

CHAPTER III

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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CHAPTER III

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A. CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE

PREAMBLE

¶A/300. The Christian life can be consciously experienced because it is a relationship between persons — the personal God and humans made in His likeness. Every person is confronted by this personal God, and the outcome of this confrontation is primarily affected by how the person responds.

In love God has fully provided for the salvation of all mankind. But only those who respond in repentance and faith can experience His grace as a redemptive reality.

God deals with all men as free and responsible persons. Therefore, He not only makes His grace available on condition of a free response, but He also reveals himself and makes known His life to all who put their trust in Him. The redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ is experienced as an awareness of His love and fellowship.

Those who are justified by faith experience the peace of God. When His Holy Spirit comes to the heart, there is joy. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is the assurance of our relationship to God as His dear children.

1. AWAKENING TO GOD

¶A/301. The Scriptures teach that men and women are corrupt in every aspect of their nature and have gone far from original righteousness. Added to the depravity common to human beings because of the Fall there are the enslaving effects of committed sins. It is impossible for them to come to God in themselves, but God in His grace reaches out to every sinner.

God takes the initiative in making sinners aware of their needs, using His Word, the revelation in Jesus Christ, the gospel proclamation of the church, the witness of individuals, and the circumstances of life. By such means, the Holy Spirit awakens sinners to their needs and to the truth of the gospel (John 16:8, 13). Awakened, they must make a response, either rejecting the call of God or turning to God in repentance and faith.

2. REPENTANCE AND RESTITUTION

¶A/302. Awakened by the Holy Spirit to their lost condition before God, sinners may move toward God. Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), all must repent in order to come into a right relationship with God.

Repentance calls for a sincere and thorough change of mind. To repent is to turn from sin with genuine sorrow and to turn to God in confession and submission. The whole person is involved: mind, feelings, will. Repentance is more than regret for wrongdoing or sorrow at being caught. It is personal sorrow that one has sinned against God. Repentance demands a radical turning from sin and a sincere turning to God. The result is a saving relationship with Christ.

Sincere repentance leads to moral renewal, often evidenced by restitution — the effort to right one’s wrongs whenever possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zaccheus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 19:8; 3:8). Neither repentance nor restitution save, however, without faith in Christ (Romans 3:22).

3. TRUST

¶A/303. Trust is confidence in and utter reliance upon God (2 Corinthians 3:4-5; 1 Timothy 4:10). Trust includes full acceptance of the promises of God, complete dependence on Christ’s sacrifice for salvation, and unconditional commitment to the will of God. God’s grace and blessings are open to those who turn to Him with firm reliance on His integrity, love, and ability.

Christians experience God’s loving care and guidance as they trust and follow Him (Ephesians 3:12). When they think they are sufficient unto themselves they become frustrated by trying to do for themselves what God wants to do for them. Self-sufficiency is inconsistent with perfect trust (1 Timothy 6:17).

4. ASSURANCE

¶A/304. God gives assurance of salvation and peace of heart to all who repent and put their faith in Him (Romans 5:1-2). The Holy Spirit witnesses to their own spirits that they are forgiven of their sins and adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:16).

The Christian has peace with God through Jesus Christ because guilt is taken away and fear of judgment is removed (Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 4:17-18). God continues to give assurance to believers through the Scriptures, the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit, and love for and fellowship with other Christians (1 John 3:14).

5. CONSECRATION

¶A/305. God calls His people to set themselves apart to His will and purpose (Romans 6:13; 12:1). Anything thus set apart is said to be consecrated.

All Christians are called to be holy and without blame before God in love (Ephesians 5:27). Christ demands that His disciples follow Him in mind and spirit (Romans 7:24-25). If Christians are to witness effectively in the world they must be distinguished by righteousness, peace, joy, faith, hope, and love (John 13:35; 14:15; Galatians 5:22-24). God wants a special kind of people for His work (Matthew 16:24; Romans 14:17; 8:6-9; John 17:17; Psalm 100:2). When Christians sincerely follow Christ and listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks in the Scriptures, they should sense their need of cleansing from inward sin. They should desire earnestly to be filled with the love of God and long for a relationship with Christ which will satisfy their deepest inward need and empower them to serve and obey the Lord (Ephesians 5:1-14; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 14:1; Acts 1:8).

Christians, therefore, must consecrate themselves to God and surrender their wills to the will of the Heavenly Father (Matthew 19:21). Those who desire inward sanctification must deny themselves, bear the cross, and follow Christ. Devotion to self is idolatry. Christians who are divided in their loyalty cannot serve God victoriously and steadfastly. Christ must be given the preeminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life (John 15:10; Mark 14:36; 1 Peter 1:14).

Therefore, to be open to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers must give themselves without reservation to God, freely yielding all they have to the purposes of God and devoting every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than to self (Colossians 3:8-13). No Christian can be delivered from the dominion of sin if self is permitted to reign in the life. No one can serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

6. ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

¶A/306. Christ gave himself even unto death for the cleansing of His church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 13:12). His disciples are called to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 7:1). Christ has provided in the atonement for the believer to be entirely sanctified (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:8-10). Sanctification begins with regeneration and results in a deeper relationship when the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; 1 John 1:5-2:1). This cleansing accompanies the fullness of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Acts 15:8-9).

Paul prayed: "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly;

and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it: (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

God the Holy Spirit is the sanctifier (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Coming into the life at conversion, He fills with His presence when the Christian's consecration is complete, cleansing the heart and empowering for witness and service (John 3:5; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:3; Acts 1:8). He sheds God's love throughout the heart and life of the Christian (Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:12-13).

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

Inward sanctification cleanses the Christian from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (1 Peter 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15-20). Cleansing makes one perfect, not in performance, but in love (Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:12-13).

7. GROWING IN CHRIST

¶A/307. The Christian has a new relationship with God and a new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The joy of this new life in Christ may for a time obscure the need for growing up in Christ, often referred to as Christian maturity. The new Christian must ultimately choose between growth and decline.

The Bible is the Christian's growth manual. It must be taken seriously, read, and studied for meaning. If the growing Christian is listening, God will speak through its pages. The value and meaning of life are found in this book. Scripture is a means of cleansing and changing attitudes and acts.

