastors shall, without exception, be submitted, when he/she arrives. The new senior pastor has up to one year to exercise the option on each resignation. No resignation of conference-appointed assistants shall be accepted without due cause and/or process, which shall include the conference superintendent, the ministerial appointments committee, and the designated personnel committee and/or team of delegates. The ministerial appointments committee shall retain all of its appointment authority including the timing of any change. When the senior pastor is to be moved, the ministerial appointments committee

shall communicate this information to each conference-appointed assistant and the personnel committee of the church.

## Formation of New Churches

### ¶ 6800

- A. The fulfillment of the Great Commission and the mission of the Free Methodist Church requires larger, growing and more effective local churches as well as more and varied churches. Reaching unreached people is the motive for the planting of new churches. Each church should be eager and open to win all people to Christ and incorporate them into membership. Yet within each population group there are persons who, because of geographic distance or language or cultural differences, can more readily be reached by new churches than by existing ones. Creative strategies and multiple styles of ministry are required.
- B. Most new churches will come into being as local churches form new groups nearby or use their facilities for new kinds of ministry. Others will come about as individuals or teams are commissioned at the local, conference, or general level to enter new areas. In still other cases, already existing groups may discover the benefit of affiliating with the Free Methodist Church and sharing in its mission. In each instance, the ultimate goal is not only to reach more people and see them mature in Christ, but also to reproduce new local churches.
- C. New Free Methodist churches shall be known as “church-planting projects,” “fellowships,” or “affiliated churches” in preparation for society status. These terms will be used in reporting appointments and for official denominational records. However, the name “Free Methodist Church” may be used in public reference by groups in any of these categories. All local congregations shall clearly identify themselves with the Free Methodist Church. The following guidelines pro-

vide consistency in policy while allowing latitude in strategy for multiplying local churches.

- D. An annual conference or local church may partner with Free Methodist World Missions to design and implement strategies for ministries to ethnic peoples within the United States. Groups of immigrant residents within the United States may be identified as missions initiatives by Free Methodist World Missions.

### **Church-Planting Projects**

¶6810

- A. A church-planting project is the first phase in the formation of most new churches.
- B. Authority to Form. Each church-planting project must have a sponsoring agency, which may be a local society or conference board or committee. The project comes into existence when the sponsoring agency announces its decision.
- C. Accountability and Responsibility. The church-planting pastor or lay project leader is accountable to the sponsoring agency which is responsible for providing assistance and support in the form of consultation, personnel, materials and/or finances.
- D. Membership. A church-planting pastor or lay project leader is responsible for preparing persons to become members of a new Free Methodist fellowship or society with assistance as needed from the sponsoring agency. Free Methodist members participating in the project retain membership in their home church.
- E. Financial Matters. Full self-support should be attained as early as possible. The church-planting project may hold or disburse its own funds only if authorized by the sponsoring agency, which retains auditing responsibility.
- F. Local Organization. A church-planting pastor or lay

project leader may appoint a ministry committee to provide counsel and direction.

- G. **Duration.** Church-planting projects are encouraged to move to fellowship or society status as soon as possible. Only under special circumstances approved by the sponsoring agency should a church-planting project continue more than two years if it has not progressed to the fellowship status (§6820).
- H. **Conference Relationship.** A lay project leader shall have an honorary seat in the conference and may be named in the appointments at the discretion of the ministerial appointments committee.

### **Fellowship Status**

#### **§6820**

- A. Fellowship status is the second phase in the formation of most new churches. The conferences administrative committee or board of evangelism shall serve as the fellowship's sponsoring agency.
- B. **Authority to Form.** A conference superintendent, with the concurrence of the sponsoring agency, may recognize a group as a fellowship when:
  - 1. enough prospective members have been adequately prepared for membership;
  - 2. these prospective members give public joint assent to the adoption of the *Book of Discipline* and individually answer the questions for full membership;
  - 3. a document of agreement containing the denominational mission statement, the official name of the group and adequate statements of mutual responsibility and accountability between the fellowship and the conference has been signed by these prospective members, the superintendent and representatives of the sponsoring agency.
- C. **Accountability and Responsibility.** The pastor or lay project leader and the fellowship shall be accountable to

the conference superintendent and the sponsoring agency. The fellowship shall be guided toward becoming a Free Methodist society. A written report of progress and needs for further guidance shall be submitted to the superintendent and sponsoring agency each quarter.

