

A. The Introduction

I. Our Historical Purpose:

The Free Methodist Church exists to make known to all people everywhere God's call to wholeness through forgiveness and holiness in Jesus Christ, and to invite into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith.

II. Our Vision:

We believe that people can be free. We are confident that people best experience God's true freedom in community. This is why we have the following vision statement, *"To see a healthy church within the reach of everyone in Canada and beyond."*

III. Our Legacy:

"What is a "Free Methodist" anyway?" The Free Methodist Church has a very rich and meaningful history that inspires us today to accept responsibility for our communities within Canada and beyond.

The early Free Methodists were concerned about a number of issues in their historical setting that still have relevance today. Formed in the early days of the American Civil War, these supporters of the anti-slavery movement believed in equality for all, regardless of racial background or gender. They promoted "freedom from oppression and abuses" in order to be who God created us to be.

The Methodist Church had a practice of renting seats in their churches as a way of collecting financial support from their members. Since this practice was seen as disenfranchising the poor, who could not afford the seats, Free Methodists wanted "free seats" for all, regardless of socioeconomic status.

John Wesley (the founder of Methodism) taught that all Christians could expect to be "free from the domination of sin" in their daily lives through the renewing relationship with the Holy Spirit. Free Methodists wanted to recover this expectation in their movement. A lively spiritual refreshing was sweeping the United States in the mid-1800s, and the Free Methodists wanted this "freedom of the Spirit" in their lives and worship services as well.

Finally, many members of Methodist churches were also members of secret societies that often pulled their loyalties away from their Christian commitments. Free Methodists wanted all their members to be "free" to be full participants in a local church, offering their unique relationship, gifts and resources.

These historic examples demonstrate that from the beginning, Free Methodists have wanted everyone to experience the freedom to be who God created them to be. Further information on our movement's history is found in section B.

IV. Our Guiding Principles:

Building on these foundational principles, and contextualizing them for our vision today, we now offer these Guiding Principles for moving our Free Methodist Churches in Canada ahead in affirming our identity and realizing our vision.

We believe these Guiding Principles encapsulate many of the convictions that we have held from the very beginning and set us on a path for carrying our vision into the future. We intend them to be succinct, simple to remember, and easy to communicate to our FMCiC family in our congregations and to those outside who want to learn more about who we are.

Free to follow God: We are all free to journey with God, as revealed through Jesus, who invites and empowers us to join Him on His mission to reconcile everyone and everything.

Free to experience community: We are all free to enjoy gracious, authentic relationships with one another as the family of God, while practicing the ways of Jesus.

Free to hope: We are all free to experience the deep love and peace of God, to live without fear or guilt, and to accept Jesus' forgiving, healing, restoring, and transforming grace.

Free to collaborate: We are all free to work, pray, learn, and partner with people, churches and organizations that are in harmony with our vision to see a healthy church within the reach of everyone in Canada and beyond.

Free to be courageous: We are all free to follow God's Spirit learning, innovating and exploring new territory for ministry in ways that make sense for our local context and mission.

Free to pursue justice: We are all free to challenge racial and economic injustice, champion equality of opportunity for men and women, and advocate for the intrinsic worth and value of all people, living out the legacy of our movement.

B. Our History:

The Free Methodist Church is best understood within the framework of the biblical concept of the church and the perspective provided by its historical heritage.

I. Biblical Concept of the Church

It is clear from Scripture that the church is of God and for people. It is His creation. Christ is its head. The church is the people of God chosen for a purposeful partnership in accomplishing the will of God on earth. More than eighty word pictures relating to the church appear in the New Testament.

What is the profound truth that the many word pictures convey? God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—takes a redeemed people into partnership to share in His activities and to realize His purposes. The church is the organic, corporate instrument God has chosen to remake people and society. It has a mission of holy love. The church exists to produce Christ-likeness in humans and their institutions. Thus our mission may be described as participation with God in bringing holiness and love to bear upon the sins, hurts, and needs of people. This description of our mission is both individual and social. It points to a social relationship of people to God and to each other described in Scripture as “the kingdom of God.”