The growing Christian is increasingly sensitive to both good and evil, steadily learning to distinguish between them. The Holy Spirit will guide in harmony with the Scriptures. One must be alert to the Spirit's directives, immediately resisting temptation and responding to God's call to higher living.

Maturity involves personal development which yields growing respect for one's self and for others. Respect for others necessitates self-respect. The Ten Commandments, summarized into two by Jesus, teach the nature of respect in the growth of the moral person. The quality of a Christian relationship to others affects the quality of one's own life.

Growth in Christ requires readiness to mend relationships both with God and with others (James 5:16).

Growth in Christ involves responsibility for the well-being of others, all of whom are loved by God and made in His image. Christians need to love and to be loved. They will express their love both by deeds of kindness and by personal words of witness that Christ is the embodiment of God's love and the Savior of the world.

Maturity in Christ should develop adequacy for life and a concern for the transformation of the world according to God's will. Trusting in God and sustained by the Holy Spirit, the Christian will replace attitudes of defeat and futility with those of courage and confidence.

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christlikeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. It should be as conversation, avoiding artificial phrases and tones. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often circumstances (James 5:16). The Bible teaches that both individual and group praying are effective for those who are in Christ. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasizes our dependence on God. Both prayer and Bible study should be regular, without becoming mere rituals (Psalm 119:11, 105).

Growing Christians find their proper environment in the fellowship of believers. They do not live independently from the body of Christ. Worship requires a proper attitude toward God. It involves the believers' active participation. They must prepare mind and spirit for communication with God. Sincere followers of Christ reach out to God in praise, thanksgiving, dedication, confession, faith, and service. As a part of the body of Christ they must involve themselves in corporate worship, as well as in the other ministries of the church. Support, insight, inspiration, and discipline are fruits of fellowship. Small group participation is a means of grace and growth.

Growth comes with the acceptance of duty in the life of the church. The Holy Spirit provides Christians with talents which can be developed for the common good. The use of these talents is a means of growth. God ministers to them as they engage in activities pleasing to the Lord.

8. THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

¶A/308. The Holy Spirit distributes, as He wills, gifts of speech and service devoted to the common good and the building of the church. Gifts are to be exercised under the lordship of Christ. The believer is to seek as the evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness, not the gifts themselves, but the giver. The greater gifts, however, are to be desired above the

lesser. "Make love your aim, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Corinthians 14:1).

The Apostle Paul gives guidelines, helping the church to discern the authenticity of gifts of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings order out of chaos. This is true of His work in creation, as well as in redemption. He is never the author of confusion but is the source of love, power, and a sound mind. Therefore, in public worship everything is to be done decently and in order. Speaking or teaching to speak with unintelligible sounds is not consistent with such order. The language of worship is to be the language of the people. All communication in worship is to be experienced with understanding (1 Corinthians 14:6-12).

Life in the Spirit is characterized by pure love. The gifts of the Spirit are to be accompanied by the fruit of the Spirit. Every gift of the Spirit is exercised with the love and compassion of Christ. Unkind critical attitudes and schism in the church are evidences of the flesh (Galatians 5:13-15).

9. DIVINE HEALING

¶ **A/309.** We believe that all healing, whether of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God who is "above all and through all and in all." He may heal by the mediation of surgery, medication, change of environment, counseling, corrected attitudes, or through the restorative processes of nature itself. He may heal through one or more of the above in combination with prayer, or He may heal by direct intervention in response to prayer. The Scriptures report many cases of the latter kind of healing which centers in the life and ministry of the apostles and the church. Consistent with the Scriptures (James 5:14-15), therefore, we urge our pastors to make opportunity for the sick and afflicted to come before God in the fellowship of the church, in strong faith that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is both able and willing to heal. At the same time, we recognize that although God's sovereign purposes are good and He is working toward a final redemption which assures wholeness to all believers, He may not grant physical healing for all in this life. We believe that in such cases He can glorify himself through the resurrection to life everlasting.

B. CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

¶ A/315. We expect all who are received into the adult membership of the church to be good examples of Christian conduct. We also recognize that growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) can take time and exposure to the witness of Scripture and holy living, requiring love and patience. Free Methodists, therefore, seek to live according to scriptural principles expressed in the membership Covenant (Pars. 156-160), and applied to life in the following statements.

AS REGARDS GOD

1. FALSE WORSHIP

¶ A/320. Jesus Christ affirmed the Old Testament commandment, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:4-5). This precludes the worship of any other person, spirit, or thing.

Our people are to abstain from all practices which lead to idolatry. New Age teachings, and occult practices such as spiritism, witchcraft, and astrology must be avoided. Moreover, Christians must be on guard against the idolatries of the heart — the worship of things, pleasures, and self (1 John 2:16).

2. SECRET SOCIETIES

¶ A/321. 1. Christians’ supreme loyalty must be to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:9; Acts 2:36). In all associations, Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, we require all members to avoid solemn bonds of fellowship with unbelievers which may confuse their identity and cloud their witness.

2. Those voluntary associations which demand an oath, affirmation, promise of secrecy, or a secret password as conditions of membership are to be considered secret societies. In contradiction to the teaching of Christ and the New Testament, these societies require pledges and vows which bind the future actions of those who join (Matthew 5:34-37). Christians, therefore, who swear their unreserved loyalty to any secret society are in direct conflict with their unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. Christians must keep themselves free to follow the will of the Lord in all things.

3. Most secret societies are religious in nature. Prayers are offered,

hymns are sung, and members engage in acts of worship before an altar. Chaplains are chosen to lead in worship and to conduct funerals. But the worship of these societies is unitarian, not Christian; the religion is moralistic, not redemptive; and the ends are humanistic, not evangelical (Acts 4:12). We insist, therefore, that those who are members of our church refrain from membership in all secret societies and that those who unite with the Church resign from active membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

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

3. THE LORD'S DAY

¶ **A/322.** God makes clear in Scripture by both example and command that one day in seven is to be devoted to worship and rest (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus declared, "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath" (Mark 2:27). We need a special day in which we turn from our work and concerns to worship God and to renew body, mind, and spirit. The New Testament reveals that the early church moved from observing the last day of the week — the Jewish sabbath — to worshipping God in Christ on the first day of the week — the Lord's day, the day of resurrection.

