

Chapter 3

The Christian Journey

The Goal of the Christian Journey

¶3000 The Scriptures affirm that God’s purpose for humanity, from before creation, was that we should “be holy and blameless before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Timothy 2:4). God’s purpose was far from empty. For, from before creation, his purpose had reality in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God’s clear statement of the origin, purpose and goal that he has for humanity. For “he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Ephesians 1:9-10).

The Christian journey is a part of this plan, which was set forth in Christ. The Christian journey is only possible because of God’s eternal purpose, the redemption he made for us in Christ, and the living presence of his Spirit in our lives.

Because of God’s plan, the goal of the Christian journey is nothing less lofty than to attain “unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christlike maturity. When we enter the life to come, our journey will be complete because we will be like God in an even fuller way than is possible now: “What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

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.

Therefore, we as Free Methodists affirm with God's Word that the proper goal for our Christian life is this Christlike maturity, which the Bible describes as holiness and righteousness (Matthew 5:6; 1 Peter 1:16). We acknowledge that this is only possible because of the grace that he so richly provides.

Contents

¶3010 This chapter of the *Book of Discipline* is intended to describe some significant features of the Free Methodist understanding of the Christian journey. It is intended to promote in our churches an understanding of the way of salvation, Christian character and Christian responses to modern issues. It also contains some resources for Christian discipleship. This chapter has the following sections:

The first section describes the way of salvation, including the process by which God, through the activity of his Spirit, makes it possible for sinful humans to enter the Christian journey and to grow into Christlike maturity.

The second section is a description of genuine Christian character and the spiritual disciplines that nourish and support Christian life.

The third section addresses the Christian response to certain pressing issues that are a part of Christian life in the modern world as it relates to God, oneself and to others.

The fourth section contains resources for local churches, to help them lead people in a discipleship process toward Christlike maturity.

The Way of Salvation

¶3100 This section, on the way of salvation, describes the Free Methodist standard of teaching on the biblical doctrine of salvation. These paragraphs are an elaboration of what is affirmed in the Articles of Religion – Salvation (see ¶114-120).

They represent our understanding of the clear teaching of Scripture on the process by which God through the activity of his Spirit makes it possible for sinful humans to enter the Christian journey and to grow into Christlike maturity. The way of salvation is the path God has laid out for us to begin the Christian journey, and to grow in faith.

The way of salvation includes God's gracious initiative for salvation, awakening to God, repentance, trust, assurance, consecration and sanctification.

God's Gracious Initiative for Salvation

¶3110 In love God has graciously provided for the salvation of all humankind. God is love. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was sent by the Father as an expression of God's love for the world. The cross shows the extent of Jesus' love for all. The love of God is further expressed to the world through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Only those who respond in repentance and faith can experience His grace as a redemptive reality.

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, but the outcome of this confrontation is affected by how each person responds.

God deals with all persons as free and responsible. Therefore, He not only makes His grace available, waiting our 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.

Awakening to God

¶3120 The Scriptures teach that by nature humans are corrupt in

every aspect of their beings and have gone far from original righteousness. Added to the depravity common to all because of the Fall, there are the enslaving effects of committed sins. We are unable in ourselves to come to God, 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.

Repentance and Restitution

¶3130 Awakened by the Holy Spirit to their lost condition before God, persons 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.

Sincere repentance leads to moral renewal, often evidenced by restitution – the effort to right one’s wrongs when possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zaccheus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 3:8). Neither repentance nor restitution save, however. Salvation is by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

Trust / Faith

¶3140 Trust, also known as faith, is 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 full reliance on His integrity, love and power.

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).

Assurance

¶3150 God gives assurance of salvation and peace of heart to all who repent and put their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). 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).

Christians have peace with God through Jesus Christ because guilt is taken away and fear of judgment removed (Hebrews 6:11; 10:22). 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).

Consecration

¶3160 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 this 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 5:1-2:14; 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. A Christian who is divided in loyalty cannot serve God victoriously and steadfastly. Christ must be given preeminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life.