When the church is acting under the headship of its Lord and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it continues the story begun in the book of Acts. Since the first century the church has experienced many wonderful achievements. Many more are yet to be realized in the unfolding drama of the acts of the Holy Spirit through redeemed people.

The New Testament reminds us that the church visible is not the church ideal. Because the church is a divine-human partnership, sharing not only in the holy love of its founder but in the blemishes of its humanity, it is ever in need of renewal. God takes the same risk with the church in redemption as He did when He granted humans freedom in creation.

II. Historical Heritage and Perspective

Free Methodists consider the story of the church in the book of Acts and the other New Testament writings as their primary heritage. Generation after generation derives from this record their main source of direction and renewal. Followers of God have wrestled with issues both old

and new throughout the centuries just as they do now. The entire history of the church is instructive for us.

Free Methodists claim a line of evangelical descent spelled out in large terms as follows: they trace their spiritual heritage through men and women of deep personal piety in all ages who have shown that it is possible to maintain the glow of spiritual fervour in the midst of paganism, apostasy, and the periods of corruption in the established church.

The lineage of The Free Methodist Church begins with the people of God in the Old and New Testaments. It is continued in the great Councils and Patristic writings and teachings of the early Church Fathers. It also includes influences and contributions from the multitude of renewal movements in western Christianity: Wycliffe and the German Moravians (from whom Wesley learned the concept of “the witness of the Spirit”); the sixteenth century Reformation with its many counterbalancing renewal movements, not the least of which were the Arminian correctives (which taught that Christ’s salvation was for all mankind without limit, but that it must be freely chosen); the Catholic-Anglican tradition; the English Puritan influence; the Methodist tradition; and the nineteenth century holiness movement. God has used these and others across the ages to make the unchanging Christian gospel known more clearly. In summary, Free Methodists identify with the flow of history of the Christian church while maintaining distinctive evangelical and spiritual emphases.

The contributions from church history may be detailed as follows:

The Free Methodist Church reflects historic Christian orthodoxy in that its roots are solidly fastened to the time tested statements put forth in the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, The Formula of Chalcedon, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion in the Church of England; and the Twenty-five Articles of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1784.

The Reformation heritage is reflected in the commitment to the Bible as the supreme rule of faith and life and to salvation by grace through faith. Desire for church order and appreciation for liturgical form reveals the Catholic-Anglican influence. The emphasis on the essentials of the faith allows for openness towards differing views on such subjects as modes of baptism and the millennium.

The Methodist heritage is shown in theological, ecclesiastical and social concerns articulated by the Reverend John Wesley and his associates in the eighteenth century and reaffirmed through the holiness movement of the nineteenth.

Theologically, The Free Methodist Church is committed to the Wesleyan-Arminian affirmation of the saving love of God in Christ. Through prevenient grace He seeks to bring every individual to Himself but grants to each the responsibility of accepting or rejecting that salvation. Salvation is a living relationship with God in Jesus Christ, giving the believer a legal position of righteousness, and therefore affirming the security of all who continue in fellowship with Him. Along with the Arminian emphasis on the universal offer of salvation, John Wesley rediscovered the principle of assurance through the witness of the Holy Spirit. He declared a scriptural confidence in a God who is able to cleanse the hearts of believers from sin here and now by faith, fill them with the Holy Spirit, and empower them for carrying out His mission in the world.

Ecclesiastically, the Methodist heritage is continued in Free Methodist organization. There are lines of responsibility connecting local, conference, and denominational ministries. Small groups of believers are accountable to one another for growth in Christian life and service. Free Methodists are concerned for the whole church, not just the local congregation. They value the leadership of bishops, superintendents, pastors, and lay leaders who provide counsel and direction to the church.