In keeping the sabbath principle in a Lord's day setting, we urge our people to make corporate worship with the Christian community the essential activity of Sunday (Hebrews 10:25) and to set the day apart by engaging in worship, fellowship, and ministries that express their praise to God, nurture their faith in Christ, build the Body of Christ, and serve the needs of persons around them. We urge our people to refrain from unnecessary labors and commerce on the Lord's Day, recognizing that salvation and all the resources of life come not from our own strivings but by grace as we rest in God (Isaiah 58:13-14; Hebrews 4:9). We encourage pastors and others who must be involved in necessary work on Sunday to observe the sabbath principle on another day.

AS REGARDS MYSELF AND OTHERS

4. HUMAN RIGHTS

¶ **A/330.** As a faith community, we believe that human beings are created in the image of God and therefore have inherent dignity and intrinsic value. This conviction forms the foundation of our approach to the principle of human dignity. Human life in any of its stages is sacred to us as Christians, because of our confidence that life exists in relation

to God. Thus all human life must be valued, respected and protected through all its stages, whether nascent, mature or senile.

We affirm the intrinsic value and inherent dignity of every human being regardless of gender, ethnicity, age or disability. We confess our sinful human tendency toward prejudice and turn from it. We call on people everywhere to respect the worth of all persons and to actively seek justice for all.

5. THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

¶ **A/331.** Our convictions about the inherent worth of human life form the foundation of our approach to bioethics. These complex bioethical issues involve religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Therefore, Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law of the state or the possibilities of safe medical procedures.

¶ **A/331.1** Supremacy of God.

God is sovereign: the world and all that is in it belongs to God. Though God's eternal purposes may never be thwarted by human action, we are still free and responsible to make God-consistent choices in matters of life and death. Christians live in the reality that human beings are created for an eternal purpose. As we attend to human suffering, we acknowledge that the ability of medical technology to end human suffering is finite.

Therefore, we accept our responsibility to use this technology with wisdom and compassion; honoring God, who is ultimately supreme.

¶ **A/331.2** Abortion.

The intentional destruction of human life is murder when any degree of malice or selfishness accompanies the decision and act. Therefore, induced abortion is morally unjustifiable except when the act has been decided upon by responsible and competent persons, including Christian and professional counsel, for the purpose of saving the life of a pregnant woman.

Abortion, when it serves the ends of population or birth control, personal preference of convenience, and social or economic security, must be considered as selfish and malicious. Therefore, the intentional abortion of nascent life from conception on, except when extreme circumstances requires termination of a pregnancy to save the life of the pregnant woman, must be judged to be a violation of God's command, "You shall not commit murder."

We recommend that Free Methodists offer compassionate alterna-

tives and long-term care to women considering abortion. We recommend similar long-term care for all persons impacted by previous abortions. We also urge continuing support for those involved in parenting and in the adoption and fostering of children.

While firmly opposed to abortion, we recognize that those whose views contrary to ours should be treated with respect and dignity and that God's forgiveness is offered to all.

¶A/331.3 Euthanasia.

There is no justification for euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. It is understood that a terminally ill person's request that life not be sustained by heroic measures, does not constitute euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. We recognize that it is permissible to use painkillers and other medications, which carry the risk of shortening life so long as the intent is to relieve or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death. We further recognize the responsibility of medical professionals to alleviate pain within these parameters. Christians must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living. We believe that there is no such thing as a "useless" life. The value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God who loves us.

¶ A/331.4 Reproductive Technology.

Reproductive technologies generate a large number of ethical, medical, legal and theological questions even as they offer hope. The guiding principle, that all human life must be valued, respected and protected throughout all its stages must be carefully and consistently applied to every new development. A Christian theology of family (A/341.1) must also inform these decisions. Simply because technology makes a procedure possible and civil law defines it as legal, does not mean a procedure is morally acceptable.

¶ A/331.5 Other Ethical Dilemmas.

These biblical principles, which guide our approach to bioethics will need to be applied on an ongoing basis to other ethical dilemmas rising from advances in medical technology. Such ethical dilemmas may include but not be limited to: the allocation of finite resources, organ transplantation, end-of-life concerns, genetic engineering and testing, gender identity issues and others.

¶ A/331.6 Suffering and Sovereignty.

Though God's love is steadfast, he has chosen to not protect us from suffering. God meets us in our suffering, to comfort us, to shape a Christ-

like character within, and to make us instruments of his healing. Chronic disease, diminished physical capacity or ongoing disability do not constitute the end of life and need not compromise one's trust in God.

For the Christian death is not the end of life, but the transition into eternity. Therefore, physical death is not the ultimate enemy, but part of our journey. God's love sustains us in our suffering. He ministers to us personally and through the healing environment of Christian community. Divine wisdom in the face of suffering comes to us through scripture, prayer, godly counsel and the work of the Holy Spirit. As we are comforted, we are called to extend God's comfort to those who suffer.

6. WAR AND PEACE

¶ **A/332.** 1. We recognize the sovereign authority of government and the duty of all Christians to reverence the power, to obey the law, and to participate righteously in the administration of lawful order in the nation under whose protection they reside (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7). Members of our church should bear the responsibilities of good citizenship, and they have the right to act in the enforcement of law and the defense of the peace in accord with the conscience of each person.

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

3. It is our firm conviction that none of our people should be required to enter military training or to bear arms and that the consciences of our individual members should be respected (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Therefore, we claim exemption from all military service for those who register officially with the church as conscientious objectors to war.

7. CIVIL OATHS

¶ **A/333.** Vain and rash swearing is forbidden by our Lord (Matthew 5:34-37; James 5:12). However, we hold that the Christian religion does not prohibit the taking of an oath where it is required by a public official. In every case, the Christian must speak in justice and in truth (Exodus 20:16; Ephesians 4:25).

8. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

¶ **A/334.** The Free Methodist Church views the education of its youth as a parental responsibility (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Ephesians 6:4). Part of that responsibility may be delegated to either public or Christian day schools.

