

## **CHAPTER 7: CONGREGATIONAL LIFE**

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## CHAPTER 7: CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

### ¶700 INTRODUCTION

Many things go on in the activities of local churches. There are times when a local church gets so involved in a flurry of activities that it loses its sense of direction. We have listed in this introduction the five primary activities of the church, which are to mark the ministry of each local church. Throughout the rest of this chapter we shall go into greater detail on each one of them.

#### *Worship*

The worship of God is the central activity of God's people, the undergirding reality of all of life. The Psalmist said, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth" (Psalm 34:1). For thousands of years this life of continual worship has been shaped and nourished by special gatherings in which God is praised and his saving acts recounted.

The unit on worship has the following sections, designed to help leaders prepare for vital worship today:

- The first section describes several core convictions about worship in Free Methodism in Canada.
- Then mention is made of sources for further resources and input.
- The next section explains the function of prepared services in Free Methodism.

Over the years the Body of Christ (through people with gifts and training in these areas) has developed services using time-tested words to guide God's people through special acts of worship. The use of such services offers believers a framework in which Christian truth (in some fullness) surrounds these events, and the quality of the event is not so much dependent on whether the particular pastor involved has high skills and training in theology, liturgy and worship. As well, these "rituals" serve to tie together the Free Methodist family. Wise pastors use them, adapting only within areas of expertise - for the sake of the Body of Christ.

A number of prepared rituals are provided in folder format for easier use by officiants.

#### *Evangelism*

There is more to the Biblical picture of congregational life. In worship God invites his people to enter into his own heart for people. Believers are called to share the good news of his love so that more and more people may come to know, love and worship the one true God. The vocation of God's people Israel was to be "a light to the nations . . ." (See Isaiah 42:6). As that calling and vocation are fulfilled in the people of Christ, this call continues: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19) Evangelism is also at the heart of the life of God's people.

This section gives an introductory explanation of evangelism, understood biblically as bringing people into the life of the kingdom of God, outlining the several dimensions in a full-orbed view.

Healthy churches seek every way possible to reach people and bring them into the life of the kingdom - whether that evangelistic ministry be through the local church or through our connectional ministries in Canada and around the world.

*Fellowship*

Those who come to God through trust in Jesus Christ are drawn into a shared life. The biblical term is “fellowship.” This section distinguishes Christian fellowship from the variety of meanings often held by church people when this word is used.

The call to a deeply shared life together comes to us from the New Testament, and was stressed afresh in early Methodism. It is in the context of this life together that Christians worship God, share his love with the lost, serve the needy and broken, and build each other up toward maturity.

*Compassion and Justice Ministries*

In worship we are called to the divine intention for the world. The God we praise has a heart for the lost and hurting. He is a God of justice and truth. In both Old and New Testaments, God’s people are called to great generosity for those in need. Instructions about worshipping, praising and fearing God can be found *along with* calls for compassion for the widow and orphan.

In this section we learn that a concern for the poor and the broken in our world and for seeking justice for the oppressed has long been an emphasis among Methodists. The Free Methodist Church seeks both to evangelize and to serve, to be light and salt, and urges individual Christians and local churches to seek a variety of means to do both.

*Christian Nurture*

Images of growth and development abound in the New Testament. The Free Methodist Church seeks to help every believer to grow up into Christ (see Ephesians 4). The same commission of our Lord which commands that we go and make disciples of all nations explains that in addition to baptizing them the church is to teach them to obey everything he commanded (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Christian nurture process seeks to lead people to Christ and church membership, help them grow to spiritual maturity, equip them with the skills they need for ministry, and enlist them in the world-wide mission of sharing Christ.

**¶710 CHRISTIAN WORSHIP**

The worship of God is the central activity of God’s people; the undergirding reality of all of life. The Psalmist said, “I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1). Worship in this life is rehearsal for the ceaseless life of worship in the world to come. In the Revelation we read, “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing ‘To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!’ ” (Revelation 5:13).