Born at a time when representative government was being developed by free societies, The Free Methodist founders reaffirmed the biblical principle of lay ministry. Free Methodists recognize and license unordained persons for particular ministries. They mandate lay representation in numbers equal to clergy in the councils of the church.

Socially, from their early days, Free Methodists displayed an awakened conscience characteristic of the early Wesleyan movement. Their outspoken action against the institution of slavery and the class distinction inherent in the rental of pews to the wealthy demonstrated the spirit of true Methodism. Although issues change, the sensitive social conscience remains, evidenced by continuing active participation in the social concerns of the day.

During the nineteenth century, the holiness movement, arising in American Methodism but spreading through other nations and denominations, called Christians to deeper levels of relationship with God and greater concern for the needs of hurting humanity. Within this context, the Reverend Benjamin T. Roberts and other ministers and laypersons in the Genesee Conference of the Methodist Church in western New York, raised a protest against theological liberalism, unhealthy compromise on pressing social issues, and loss of spiritual fervour.

Between 1858 and 1860, a number of these leaders were excluded from the Methodist Episcopal Church on various charges and allegations. In reality, the primary issue was their proclamation of the basic principles of Methodism, especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification. Appeals made to the General Conference of May 1860 were denied. On August 23 of that year, they met in an apple orchard in Sanborn, New York, to form The Free Methodist Church. Today, Centenary Park marks the approximate location of that historic event.

“Free” was chosen as an adjective in the name to signify their belief that slaves should go free, pews should be free of rent to any who wished to attend church, members should be free from oaths of secrecy in secret societies, and the freedom of the Spirit should be acknowledged in public worship. The body that began inauspiciously in an orchard in western New York is now at work in 50 countries of the world, one of which is Canada.

III. Methodism in Canada

Prior to the emergence of The Free Methodist Church in Canada, Methodism had already had a long history in Canadian society. Methodism came to Canada through the influence of Paul and Barbara Heck. Originating in Germany, the Hecks had emigrated first to Ireland, where Barbara was converted at the age of 28 under Methodist preaching, possibly that of John Wesley himself. In the early sixties of the 18th century, they sailed for New York, along with Barbara’s cousin Philip Embury and his family. During the time of the American Revolution, Paul and Barbara Heck and Philip Embury’s widow, Mary, and their son, fled to the Prescott area of Upper Canada. Remembering gratefully the protection they had received under the British Crown when they had fled from Germany to Ireland, they now joined the movement into Canada of thousands of United Empire Loyalists whose loyalties to Britain would not allow them to join the rebel cause in the

colonies. So it was that Paul Heck was present when the first Canadian Methodist circuit was organized in 1791, the year of John Wesley's death.

The Methodist cause spread rapidly in Canada. Within ninety years, and after two mergers, there were five different non-ethnic branches: The Methodist Church of Canada, Methodist Episcopal Church, Primitive Methodist Church, Bible Christian Church and the infant Free Methodist Church. The first four merged into one Methodist body in 1883. This body later merged with Congregationalists and a significant number of Presbyterians to become the United Church of Canada in 1925.

IV. Free Methodism in Canada

In the fall of 1873 and winter of 1874 General Superintendent, B. T. Roberts visited the area just north and east of the city of Toronto, now Scarborough, on the invitation of Robert Loveless, a Primitive Methodist layman. Later, in 1876 while presiding over the very young North Michigan Conference, he read conference appointments that assigned C.H. Sage his field of labour—Canada!