- D. Membership. A fellowship may receive members in all relationships and shall report them in the same manner as societies.
- E. Financial Matters.
  - 1. A fellowship shall hold and disburse its own funds but the sponsoring agency shall retain authority to audit.
  - 2. Any real property acquired by a fellowship prior to recognition as a society shall be in the name of the conference or the Free Methodist Church of North America, rather than in the name of the fellowship.
  - 3. In the case of dissolution of a fellowship, the accumulated assets become the property of the sponsoring agency.
  - 4. A fellowship is encouraged to give a tithe of church income to conference and denominational ministries as the first step towards full participation in these financial responsibilities.
- F. Local Organization. Members of the fellowship shall elect a local board of administration of no fewer than three members, including the secretary, treasurer and honorary delegate. The pastor in charge may nominate officers or members at-large other than the delegate. The local board of administration may form other boards and committees as needed.
- G. Duration. A fellowship shall remain in this relationship no longer than three years unless the sponsoring agency grants an extension. In the event of the dissolution of a fellowship, letters of transfer shall be issued to its members in good standing.

- H. **Conference Relationship.** A fellowship shall be represented in the annual conference by an honorary delegate who shall have a voice but no vote.

## **Affiliate Congregations**

### **¶6830**

- A. Congregations established outside of Free Methodist sponsorship and wishing to become part of the denomination may enter as affiliate congregations.
- B. **Authority to Recognize.** A conference superintendent, with the concurrence of the conference administrative committee, may receive a congregation in an affiliate relationship when:
  - 1. the members of the congregation have received adequate orientation to the doctrine, organization, and mission of the Free Methodist Church;
  - 2. a document of affiliation has been signed by the governing board of the congregation, the superintendent, and representatives of the conference, affirming the Articles of Religion and the mission statement of the Free Methodist Church and describing mutual responsibilities; and
  - 3. the members have given public joint assent to the document of affiliation and questions for church membership.
- C. **Accountability and Responsibility.** The pastor and board of the affiliate church shall meet periodically (at least twice a year) with the conference superintendent or designated liaison to review and strengthen the connectional relationship and shall participate in conference fellowship, mentoring and reporting procedures. The pastor and board shall consult with the ministerial appointments committee of the conference regarding any proposed changes in pastoral leadership during affiliate status.
- D. **Membership.** An affiliate congregation may receive members in all relationships and report them in the same manner as societies.



- E. Financial Matters.
  - 1. An affiliate congregation is encouraged to contribute generously to conference and denominational ministries as the first step towards full participation in these responsibilities.
  - 2. Staff members are eligible but not required to participate in the denominational pension program during affiliate status if an alternate retirement plan is already in effect.
  - 3. An affiliate congregation which owns real property need not incorporate the trust clause of ¶6400.D into its deed until recognition as a society occurs. Denominational assistance for capital improvement shall be in the form of loans repayable if the church chooses not to become a Free Methodist society.
- F. Local Organization. The governing board of an affiliate congregation shall be guided by the *Book of Discipline* and the mission of the Free Methodist Church in its decisions and the development of new ministries but may retain its existing bylaws until recognition as a society occurs.
- G. Duration. The normal duration of this relationship shall not exceed three years from the adoption of the document of affiliation. At the end of this period the congregation would become a society, terminate the affiliate relationship or request the conference to grant an extension of time for clarification and development of denominational relationships.
- H. Conference Relationship. An affiliated congregation shall be represented in the annual conference by an honorary delegate who shall have a voice but no vote.

## Societies

### ¶6840

- A. A society is the term for a fully organized local Free Methodist church.

- B. Authority to Form. The conference superintendent, in consultation with the annual conference administrative committee, may authorize a fellowship or affiliated church to become a Free Methodist society when:
  - 1. it has developed a mission statement that is in harmony with the denomination;
  - 2. it has sufficient members, maturity and financial stability to function in this relationship;
  - 3. it has fulfilled the provisions of ¶6820.B.2-3.
  
- C. Financial Matters.
  - 1. An affiliated church must insert the trust clause of ¶6400.D into any of its property deeds or articles of incorporation before being recognized as a society.
  - 2. New societies must acknowledge the trust clause requirements in the written document of agreement.
  - 3. The conference may provide a phased plan to bring new societies into full participation in all conference and denominational financial responsibilities as soon as possible.
  
- D. Conference Relationships. Only recognized societies shall be entitled to voting representation in the annual conference, but members of Free Methodist fellowships or affiliated churches shall be counted in conference and denominational totals for all other purposes.

### **New Societies on Conference Boundary**

¶6850 When a church-planting project, fellowship, or society is formed near or within a territory or population group also served by or assigned to a denominational entity other than its sponsoring agency, all parties shall seek to establish and enhance fellowship and connectional ties as noted in ¶6810, ¶6820, ¶6830, while recognizing evangelistic effectiveness as the highest priority.