The Free Methodist Church holds several core convictions about worship. These, we believe, apply across the cultures and years, especially in services of worship. They are characteristic of vital worship in any context (whether alone with Christ, or in small groups).

**1. Worship’s Focus**

In a service of worship, God is the audience, the worshipping people are all the actors, and pastors, musicians, readers and other worship leaders are prompters, seeking to help the actors (the people) minister to the audience (God). Worship is *for God!*

At its heart, Christian worship is praise and thanksgiving for who God is and what God has done in Jesus Christ. In worship God's people experience anew God's character, creative and redemptive activity, and promises of salvation and new creation. In Christian worship we represent the story and character of God.

Of course, worship services, though primarily directed to God and his glory, and focusing on his saving acts, can nonetheless be made friendly to persons in whom the Holy Spirit is awakening hunger for God. Vital worship can actually help draw such persons further into an encounter with the living God.

## 2. Balance

Vital worship is balanced, holding together the following tensions, striking both notes in a harmonious blend.

<i>both</i>	<i>and</i>
worship in spirit	worship in (Biblical) truth.
praise (for who God is)	thanksgiving (for God's mighty saving acts)
God is love	God is holy
God is near (immanent)	God is wholly "other" (transcendent)
feeling	understanding
freedom	form
joy, celebration	mystery, awe, reverence
encouragement, comfort	rebuke, challenge
reformation	tradition
shaped by trained pastors	shaped by lay teammates

Note: No one combination of components or styles or format will result in a balanced worship experience for all groups of worshippers. Worship leaders in every place need to exercise great discernment in creating worship services that reflect balance and wholeness for the people involved. In contextually appropriate ways, both ends of the tensions listed above are worked into healthy worship.

Some pastors will choose to use a lectionary, (carefully planned lists of readings designed to expose the church to the broad arcs of scripture and its teaching.) All can benefit from following the church year (at least Christmas and Easter) as means of pursuing balance and wholeness in worship.

## 3. Frequency

The example of almost 2000 years of walking with Jesus shows us that Christians usually plan to worship together (at least) weekly (corporately or in small groups).

## 4. Basic Components

Healthy worship services usually include the following components:

**Singing** - of songs that are *full of truth* (about God, his salvation and purposes, and about our responses to him); and *heartfelt*, in language and modes that people can "feel" and with which they can identify.

The **reading of the scriptures** - (as an act of worship, not simply as a launching point for the proclamation.) Reading the scriptures ties worship to the Biblical story of God.

**Prayers** - these may take the form of songs sung to God, songs in which God's Word to us are sung, or prayers prayed out loud or in the heart, or listening in silence to what the Spirit is saying. The prayers of vital worship will reflect a *balance of adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplication (making requests)*. Well-planned worship includes all four approaches to God.

**Proclamation of the scriptures** - in which God's Word is *opened to our understanding and applied to our lives*. Proclamation in Free Methodist worship services will not be in contradiction of the core beliefs laid out in our "Articles of Religion" or the moral vision laid out in *The Manual*.

**Giving** - an offering in which God's people worship through a costly action, and support Kingdom ministry.

**The sacrament of the Lord's Supper** - (Usually monthly)

**The sacrament of baptism** - (As needed)

Worship includes other components that help God's people to worship him, hear his Word, and respond to his call. These may include aesthetic, creative components that enact the word of God, or depict his beauty and majesty (i.e. drama, visual displays, and other celebrative arts).

## 5. Resources

Abundant resources exist in books, magazines, journals and elsewhere for developing full-orbed worship theology and practice. Denominational leaders and others who demonstrate discernment and understanding regarding worship theology and practice can guide worship leaders to these resources.

Other resources may be available on The Free Methodist Church in Canada website at [www.fmcic.ca](http://www.fmcic.ca).

## ¶711 COMMUNION SERVICES

The Lord's Supper is the one thing Jesus told his followers to do in remembrance of him. It is a central act of Christian worship and a chief means of grace (see ¶620). The Communion service must include, at a minimum, (1) confession of sin and request for forgiveness, (2) a retelling of the biblical story which we are called to remember through the sacrament, and (3) words of consecration/distribution.