The church gives moral support to the public school system. However, we reserve the right of our children and youth to be exempted from participating in dancing, assignments, and other school-related activities which conflict with the moral and social values held by the denomination. When such conflicts arise, we ask that the students' academic standing not be in jeopardy, but when necessary other suitable assignments be substituted.

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

We believe that materials used in classrooms should reflect historical accuracy, as in the description of a country's religious roots. We reject historical revisionism that repudiates or distorts religious influences. Accordingly, we will work to promote legislation and school management policy to encourage history course development and the selection of materials which present these religious themes as they occur in reliable historical sources.

9. DISCIPLINE OF THE BODY

¶ **A/335.** 1. The Scriptures instruct us to honor the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:23).

2. Christians should be characterized by balance and moderation. Extreme patterns of conduct must be avoided. They are also to keep themselves free from addictions or compulsions. For example: watching television, drinking coffee, and eating sweets are not evil in themselves, but when used to excess are injurious to one's health and witness.

3. Christians are to be characterized by a disciplined style of life. They should not indulge selfishly in the pleasures of this world. To the contrary, they are to live simply in service to others, and practice stewardship of health, time, and other God-given resources.

4. The Free Methodist Church is committed to help every Christian attain such a disciplined life. Although unhealthy habits are not easily broken, believers need not live in such bondage. They find help through the work of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the counsel and support of other Christians.

10. MISUSE OF DRUGS

¶ **A/335.1.** 1. Christians find that life is full, abundant, and free in Jesus Christ (John 8:36; 10:10). Therefore, our people abstain from whatever damages, destroys, or distorts His life in them. Illicit drugs are prime offenders. Marijuana, cocaine, and heroin, widely used in our time, cause untold damage to people and relationships. Such drugs restrict personal development, damage the body, and reinforce an unrealistic view of life.

2. Our people abstain from the use of alcoholic beverages (Mark 12:30-31) because Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves. Alcohol, a legalized drug, is damaging to individuals, families, and society. It is unpredictably addictive and its destructive effects cannot be fully measured. Where it is used, it leaves a trail of broken marriages, family violence, crime, industrial loss, ill health, injury, and death. As concerned Christians, our people practice abstinence for the sake of health, family, and neighbors. Moreover, we see the adverse social consequences as so pervasive that we seek by abstaining to make a united social witness to the freedom Christ gives.

3. Our people refrain from the use of tobacco because Christians are to treat their bodies as sacred trusts. It is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as an expensive and offensive addiction. Free Methodists take seriously the words of Paul, the apostle, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

4. We caution our people against indiscriminate use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs because drug dependency of any kind inhibits fullness of life in Christ. Though the therapeutic value of such substances may be great, their potency, proliferation, and easy accessibility require that Christians be vigilant against their misuse.

5. We counsel our congregations to be understanding and supportive toward those who come to Christ with problems of addiction. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we urge our people to recognize fully the addictive power of alcohol,

tobacco, and other drugs, and to give whatever helps and support are needed while new Christians seek full deliverance.

6. As a further evidence of an awakened conscience, our people refrain from the cultivation, manufacture, or sale of any of these harmful substances.

11. STEWARDSHIP OF POSSESSIONS

¶ **A/336.** The Scriptures teach the privilege and responsibility of private ownership. Christians hold title to possessions under civil law, but regard all they have as the property of God entrusted to them as stewards. Although they may accumulate goods they lay not up for themselves treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-20; Luke 12:16-21), but give liberally for the needs of others and the ministry of the church (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13).

12. GAMBLING

¶ **A/336.1.** Gambling contradicts faith in God who rules all the affairs of His world not by chance but by His providential care. Gambling lacks both the dignity of wages earned and the honor of a gift. It takes substance from the pocket of a neighbor without yielding a fair exchange. Because it excites greed, it destroys the initiative of honest toil, and often results in tragic addiction. Government sponsorship of lotteries only enlarges the problem. Because of the evils it encourages, we refrain from gambling in all its forms for conscience sake, and as a witness to the freedom we have in Christ.

13. ENTERTAINMENT

¶ **A/336.2.** 1. General Guidance.

Many forms of entertainment (television, videos, movies, recorded music, printed material, electronically distributed media, etc.), though not inherently evil, may have content that arouses fleshly impulses, rather than nurturing life in the Spirit.

In an increasingly secular society, Christians must carefully evaluate every form of entertainment in light of biblical principles (Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:1-3, Galatians 5:13-26), avoiding every form of evil, while honoring Christ in everything (Colossians 3:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

2. Dancing.

In the Psalms, we are encouraged to praise God with songs, clapping, shouting, instruments, and dance. Christians throughout the ages have glorified God with bodily motions.

However, many modern forms of dance contribute to the life of the flesh rather than the life of the Spirit. The music is frequently designed

to arouse sexual excitement, the atmosphere is conducive to drug and alcohol use, and dance steps and postures may be sexually provocative. We hold that such activities and their environments do not honor Christ and are contrary to the admonition of God's Word to avoid every kind of evil.

3. Evaluate all entertainment.

Questions such as the following should, therefore, be considered regarding any form of entertainment: Is this activity compatible with my witness as a Christian? Is it consistent with a conscience responsive to the Holy Spirit? Will participation or observation expose me to unnecessary temptation? Are my motives pure?

We expect Free Methodists to evaluate all forms of entertainment in the light of biblical standards for holy living, and to abstain from those that do not meet such standards.

14. PORNOGRAPHY

¶ **A/336.3.** Pornography awakens lust in the heart. It depicts and encourages indecent and deviant sexual conduct such as adultery, bestiality, incest, rape, sodomy, and child molestation. Its effects are a progressive decay of moral values, beginning with addiction, followed by a desensitizing of conscience, and tending toward the wanton acting out of illegitimate or perverted sexual conduct, often victimizing the innocent and unsuspecting.

For society, pornography is a virulently degenerative force. It damages and destroys. For Christians, pornography is an abomination which must be opposed by any legitimate means.

