



STUDY COMMISSION
ON DOCTRINE

(SCOD) REPORT

APRIL 2024

IMAGINE

PREPARED FOR THE 2024 FREE METHODIST CHURCH IN CANADA
GENERAL CONFERENCE | APRIL 25-28 - TORONTO, ON

Report of the Study Commission on Doctrine

Prepared for the General Conference of the Free Methodist Church in Canada, 2024

Membership: The current membership of the Study Commission on Doctrine includes Bishop Cliff Fletcher (chair), Amy Bratton, Matthew McEwen, James Pedlar, Dustin Schellenberg, David Schuchardt, Debbie Yeboah, and Harold Gonyou (joined as guest in 2023). Sadly, during this term we grieved the loss of Lee Barbour and John Vlainic (secretary and guest resource person). Monique Alexander served as secretary after John's passing.

Meetings: SCOD has met eight times since 2021. The meetings were primarily held on zoom. A two-day in-person meeting was held in Mississauga in October 2023.

Agenda Items:

- **Article on Final Destiny:** Conversation regarding a potential change to ¶130 began in the previous session of SCOD. We discussed this issue in detail throughout our term, looking at Scriptural, historical, and theological issues. A sub-committee drafted potential revisions to the article which went through several iterations and refinements, leading to the resolution that SCOD is bringing to this General Conference.
- **Revision of ¶630.2.1 (“Worth of Persons”):** A member of Conference questioned whether the wording of this paragraph implied universal salvation. After review, we removed the phrase “and redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection” from this paragraph. This does not change the substance of the paragraph, which bases the worth of all people in our creation in the image of God.
- **Care of Creation¹:** SCOD reviewed a statement on Care of Creation draft by the FMCUSA SCOD and approved at their General Conference in 2023. We have brought the American statement to the Canadian General Conference for review. SCOD would like feedback on the document from churches and / or networks as we consider further refinements and possible incorporation of this material into the Manual in the future.

¹ The Creation Care resolution falls into the purview of the Board of Administration according to our Manual, not the General Conference. However, SCOD felt that this item is significant and wanted General Conference’s input before formally sending it to the BOA for final approval. We will, therefore, invite delegates and pastors to attend the SCOD townhall at General Conference in order to ask questions, offer input, interact with the Creation Care resolution even though we will not be voting for it at General Conference. SCOD will then take the Townhall feedback into consideration of their final resolution to the BOA.

¶630.4 CARE OF CREATION

MOTION:

Whereas: the Free Methodist Church declares in its Articles of Religion, “The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, His creation, His people, His one and only Son and the destiny of humankind” [¶108], and in ¶126 declares also that the complete manifestation of the Kingdom of God entails “a total cosmic renewal which is both material and moral”, and

Whereas: God commissioned humankind to care for the garden in which they were placed (Gen 2:15) and established an “everlasting covenant” with the earth and with “every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” (Gen 9:13, 16), and

Whereas: care for creation is particularly important for Methodists, whose founder, John Wesley, wrote extensively on “the Wisdom of God in Creation,”

Therefore, BE IT RESOLVED: The FMCiC shall adopt the following language for The Manual immediately, replacing ¶630.4 As Regards the Care of Creation

~~¶630.4 As Christians we affirm with Scripture that all creation declares the glory of God (Psalm 19:1-4). Since we worship the Creator and believe that Christ’s redeeming work “...reconciles to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven...” (Colossians 1:20), we value creation and participate in activity that restores, protects, and respects the earth. This demonstrates our love for God.~~

¶630.4 The Lord God brings salvation to earth through a series of revealed covenants, culminating in the New Covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. The first of these covenants, God’s covenant with the earth (Gen 9), is instituted following humanity’s fall into sin and after the flood. The rainbow is the visible sign of this covenant. God thus has an everlasting covenant with the earth (Gen 9:8-17), as well as His saving covenant with people. As God’s stewards on earth, called to “cultivate and care for it” (Gen. 2:15, NABRE), we affirm that God’s covenant with the earth constitutes our stewardship commission. Therefore:

A. We affirm the goodness of God’s creation, the value—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual—of engagement with it, and our responsibility to care for it as an integral part of our Christian discipleship and God’s Creation mandate (Gen 2:15).

B. We lament the ways in which humanity has failed to fulfill these responsibilities, polluting our environment, damaging ecosystems, and harming other species. The consequences of such failures are borne the most by the poor and marginalized.

C. We affirm and seek to support effective ministries of creation care such as reducing our consumption, tree-planting and reforestation, sustainable agriculture and energy

production, drought prevention and relief, environmentally sustainable transportation, appropriate recycling, and the minimization of waste.

D. We commit ourselves to be faithful stewards of God’s creation, engaging in practices that reflect God’s covenant with the earth and our commission to care for it, especially in our preaching, teaching, and spiritual practices; the sustainable stewardship of our church buildings and properties; global and local missions work and ministry; and civic efforts to care for our environment.

E. We, along with the whole of Creation, groan in anticipation of the time when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). We eagerly look forward to the renewal of the whole of creation when God through the work of Jesus Christ finally “reconcile[s] to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross” (Col 1:20).

- **MEGAP Theology Interview Questions:** At MEGAP’s request, SCOD reviewed the theological questions asked of Ministerial Candidates and suggested revisions.
- **Task Forces:** SCOD has kept in touch with the work of the three Task Forces, receiving occasional reports of their work and offering feedback as requested. For example, we consulted with the LGBTQ2S+ Task Force about potential changes to the Manual regarding celibacy.
- **Membership:** During several SCOD meetings we discussed the requirements for FMCiC membership, specifically in relation to alignment with the teachings of the Manual. While SCOD has made no formal recommendations in this regard, we anticipate further work will be necessary in the future.
- **Other initiatives:** SCOD discussed several other issues in the past three years, including the creation of a “Theology 101” course; the development of resources related to death and dying; providing support for FMCiC Communications regarding Wesleyan distinctives; theological implications of artificial intelligence.