Therefore, to open themselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers must give themselves without reservation to God. They freely yield all to the purposes of God and devote every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than to self (Colossians 3:8-13). Christians cannot be delivered from the dominion of sin if they permit self to reign in their lives. They cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Sanctification

¶170 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 provided for believers to be entirely sanctified in the atonement (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:8-10). Accordingly, 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). Sanctification begins with regeneration. It continues throughout the believer's life, as the believer co-operates with the Spirit. And a deeper relationship with Christ is possible when the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; 1 John 1:5-2.1).

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 unrivalled 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; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7). 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 5:25-62). They will know an inner surrender to all the will of God, and their lives will be transformed from inner conflict with sin to glad obedience (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16-25).

Inward sanctification cleanses Christians from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (1 Peter 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15-20). When they are cleansed, they are not made perfect in performance, but in love (Hebrews 6:1; 12:14; Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:12-13).

Genuine Christian Character

¶3200 This section describes how genuine Christian character may grow. This statement has its roots in the Scriptures and in classic descriptions of the Christian life that have been written through the centuries. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote comparable descriptions such as *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* and *The Character of a Methodist*. Christian character begins with life in the Spirit, and is nourished by the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life.

Christians have a new relationship with God and a new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. In new Christians, the joy of this new life in Christ may for a time obscure the need for growing up in Christ. People who have

been Christians for some time can become complacent. Therefore, every Christian must ultimately choose between growth and decline.

This section describes some of the spiritual disciplines that are essential for Christians. Through the exercise of these and other spiritual disciplines, growing Christians will become increasingly sensitive to both good and evil, steadily learning to distinguish between them. The Holy Spirit will guide them, in harmony with the Scriptures. Growing Christians learn to be alert to the Spirit's directives so they may resist temptation and respond to God's call to higher living.

Prayer

¶3210

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christlikeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. Prayer should be as conversation, avoiding artificial phrases and tones. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often the circumstances (James 5:16). The Bible teaches that both individual and group prayer 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; 10:5).

Study of the Word

¶3220

The Bible is our source for discovering how we may grow. It is the Christian's "growth manual." It must be taken seriously as the final authority for our lives; therefore, it ought to be read and diligently studied for its meaning. God will speak to growing Christians through its pages if they are listening. The value and meaning of life are found in this book. The prayerful study and application of Scripture is a means of cleansing and of changing attitudes and behavior.

Life in the Church

¶3230

Growing Christians find their supportive 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 believer's active participation. Believers should prepare their minds and spirits for worship. Sincere followers of Christ reach out to God in praise, thanksgiving, dedication, confession, faith and service. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are vital parts of the life of the church that were commanded by the Lord. God has promised to graciously meet the person who faithfully takes part in these sacraments. As a part of the Body of Christ, believers must take part in corporate church worship as well as in the other ministries of the church. Small group participation is a means of grace and growth. Support, insight, inspiration and discipline are fruits of fellowship.

Spiritual Gifts and Ministry

¶3240 Growth comes with the acceptance of full responsibility for the use of natural talents and spiritual gifts in service and ministry. The Holy Spirit endows every believer with natural abilities for service and ministry. These are a trust. They must be used only in ways that will glorify God. To use God-given abilities well is to nurture personal growth. The Holy Spirit also distributes, as He wills, spiritual gifts of speech and service for the common good and the building of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Spiritual gifts are to be exercised under the lordship of Christ with His love and compassion, and are not to be the cause of division in the church. Therefore, everything is to be done decently and in order. For example, in public worship, 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 intelligible (1 Corinthians 14). The believer is to seek as the evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness, not the gifts themselves, but the character and power of the Holy Spirit.

Love of Others

¶3250 Growth in Christ requires taking responsibility to love others, all of whom are loved by God and made in His image. The quality of a Christian's relationships with others af-

fects the quality of his/her own life. Growth in Christ requires readiness to mend relationships both with God and with others (James 5:16). The Ten Commandments, summarized into two commandments by Jesus, (Luke 10:25-28) teach the nature of our relationships with God and with others. Christians will express their love both by deeds of kindness and by personal words of witness that point to Christ as the embodiment of God's love and the Savior of the world.

Divine Healing

¶3260 All healing, whether of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God who is "over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6). 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.