15. SIMPLICITY OF LIFE

¶ **A/337.** While customs and man-made standards change from age to age throughout the world, we recognize that there are certain scriptural principles which should govern Christians in their attitudes and conduct. Whatever we buy, use, or wear should help us in winning others to Christ, edifying the body of Christ, and glorifying Christ (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

Those biblical principles which should govern Christians in their choice and purchase of all possessions include simplicity, modesty, purity, propriety, humility, and economy. Christians should avoid extravagance, endeavoring to be clean, tidy, attractive, modest representatives of Christ (1 Timothy 2:8-10; 1 Peter 3:1-5).

The principles of simplicity of life should be considered when we purchase or build or furnish a home, buy a car, select clothes, shop for food, and in all other matters.

16. EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE

¶ A/338. 1. All persons have the right to gainful and meaningful employment irrespective of sex, race, color, national origin, or creed (Romans 10:12).

2. We recognize the right of employees to organize for the purpose of seeking in a proper way their betterment in labor, industry, and business. Oath-bound secret pacts or acts of violence designed to violate or defend these rights cannot be condoned.

3. We also recognize the right of the individual to remain independent of organization. It is our firm conviction that none of our people should be required to become members or fee payers of any labor union or professional organization whose activities and policies violate the individual member's religious values and convictions as expressed in the *Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church. Therefore, on the basis of conscience, we claim exemption from membership or fee paying for those members who find their religious convictions in conflict with the activities and policies of a particular labor union or similar organization.

4. In labor relations, justice is an indispensable ingredient in the Christian's code of ethics. It is a part of God's nature and of His norm for us. The Christian concern for justice is a peculiar one; it is primarily a concern to do justice and only secondarily a concern to obtain justice. This norm is equally applicable to employer and employee (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1).

5. The Christian should not view management and labor as ultimately hostile opponents. Distrust and hostility should not be brought either to the place of work or to the negotiating table. There is no place in the Christian ethic for exploitation, for using people as a means to a selfish end, or for seeing them primarily as economic units. The adversary system for rigid confrontation should not be used, but a problem-solving approach is supported and implemented.

6. Our people should endeavor to make their witness effective where they work, remembering that a Christian workman is responsible first to God and then to the employer and the organization (Matthew 7:12; Colossians 3:17).

AS REGARDS THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOD

17. CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

¶ A/340. Christians are citizens of the kingdom of God and also of this world. They receive benefits and bear responsibilities from both

relationships. Their first allegiance is to God, but that does not release them from responsibilities to country if they do not conflict with the clear teachings of the Scriptures (Romans 13:1-7). They should pray for “all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:2) and should “be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (1 Peter 2:13). They should actively participate in civic life by involvement in constructive efforts for the improvement of social, cultural, and educational standards (Matthew 5:13-16); by opposition to degrading influences (2 Peter 2:4-10); and by the exercise of the right to vote.

18. MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

¶ **A/341.** The Free Methodist Church recognizes marriage and family as institutions ordained by God. Given that the church is the embodiment of “the family of God,” conduct within the church family should mirror the conduct expected within the human family. As such, guidelines for conduct are presented to assist in maintaining the health and sanctity of marriage, family, and church family.

1. Nature of Marriage.

At creation God instituted marriage for the well-being of humanity (Genesis 2:20-24; Mark 10:6-9). Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong relationship which the Scriptures call “one flesh.” In this union the two retain their individual identities, but subordinate them to the larger relationship of marriage.

Marriage is the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage. It condemns all unnatural sexual behavior such as incestuous abuse, child molestation, homosexual activity and prostitution (1 Corinthians 6:9; Romans 1:26-27).

Marriage, therefore, should be safeguarded and supported by both church and society. This calls for public vows. It is not enough for a couple to live together in private commitment; they are to covenant before God and state.

2. Nurturing Healthy Marriages and Families.

The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the Apostle’s command (2 Corinthians 6:14), we expect them to marry only believers. Before entering into marriage, all should counsel with their Christian leaders. Young people contemplating marriage should seek parental consent. Our ministers shall not officiate at the marriage of any person under age, unless parents or guardians are present or have given written consent, and unless two witnesses are present who know the couple.

We require our churches to provide graded materials for instruction in sex education and preparation for marriage. Pastors shall see that all

candidates for marriage have received premarital guidance, using materials consistent with denominational teaching. We further encourage local churches and conferences to provide resources such as seminars and retreats to strengthen marriages and build Christian homes.

3. Value and Nurture of Children.

The Free Methodist Church expects to be interactively involved with parents in teaching and nurturing all children in the foundations of the Christian faith. It is the purpose of the family, both the human and family of God, to provide a setting in which adults and children can grow together in their love of God and love for each other (Deuteronomy 11:18-19; Joel 1:3).

Due to the value Jesus demonstrated toward children (Matthew 19:14), our churches make ministry to children and youth a priority. Ministries focus not only on leading young persons to faith in Jesus Christ but also on enfoldng them into church membership and ministry.

4. Healing Troubled Marriages and Families.

The church recognizes that the effect from crisis in marriage is not limited to the married couple but also to the children, parents, siblings, and the church family. The church which is alive to God has spiritual resources for all those directly or indirectly affected by marriages in trouble. The chief resources are the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the Word, prayer and the sacraments, counsel and support. Through the church's ministry, God can bring healing and reconciliation.

Domestic violence, either emotional or physical, increases with the decadence of society and does occur in church-related families. It often jeopardizes the safety of a spouse or children and may threaten life itself. Family members so threatened need both spiritual and emotional support and healing (Malachi 2:13-16).

5. Separation.

When an impossible situation is destroying the home, Christians may separate. In such cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

6. Divorce.

When marriages break down completely, we recognize that, in the words of Jesus, "hardness of heart" is implicit (Matthew 19:3-8; Mark 10:5-9).

Regarding divorce, the following scriptural principles apply:

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

- b. A person denies the faith who deserts a spouse deliberately and for an extended period of time. When the desertion leads subsequently to divorce, the deserted partner is no longer bound by the marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- c. Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union. When reconciliation is impossible, divorce may be unavoidable (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

7. Recovery After Divorce.

Divorce always produces trauma. It is a breaking of covenant, thus violating God's intention for faithfulness in marriage (Malachi 2:13-16). For this reason divorced persons should be helped to understand and remedy the causes for the divorce. They should seek pastoral counsel. Professional counsel may be necessary. If unhealthy patterns of relating exist, they must be replaced by new attitudes and behaviors which are Christlike (Colossians 3:1-15). Where hardness of heart is present repentance and forgiveness are required. The goals of the process are personal healing and restoration to ministry within the church. The church must extend its concern to family and others affected by the divorce.