Reluctantly, Sage came to southwestern Ontario. He was well received by disaffected Methodists, unhappy with the direction in which the larger Methodist bodies were moving. He preached a gospel calling men and women to conversion and the unconverted responded in encouraging numbers. His preaching took him as far north as the Muskoka region. By 1880, the Canada Conference consisted of two districts, 11 societies, 13 preaching points and 324 members. In the early years, the work grew rapidly. Churches were formed in eastern Ontario. By the early twentieth century it had spread to the prairies of western Canada. By 1920, there was an impetus to consolidate as a distinctly Canadian body. The result was the All Canada Conference—a gathering of western and eastern leaders in Sarnia, Ontario. It was a landmark event of praying, planning and dreaming. Out of that meeting came such results as the formation of a Canadian Executive Board to manage distinctly Canadian matters, the launching of the *Canadian Free Methodist Herald*, and the establishment of Lorne Park College in Port Credit, Ontario. The passing of a Federal Act of Incorporation in 1927 was also largely traceable to the All Canada Conference in Sarnia. In 1940, Aldersgate College was founded in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan,

another result of the vision generated at the All Canada Conference.

The Free Methodist Church in Canada was further strengthened in 1959 by a merger with the Holiness Movement Church. This latter denomination was the product of revivals in the Methodist churches of the Ottawa Valley under Ralph Horner during the waning years of the nineteenth century. This union, brought about by the labour of strong leaders in both bodies enlarged the world vision of the Canadian church by adding missionary concerns in Egypt, Brazil and Northern Ireland, fields the Holiness Movement Church had established.

In the early nineteen-seventies Canadian Free Methodist leaders applied to the Free Methodist Church of North America requesting authorization for the Canadian Church to become a general conference in its own right. Consultation resulted in the establishment of a Canadian Jurisdictional Conference, a halfway step, which came into being in August of 1974. At the General Conference of 1989, held in Seattle, Washington, the Canadian Jurisdictional Conference was authorized to form as a General Conference. On August 6, 1990, the Canadian General Conference was inaugurated in Mississauga, Ontario. At the Second General Conference of The Free Methodist Church in Canada, held in 1993, the British Columbia District of the Pacific Northwest Conference became a part of The Free Methodist Church in Canada.

V. The Bishops of The Free Methodist Church in Canada

Donald N. Bastian 1974-1993

Gary R. Walsh 1993-1997

Keith A. Elford 1997- 2017

Cliff Fletcher 2017-

C. Our Core Values

- **Persons**
- All persons are made in the image of God and possess intrinsic worth.
- All persons have a need to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.
- All persons can be saved and begin a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
- All persons have their own gifts to contribute to the kingdom.

- **Church**
- The Christian community is the foundation for the growth of the Kingdom of God on earth.
- The Christian community is the primary context for developing believers.

- The Christian community is to minister in Jesus' name to all people.
- The Christian community is to worship and serve God.

- **Team**
- Teamwork demonstrates the diversity of spiritual gifts and personal competencies within the church.
- Teamwork recognizes our dependence on God and each other.
- Teamwork maximizes the leadership resources of the church.
- Teamwork builds Christian community.

- **Connectionalism**
- Free Methodists share a common theology, membership covenant, and leadership system.
- Free Methodists co-operate with other parts of the Christian church in redemptive endeavours and political response.
- Free Methodists build healthy inter-congregational cooperation, celebration and support.
- Free Methodists affirm diverse approaches to accomplish our common vision and mission.

- **Integrity**
- Integrity is grounded in the character of God.
- Integrity establishes a framework for all relationships.
- Integrity guides all strategies, actions and programs.
- Integrity ensures the appropriate use of time, money, and energy.

- **Learning**
- Learning leads to excellence.
- Learning leads to creativity.
- Learning leads to faithfulness to biblical essentials.
- Learning increases skill.

- **Growth**
- The Scriptures call for every church to grow.
- The Scriptures call for the evangelization of the unreached.
- The Scriptures call for every Christian to grow in grace and knowledge of Christ.
- The Scriptures call for every Christian to participate in the growth of the church.

- **Generosity**
- God is generous to all. Becoming more like Him, we extend God's love through generosity to others.
- Generosity is grace-enabled as we trust God in all circumstances.
- Generosity is a source of joy and blessing as we join God in His ministry.
- Generosity glorifies God.