Christian Life in the Modern World

¶3300 This section arises from the experience of Free Methodists as they have lived out Christ's command to holiness in the modern world. Therefore, it describes a Christian response to pressing issues in the contemporary world.

There is no claim made that this is a complete or final description of an appropriate Christian response to all of the

important issues faced in the modern world, or that such a description could ever be written. Rather, the approach taken in the following paragraphs illustrates the ways in which a Christian must form a responsible and biblically appropriate response to contemporary issues.

A member of The Free Methodist Church adopts the following paragraphs as an authoritative guide to living an authentic Christian life. These principles (*indicated by italicized text*) arise out of the direct, clear teaching of Scripture. The application statements that follow each principle represent the historic understanding of Free Methodists. We believe that a life lived according to the following statements will be a life that is “worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (Ephesians 4:1 NRSV).

As Regards God (see ¶157)

False Worship

¶3310 *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). The worship of any other person, spirit, or thing is idolatry.*

We abstain from all practices that lead to idolatry. Occult practices, such as spiritism, witchcraft and astrology must be avoided. Moreover, Christians are to be on guard against the idolatries of the heart – the worship of things, pleasures, and self (1 John 2:16).

The Lord’s Day

¶3320 *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 that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). We need a special day in which we turn from our daily work 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 His resurrection.*

In keeping the Sabbath principle in a Lord's day setting, we participate in corporate worship with the Christian community as the essential activity of Sunday (Hebrews 10:25). We refrain on that day from unnecessary labors and commerce, and recognize that salvation comes not from our own strivings but by grace, as we rest in God (Isaiah 58:13-14; Hebrews 4:9). Pastors and others who must be involved in necessary work on Sunday are encouraged to observe the Sabbath principle on another day.

Secret Societies

¶3330 *The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:9; Acts 2:36). In every association Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, we abstain from solemn oaths of secrecy shared with unbelievers which cloud our witness.*

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). As Christians, therefore, we refuse to swear unreserved loyalty to any secret society since we see such an allegiance to be in direct conflict with unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. We must keep ourselves free to follow the will of the Lord in all things.

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 refrain, therefore, from membership in all secret societies and when we unite with the church we resign from active membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

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.

As Regards Ourselves and Others (see ¶158)

Worth of Persons

¶3340 *We are committed to the worth of all humans regardless of gender, race, color, or any other distinctions (Acts 10:34-35) and will respect them as persons made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) and redeemed by Christ's death and resurrection. The Old Testament law commands such respect (Deuteronomy 5:11-21). Jesus summarized this law as love for God and neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). He ministered to all without distinction and His death on the cross was for all (John 3:16; Romans 5:8).*

We are therefore pledged to active concern whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, depersonalized or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27). We are committed to give meaning and significance to every person by God's help.

Remembering our tendency to be prejudicial, as Christians we must grow in awareness of the rights and needs of others.

Self Discipline

¶3350 *One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Scriptures instruct us to honor the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).*

As Christians we desire to be characterized by balance and moderation. We seek to avoid extreme patterns of conduct. We also seek to keep ourselves free from addictions or compulsions.

Since Christians are to be characterized by a disciplined style of life, we attempt to avoid selfish indulgence in the pleasures of this world. It is our wish to live simply in

service to others, and to practice stewardship of health, time, and other God-given resources.

We are committed to help every Christian attain such a disciplined life. Although unhealthy habits are not easily broken, believers need not live in such bondage. We find help through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the counsel and support of other Christians.

Stewardship of Possessions

¶3360 *Although as Christians we accumulate goods, we should not make possessions or wealth the goal of our lives (Matthew 6:19-20; Luke 12:16-21). Rather, as stewards we are people who give generously to meet the needs of others and to support ministry (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13).*

The Scriptures allow the privilege of private ownership. Though we hold title to possessions under civil law, we regard all we have as the property of God entrusted to us as stewards.

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 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 faith we have in Christ.

While customs and community standards change, there are changeless scriptural principles that govern us as Christians in our attitudes and conduct. Whatever we buy, use or wear reflects our commitment to Christ and our witness in the world (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). We therefore avoid extravagance and apply principles of simplicity of life when we make choices as to the image that we project through our possessions.