Leaders who minister to the divorced must be persons of integrity who are mature in faith and in control of their own sexuality.

8. Remarriage

A divorced member who is considering marriage or a member who is considering marriage to a divorcee shall submit to and follow the counsel and guidance of the church.

Persons who have been involved in divorce while in a state of unbelief shall not for that reason alone be barred from becoming members, even though they remarry. Similarly, believers are not prohibited from marrying a person who was divorced while an unbeliever. A member of the church divorced from an adulterous spouse or deserted by an unbelieving mate, after attempts at forgiveness and reconciliation have been rejected, may remarry (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-11; 1 Corinthians 7:15).

9. Refusal of Counsel.

When a member divorces a spouse in violation of the Scriptures, or remarries without seeking the counsel or following the guidance of the pastor or the membership care committee, the committee shall review the case and recommend appropriate action to the local board of administration. Corrective action may include removal from leadership, suspension, or expulsion from membership.

10. Exceptional Cases.

Cases may arise for which the pastor or the membership care committee can find no explicit direction in the *Book of Discipline*. In such

cases, the pastor or the committee shall confer with the conference superintendent.

11. In those countries where civil law makes application of the prior sections of this paragraph impossible, a conference or mission district may implement marital status norms for membership compatible with the laws of the country, consistent with scripture, and in line with our redemptive purposes.

19. HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

¶ **A/342.** Homosexual behavior, as all sexual deviation, is a perversion of God's created order (Genesis 1-3). The sanctity of marriage and the family is to be preserved against all manner of immoral conduct (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:23-28; Leviticus 20:10-16), thus the Free Methodist Church does not recognize the legitimacy or participation in the practice of same-sex marriage.

Homosexual behavior is contrary to the will of God as clearly stated in Scripture (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-10).

Persons with homosexual inclinations are accountable to God for their behavior (Romans 14:12).

The forgiving and delivering grace of God in Christ is all-sufficient for the homosexual (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25; Luke 4:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

The church has a personal and corporate responsibility to be God's instrument of healing, restoring love to the homosexual seeking recovery of Christian conduct and life-style (2 Corinthians 2:7-8).

The church opposes legislation which makes homosexual conduct or life-style legitimate.

C. CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

AS REGARDS THE CHURCH

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIVING CHURCH

¶ **A/350.** 1. 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).

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. Ethnic groups in North America who, for cultural reasons, encounter difficulties with membership procedures as outlined in Paragraphs 351-361 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 Council on Ethnic Ministries 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.

2. PHILOSOPHY OF MEMBERSHIP

PREAMBLE

¶ **A/351.** 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 principles of Christian conduct as expressed in Paragraphs A/315-342 are to be the maturing life goals of all who are invited into membership.

*a. Holiness:**The Great Commandment of Our Community*

¶ A/352. 1. The church pursues holiness in its most comprehensive meaning of loving God with all our 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. We call 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 contemporary sin, be it addiction, selfishness, evil speaking, or anything else that dishonors the name of God.

*b. Disciple-making:**The Great Commission of Our Community*

2. 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 long-time Christians.

*c. Christian Conduct:**The Lifestyle of Our Community*

3. The church presents our vision of the Christian life described in Chapter III of the *Book of Discipline* as the conduct descriptive of our maturing Christian lives.

*d. Entry Requirements of Our Community:**Repentance, Faith and Baptism*

4. The entry level for membership in our church focuses on repentance, faith and baptism as the primary requirements. We strive to follow the New Testament model, thus making entry into membership of the Free Methodist Church, as nearly as possible, synonymous with entering into the Body of Christ.

3. ADMISSION INTO MEMBERSHIP

¶ A/353. 1. The conditions for membership in the Free Methodist Church are:

- a. awakening to God, a desire to seek God (Par. A/301);

- b. assent to participate in the maturing opportunities offered by the church, such as classes, Bible studies and small groups (Par.A/307);
 - c. evidence of genuine conversion (Par.A/302);
 - d. receiving the catechism of baptism and the sacrament of baptism, or, if baptized in infancy, giving public assent to the baptismal covenant (Par.A/124);
 - e. completing the approved course of instruction for prospective members, which clearly teaches the history, theological distinctives and mission of the Free Methodist Church;
 - f. acceptance of the Articles of Religion, the Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and matters of church government as written in the *Book of Discipline*;
 - g. interview by the pastor and/or membership care committee, who will verify the person's conversion, baptism and willingness to commit to a holy Christian life (Pars.A/306-307);
 - h. approval by the church's local board of administration upon recommendation of the membership care committee (Par.A/404.4, Sec.4); and
 - i. giving affirmative answers to the questions for membership before a public meeting of the church (Par.A/353.1)
2. The numbering of the above steps for membership is the normative order. The sequence of some steps may vary according to individual need. The purpose is to allow new believers or transfers to:
- a. identify life issues and receive assistance;
 - b. identify theological/doctrinal questions and attain answers; and
 - c. learn the mission of the church and express commitment to it.

A local church or annual conference may designate steps 1:a-c as requirements for preparatory membership. The ritual for reception into preparatory membership (Par.A/360) may be used.

¶ **A/353.1.** (Ritual other than questions and answers is optional.)

[Those who are to be received into membership shall be called forward by name, and the pastor, addressing the people, shall say:]

Into this holy fellowship the persons before you, who have received the sacrament of baptism, who have learned the nature of these privileges and duties, who have been instructed in the teachings and mission of the Free Methodist Church, and who have been approved by the local board of administration, come to be welcomed into membership. We now propose, in the fear of God, to question them as to their faith and purpose, that you may know that they are ready to be admitted into this church.