Life in the Workplace

¶3370 *As Christians we are called to be servants of all. This norm is equally applicable to employer and employee (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-41). Our concern for justice is primarily a concern to be just and only secondarily a concern to obtain justice. We believe that all persons have the privilege to be gainfully employed irrespective of gender, race, color, national origin, or creed (Romans 10:12).*

We recognize the privilege of employees to organize for their betterment. Oath-bound secret pacts or acts of violence designed to violate or defend their rights cannot be condoned. We also recognize the right of employees to remain independent of such organizations.

As Christians we do not view management and labor as necessarily hostile to each other. They need not bring distrust and hostility to their place of work or the negotiating table. We resist the exploiting of people or seeing them merely as economic units. We discourage rigid confrontation and favor a problem-solving approach to disagreements.

We endeavor to make our witness effective where we work, remembering that as Christian employees we are responsible first to God and then to our employer and the organization. As Christian employers we have a responsibility to deal fairly and kindly with our employees, preserving the witness of Christian character in both word and deed (Matthew 7:12; Colossians 3:17).

Entertainment

¶3380 *We evaluate all forms of entertainment in the light of biblical standards for holy living, and recognize that we must govern ourselves according to these standards. The Scriptures say, “we have an obligation – but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body you will live” (Romans 8:12-13).*

In a culture where pleasure is ardently pursued, we must

exercise care regarding our recreational activities. We face a multitude of entertainment media such as television, videos, movies, recorded music, the Internet, dances, magazines and novels. Since many of these are pursued in the home, our choices regarding them cannot be legislated from afar; we must make them from within, from a renewed heart. In the case of children and young people living at home, however, our convictions as Christian parents should prevail.

Our choices regarding entertainment must recognize that some modern diversions promote violence, excite sexual desire or awaken greed, and certain atmospheres encourage and promote tolerance of vice and vulgarity.

We commit ourselves to be moderate in our pursuit of entertainment, regarding carefully the wise use of time and money and the stewardship of the body so as to avoid evil of every kind and honor Christ in everything.

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

Misuse of Substances

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

Illicit drugs are prime offenders. Because various forms of narcotics cause untold damage to people and relationships and such drugs restrict personal development, damage the body and reinforce an unrealistic view of life, we avoid their use.

Because Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbor as ourselves, we advocate abstain-

ing from the use of alcoholic beverages (Mark 12:30-31). The abuse of alcohol, a legalized drug, is damaging to individuals, families, and society. It is unpredictably addictive and its destructive effects cannot be fully measured. Its abuse leaves a trail of broken marriages, family violence, crime, industrial loss, ill health, injury and death. As concerned Christians, we advocate abstinence for the sake of health, family and neighbors. Moreover, we see the adverse social consequences as so pervasive that we seek by advocating abstinence to make a united social witness to the freedom Christ gives.

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

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

We believe that the intemperate consumption of food is a form of abusing the body which may result in illness and obesity. We eat healthily so as to preserve the strength of our bodies and so extend our years of usefulness as servants of Christ.

We endeavor by God's help to be understanding and supportive toward those who come to Christ with problems of addiction. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we acknowledge the difficulties of overcoming the bondage of addictions, and de-

sire to give whatever help and support are needed while fellow Christians seek full deliverance.

As a further evidence of an awakened conscience, we advocate refraining from the cultivation, manufacture or promotion of these substances which are harmful to health.

Pornography

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

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

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

Homosexual Behavior

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

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

Hebrews 7:25; Luke 4:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Because the practice is a distortion of nature, therapy may be necessary for healing to take place.

The church has a corporate responsibility to be God's agent of healing, ministering in love to homosexuals and giving them support as they learn to live a Christian life that is wholesome and pure (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

We oppose legislation that legitimizes homosexual behavior as an acceptable alternate lifestyle.

Sanctity of Life

¶3420

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.

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.

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.

A. 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 (§3440) must also inform these decisions.

B. Abortion

The intentional abortion of a person's life, from conception on, must be judged to be a violation of God's command, "You shall not commit murder," except when extreme circumstances require the termination of a pregnancy to save the life of the pregnant woman. Induced abortion is the intentional destruction of a person after conception and before delivery by surgical or other means. Therefore, induced abortion is morally unjustifiable except when the act has been decided upon by responsible and competent persons, including Christian 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 or convenience, and social or economic security, must be considered as selfish and malicious.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy involves religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Christian morality demands that we consider both the biblical commandment and the human situation in which the law must be applied. As Christians, we believe that human life, whether in vitro, mature

or senile, is sacred because life exists in relation to God.

Compassionate alternatives and long-term care should be offered to women considering abortion.

We counsel physicians and parents to understand that the moral commandment and the law of love are transgressed when human life is destroyed for selfish or malicious ends.

C. 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.

D. 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.

As Regards the Institutions of God (see ¶159)

¶3430 There are at least three divinely appointed, earthly institutions. One of these is marriage and the family. A second is the church. A third is the secular government. Only the

church, among these institutions, will last in eternity. Nevertheless, the Scriptures have clearly placed a great deal of importance on how we act with respect to each of these institutions until the return of Christ.

This section is intended to describe a Christian point of view on these important institutions. Important principles are the focus: there is no attempt to be comprehensive. Principle statements, represent what we believe are the central, clear teaching of Scripture on these institutions. We also believe that the application statements that accompany the principle statements are clear inferences from the Scriptures, but they are presented here to assist our churches and members in applying scriptural principles.

The Christian and Marriage

¶3440

A. Principles Regarding Marriage

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."

Sexual intercourse is God's gift to humanity, for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be celebrative (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage. Likewise, it condemns all unnatural sexual behavior such as incestuous abuse, child molestation, homosexual activity and prostitution (1 Corinthians 6.9; Romans 12:6-27).

We believe therefore that marriage should be safeguarded and supported by both the church and society and should be formalized with public vows. It is not enough for a couple to live together in private commitment; we believe that they are to covenant before God and the state.

B. Nurturing Healthy Marriages

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. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnize a marriage. Those who unite believers to unbelievers go contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures. Before entering into marriage, our people 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 desire that our churches provide 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 to provide resources such as seminars and retreats to strengthen marriages and build Christian homes.

C. Healing Troubled Marriages

The church which is alive to God has spiritual resources for 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.

Therefore, if our members find their marriage in crisis, we encourage them to seek the counsel of the pastor and submit to the guidance of the church. Professional counsel may be necessary.

We recognize that domestic violence, emotional and/or physical, does occur in church-related families. It often jeopardizes the safety of a spouse or children and may threaten life itself. These family members need both spiritual and emotional healing (Malachi 2:13-16).

When an impossible situation is destroying the home, we advise that Christians may separate. In such cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union.

D. Divorce

When one marriage partner is a Christian and the other a nonbeliever, we believe that 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).

When a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union. Where reconciliation is impossible, a divorce may be allowed (Matthew 5:32; 19:9).

Desertion is the abandoning of a marriage without just cause. We believe that a person denies the faith when he/she 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).

Where reconciliation is impossible in a troubled marriage, we acknowledge that divorce may be unavoidable (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). When marriages break down completely, we recognize that, in the words of Jesus, "hardness of heart" is implicit on one or both sides of the union (Matthew 19:3-8; Mark 10:5-9).

Though the Scriptures allow divorce on the grounds of adultery (Matthew 5:32) and desertion (1 Corinthians 7:10-16), they do not mandate divorce and we advise counsel with church leaders to seek other alternatives. One of these may be for both to live celibately.

E. Recovery After Divorce

Divorce always produces trauma. It is the breaking of a 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 also be necessary. If unhealthy patterns of relating exist, the marriage partners must be helped to replace them with new attitudes and behaviors that are Christlike (Colossians 3:1-15). Repentance and forgiveness are crucial to recovery. The goals of the process are personal healing and restoration to wholesome participation within the church. The church must extend its concern to family and others affected by the divorce.

F. Remarriage After a Divorce

A divorced member or one who is considering marriage to a divorced person must come under the authority, 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).

G. 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 shall include removal from leadership, and may include suspension, or expulsion from membership.