(Then, addressing those seeking admission, the pastor shall say:)

Beloved in the Lord, you have come to be received into membership in the Free Methodist Church. We rejoice that you have decided to undertake the privileges and duties of membership in this church. Before you are admitted, you shall here publicly renew your vows, confess your faith, and declare your purpose, by answering the following questions:

1. Do you have the assurance of the Holy Spirit that your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Are you experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit with His cleansing of heart and empowering for service, or if not, will you seek His fullness in your life?
3. Do you intend to serve God by the full use of the abilities He has given you?
4. Do you believe the Holy Scriptures to be the revealed will of God containing all things necessary to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?
5. Do you accept the Articles of Religion, the Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and the government of the Free Methodist Church; and will you endeavor to live in harmony with them?
6. As a committed follower of Christ in fellowship with His church, will you cultivate spiritual disciplines in order to grow into the likeness of Christ?
7. Will you practice the principles of Christian stewardship, giving freely of your time, talents, and possessions to Christ and His church?

(Here the pastor shall introduce each candidate by name to the congregation, and shall continue as follows:)

You, my fellow-members of this congregation, have heard the vows of these who have completed the requirements for membership in the Free Methodist Church. Let us now welcome them into our fellowship. (The method of welcoming shall be left to the discretion of the pastor.)

(Here the pastor may offer an extemporaneous prayer.)

This is optional:

(Then those to be received into membership shall kneel, and the pastor laying hands upon each of them in turn, shall say:)

_____, I receive you into the fellowship of the Free Methodist

Church. May the Lord confirm you in the faith and fellowship of the true disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Those being received shall rise, and the pastor addressing the candidates shall say:)

We rejoice to recognize you as members of the Free Methodist Church and bid you welcome to all its privileges; and in token of our love we give you the right hand of fellowship and pray that you may be numbered with His people here and with His saints in glory everlasting. May the church be a blessing to you, and may you be a blessing to the church.

(Then shall the pastor say to the congregation:)

Friends in Christ, I commend to your love and care these persons whom we this day recognize as members of our church. Do all in your power to strengthen their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love.

¶ **A/354.** 1. The person meeting the requirements of Paragraph A/353 shall be admitted to all the privileges of membership.

2. Any person in good standing in any evangelical church may be received into membership upon meeting the requirements of Paragraph A/353.

¶ **A/355.** When two or more societies vote to merge, individual membership is automatically transferred to the united society.

¶ **A/356.** 1. 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:

- a. evidence of present faith in Christ;
- b. reaffirmation of the Membership Covenant.

2. Members living at a great distance from the society in which membership is held and unable to attend, shall send to the pastor a written testimony at least once a year. 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.

3. 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 the ministry of restoration, they must be dealt with according to the due process of the church (Pars. A/404.5; A/740).

4. 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 both the pastor and the Christian growth group (class) leader 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 Paragraph A/356, Section 1. Inactive members shall not be reported in the *Yearbook* or any other official membership data.

5. 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.

4. ADMISSION INTO PREPARATORY MEMBERSHIP

(Optional)

¶ A/360. (Ritual other than questions and answers is optional.)

(Those who are to be received as preparatory members shall be called forward by name, and the pastor, addressing the people, shall say:)

Dearly beloved, that none may be admitted into the Free Methodist Church without instruction, we receive persons who seek fellowship with us into preparatory membership, during which they may be properly instructed, and also give proof, both to themselves and to the church, of the sincerity and depth of their convictions and of the strength and purpose of their desire to lead a new life.

(Then addressing the persons seeking admission as preparatory members, the pastor shall say:)

Beloved in the Lord, you have by the grace of God made your decision to follow Christ and to serve Him. Your confidence in so doing is to be based not on any notion of fitness or worthiness in yourselves, but on the gracious promise of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself for us.

That the church may know your purpose, will you please answer the following questions:

1. Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: I have.

2. Are you willing to receive membership instruction as offered by our church?

Answer: I am.

3. Have you received Christian baptism?

Answer: Yes or no.

If not, will you receive this sacrament at a duly appointed time?

Answer: Yes.

4. You have been won to Christ. Will you endeavor to win others to Christ and the church?

Answer: I will.

(Then shall the pastor say:)

On behalf of the Free Methodist Church and in the hope that you will go forward to complete membership therein, I extend to you a cordial welcome.

(Then shall the pastor offer extemporaneous prayer.)

¶ **A/361.** Preparatory members shall not be continued longer than two years on the membership roll in that relation without a two-thirds vote of the local board of administration that circumstances warrant a continuation for a longer period.

5. ADMISSION INTO YOUTH MEMBERSHIP

¶ **A/363.** (Ritual other than questions and answers is optional.)

(Those who are to be received as youth members shall be called forward by name, and the pastor shall say:)

Beloved, our Lord Jesus, by His Holy Word, has expressly given to everyone who believes in Him a place in His kingdom and church. Before you are admitted into the church, it becomes my duty to inquire of you as to your purpose of mind and heart.

1. Do you believe that Jesus Christ has forgiven your sins and is now your Savior?

Answer: I do.

2. Have you received Christian baptism*, or if not, are you willing to be baptized?

Answer: Yes.

3. Have you attended, or if not, will you attend your pastor's class of instruction on living the Christian life and serving God through your church?

Answer: Yes.

4. As a faithful member, will you pray for your church, attend regularly, give to your church, and help wherever you can?

Answer: Yes.

* Those received into youth membership who have been baptized in infancy are required to affirm the baptismal vows. See Paragraph A/903.

5. Will you try to show others by the way you live what it means to be a Christian, and will you do your best to bring them to Christ?

Answer: I will.

Optional:

(Here the pastor may offer an extemporaneous prayer. Then those to be received as youth members shall kneel, and the minister, laying his hands upon each of them in turn, shall say:)

I receive you into the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church as a youth member. May God confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ **A/364.** 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.

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, but in no case shall any change in their membership status be made until they reach their sixteenth birthday, other than the provisions in Paragraph A/153.

Upon reaching the sixteenth birthday, youth members shall be approved by the local board of administration either for adult membership or for entrance into the membership process at the appropriate stage. To be admitted to voting membership, they must answer satisfactorily the questions for adult membership before a public meeting of the church.

Youth members shall be reported in a separate column in the *Yearbook*.

6. ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

¶ **A/365.** 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 any other Free Methodist church. All rights and privileges except the right to vote shall be granted. Associate members shall be recorded on a separate list.

7. TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP

¶ **A/366.** 1. Only 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.

2. Members wishing to transfer to another society must have a letter of transfer from the pastor (see Par. B/1026, Sec. 1). When giving such a letter of transfer, the pastor shall at once give notice of the fact to the pastor of the society to which the letter is addressed. The letter of transfer is valid for one year.

Members holding such letter shall remain members of, and be amenable to, the society by which the letter was given until it is presented to another society, which shall receive them into membership. After that they shall be responsible to the new society for their conduct including that during the time the letter was held.

It shall be the duty of the pastor receiving the letter to notify the pastor who gave it (see Par. B/1026, Sec. 2).

3. Letters of transfer may be given to members of our church who wish to unite with other evangelical denominations (see Par. B/1026, Sec. 3).

4. Youth members may be transferred to another society by the pastor giving a letter of transfer (see Par. B/1026, Sec. 4).

5. The conference superintendent must give consent for the issuing of a letter of transfer for a supply pastor in charge of a society.

¶ A/367. Reception of Members by Transfer

(Those who are to be received into membership by transfer shall be called forward by name, and the pastor, addressing the congregation, shall say:)

The Free Methodist Church is a welcoming fellowship which provides a home for those committed to the advancement of Christ's Kingdom. We count it a privilege to receive these members into our fellowship by transfer. Their letters of transfer read:

(The pastor will read only the first letter in each category of membership in its entirety. The others can be named along with the name of the church from which they are transferring.)

Let us pray.

(The pastor shall lead in an extemporaneous prayer.)

(Name) I welcome you into the fellowship of the _____ church.

(The pastor will give a handshake of welcome to each new member.)

(Members transferring from another evangelical denomination must previously have met the requirements of Pars. A/353 and A/354.)

D. CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

PREAMBLE

¶ **A/375.** We believe rites and ceremonies of the church are to be accorded respect. Members should not through private judgment willfully and purposefully disregard the rites of the church to which they belong. Such rites are not the same in all places or churches. There have always been differences reflecting the diversity of times and countries and the customs of society. Therefore, we acknowledge the right of every denomination to change and ordain rites and ceremonies, for the edification of all. But let nothing be ordained against God's Word.

¶ **A/376.** Public worship in our churches shall seek a balance between freedom and form. Preaching shall be emphasized as a means of edifying believers and converting sinners. All public worship shall be in the language of the people.

1. ORDER OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

¶ **A/377.** The Sunday morning corporate worship service should provide four basic results: (1) to provide opportunity for the praise of God; (2) to give worshipers insight into the will of God; (3) to lead individuals to commit themselves personally to God's revealed will; and (4) to strengthen the dedicated person to perform the will of God. To accomplish these desired results, each service should include congregational singing, reading from the Scriptures, pastoral prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and preaching. The apostolic benediction is recommended for dismissing the congregation.

Other services shall include congregational singing, prayer, reading from the Scriptures, and preaching. On occasion, sharing, healing of human hurts, and other forms of worship may be used. The order of services should avoid routine by providing fitting variations in worship forms within the limitations of propriety, the Scriptures, and specific rituals when used (Chapter IX).

By precept and example, the minister shall insist on reverence and a worshipful attitude before, during, and after worship.

2. MUSIC

¶ **A/378.** The purpose of music in divine worship service is to inspire and to sustain worship. Vocal and instrumental music used in the service shall seek to contribute to reverence and exalted worship and not the display of talent, however excellent. Qualified persons whose character and life reveal the scriptural principles and support the standards

of the Free Methodist Church shall be selected to lead the singing in public worship and to play the instruments.

Congregational singing is a part of divine worship in which all persons present should unite. Worship services should be planned which encourage all members to worship meaningfully together. Care should be given to include worship music which recognizes our Methodist heritage in hymnody and gospel songs, while concurrently considering the musical styles and compositions of the present.

3. LOVE FEAST

¶ **A/379.** The love feast is one of the fascinating yet least understood aspects of the rites of the early church. John Wesley reintroduced it to millions of modern Christians, to whom it proved (and still proves) an inspiring means of grace. Historically, Free Methodists observed the love feast at least once in three months.

Love feasts are characterized by the singing of hymns, opportunity for testimony, extemporaneous prayer, and the breaking of bread in symbolizing the meals shared by the early Christians. The love feast is not to be confused with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

4. CHRISTIAN GROWTH GROUPS (CLASSES)

¶ **A/380.** In the year 1739 eight or ten persons sought the spiritual counsel and guidance of Mr. Wesley in London. They asked that he spend time with them in prayer and the study of the Scriptures. Thus began the Methodist United Societies. Members saw themselves as "a company of persons having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

For the purpose of Christian nurture and more intimate fellowship, societies were divided into classes, not exceeding twelve in number. These classes proved to be one of the most important features in the perpetuation of the Methodist revival. The practice of Christian nurture through small groups has always been regarded as a vital feature of the Free Methodist Church.

Christian growth groups should be formed within the congregation for the careful oversight of the members and the confirmation of seekers in the assurance of God's forgiveness in Christ. Membership in the groups ideally should be not more than twelve. A leader shall be chosen by the group, and the pastor may nominate. The groups should meet in a convenient location on a regular schedule.

Group meetings should be devoted to meaningful creative prayer;

the study of the Scriptures; the sharing of needs, aspirations, and victories; and fellowship in Christian love. Persons not yet believers should be invited into the fellowship as they desire to learn of Christ.

Leaders of small groups should be chosen carefully. They shall be members of the Free Methodist Church, persons of mature Christian faith and experience. They should have a good understanding of the Scriptures and agree fully with the doctrines and practices of the church. (See Pars. A/620, A/621.)

5. SERVICES WITH SACRAMENTS AND RITUALS

¶ **A/381.** Rituals are provided in Chapter IX of the *Book of Discipline* to provide for uniformity in certain special services used throughout the denomination. However, the total service providing the context in which the appropriate ritual is used is left to the discretion and order of the minister in charge. Appropriate variations in forms of worship may be used with propriety to enrich the worship experience. Pastors are exhorted to prayerfully consider making every service involving a ritual a fresh means of grace for the worshiper.