H. Exceptional Cases

Cases may arise for which the pastor or the membership care committee can find no explicit direction in this *Book of Discipline*. In such cases, the pastor, after consultation with the committee, shall confer with a superintendent.

Nurture and Education of Children

¶3450 *The Free Methodist Church views the education of its children as a parental responsibility (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Ephesians 6:4). Part of that responsibility may be delegated but not relinquished to either public or Christian institutions of education.*

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.

The church wishes to support public schools and recognizes the challenge to Christian teachers, parents and students to be as lights in the world. When parents choose to use Christian schools or home schooling, we also support them in their decision. We request that our children be excused from assignments and activities which conflict with the values held by the denomination. When conflicts arise, we request of the school that the student's academic standing not be jeopardized, and when necessary, other assignments be given.

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 scien-

tific treatment of the several concepts of origin, including special creation (that all basic life forms and life processes were created by a supernatural Creator). We therefore urge that the concept of special creation be presented in, or along with, courses, textbooks, library materials and teaching aids dealing with the subject of first origins.

The Christian and the Church

¶3460 *The church is part of God's eternal plan to make a people for himself who would be "holy and blameless before him." It was instituted by Christ during his ministry when he commissioned the church to be his unique representative in the world. Therefore, the Scriptures speak of the church as the Body of Christ. The church has been empowered for its ministry by the active, ongoing work of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. Just as New Testament letters were written to churches in particular places, made up of particular people, the church is not only universal, but also must be visible and local.*

The church is also the people of God in the world. In both Old and New Testaments this fact is amply illustrated. The Lord of the church gives gifts to His people to serve one another and to minister in the world. Although Christians who live in independence from the church may not necessarily forfeit their faith, they will certainly deprive themselves of the spiritual resources and opportunities God Himself has ordained. Consistent with the Scriptures, we affirm membership in the church.

Membership in the church is a biblical reality noted from the earliest days after Pentecost (Acts 2:47). When the Holy Spirit gives new life in Christ, at the same time He effects our spiritual entrance into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Free Methodist Church is one denomination among the many other legitimate visible churches in the world. Entrance into the membership of one of our churches is a visible and local sign of entrance into the universal church.

A. Membership in the Church

In accordance with this, our church provides means by which persons who are born of the Spirit may enter into a Membership Covenant (¶154-160) and register their

membership in a public way. We provide categories for believers under sixteen years of age and adults. As an aid to Christian development we provide membership instruction, which may be followed by entrance into membership. For further information on the requirements and rituals for membership (see ¶150-164).

B. Leadership in the Church

Leadership in the church is an honor that has accompanying responsibilities and sacrifices. The Scriptures provide descriptions of the qualities of leaders in such passages as: Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. Those who are chosen to lead in the church do so in a spirit of humility and dependence upon God. They must be spiritually mature individuals whose lifestyle shall be in harmony with the Scriptures, the doctrine of The Free Methodist Church (¶100-131), the principles of the Membership Covenant (¶150-160) and of ¶6200.E. They must live personal and public lives that clearly exemplify these principles.

The Christian and the State

¶3470 *As Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God and of this world. We receive benefits from and bear responsibilities to both relationships. Our first allegiance is to God, but that does not release us from responsibilities to our own country if such relationships do not conflict with the clear teachings of the Scriptures (Romans 13:1-7). We recognize the sovereign authority of government and our duty to obey the law (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7). Thus, we bear the responsibilities of good citizenship.*

A. Civic Participation

As Christians we pray for “all who are in high positions” (1 Timothy 2:2) and are “subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution” (1 Peter 2:13). We actively participate in civic life by involvement in efforts for the improvement of social, cultural and educational conditions (Matthew 5:13-16). We oppose degrading cultural influences (2 Peter 2:4-10). We exercise the responsibility to vote.

B. War and Military Enlistment

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

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

C. Swearing Oaths

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

Resources for Churches

¶3500

A. Understanding Lifestyle Issues in the Membership Covenant

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

For example, when the Covenant addresses lifestyle issues it says, “As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs. We commit ourselves to be free from habits and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same”

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

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

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

B. Further Resources

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