*In Communion we look **in** at ourselves and confess the things that have gone wrong. We look **back** to Calvary and praise Jesus for his death for us. We look **up** to his risen presence, longing to nourish us through the bread and cup which he said were his body and blood. We look **around** in love and fellowship with other guests at God's table. We look **forward** to his return at the end of all history, the marriage supper of the Lamb, of which every Communion is a foretaste. And then we look **out** to a needy world; Communion is battle rations for Christian soldiers. [Adapted slightly from Michael Green, *One to One* (Moorings, 1995) p. 102]*

The Articles of Religion set out our theological understanding of the Sacraments (¶123) and Holy Communion (¶125). This section is intended to clarify accepted practices in the administration of Communion as part of the worship of the church.

### **Who can participate?**

For the Communion meal, we believe that we gather around the Lord's Table and that it is "open" to all who would turn to Him in faith and newness of life. We do not "fence" the Table, that is, restrict participation to those who are members only, or even those who are (baptized) believers.

Because Christ is really present at the Table through the Holy Spirit, so too are all the pardoning and transforming benefits of Christ's sacrifice. This means that Communion is a means of preventive, justifying, and sanctifying grace – and therefore a converting as well as a confirming sacrament. A person can come to know God for the first time through the taking of the bread and the cup.

If a person carefully listens to the prayers and words of commitment leading up to receiving the elements and finds his/her heart saying "yes" to the repentance, faith, and strong desire for cleansing by Christ that is found in those prayers, then that person would be welcome to partake – even if they were not a believer prior to the Communion Service, or even baptized. (Here is one reason that the ritual/liturgy/prayers of the Communion service are important.)

Communion is a means of grace that can be used at the beginning of the Christian journey, even though we recognize that the full significance of the meal will be come to be known only as the believer develops in maturity.

Persons should be reminded of the counsel of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 as reflected in the general "Invitation" ("*You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins ...*"). All who can, with a clear conscience, respond to this invitation are welcome to participate. Where it is known to church leaders that a person has not responded to the communion invitation with integrity, pastoral counsel will be required. Such counsel may include a request not to participate until there is evidence of repentance.

### **What about Children?**

Children are welcome at the Table provided they want to participate, are mature enough to do so in an appropriate manner, have or want to have a real relationship with Jesus, and understand the basic meaning of the meal.

\*BOA

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Parents play a key role in preparing children for participation. Pastors and Sunday school teachers should also take steps to ensure that children are instructed in the meaning of the sacraments. Resources for this purpose are available on the website.

### **Who can administer?**

The widespread tradition of the Church, including our own heritage in the Church of England and early Methodism, is that Communion should be administered (that is, the elements consecrated and distribution overseen) only by an ordained minister. The reason for this limitation is to provide the believing community with full assurance that this act is offered in a way thoroughly accountable to the apostolic witness and tradition.

The officiating minister may select lay assistants to help with the distribution of the elements.

We recognize that it may be valuable to celebrate Communion in a setting where an ordained minister is not present (for example, in small group ministry, visitation ministries). In any such situation, those leading should be prepared and aware of maintaining order and integrity of the table in accordance with the teaching of the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 11:23-33) and the practices advocated herein.

### **Distribution**

The traditional, widespread but not exclusive, practice of the early Methodists was to receive the bread and cup according to the custom adopted from the Church of England - that is, by proceeding to the prayer rails before the communion table and there kneeling while the minister delivered the elements into their hands. Participants would come in groups, as many as would fill the rail together, and then depart as a group, demonstrating the community building and affirming aspect of the sacrament.

The means of distributing the Communion elements is left to the discretion of those administering the sacrament.

### **Community event**

At the Lord's Table, we have communion with Christ and each other. Taking Communion involves a common confession of like-minded, like-believing persons who identify themselves and are given identity through this sacrament. Communion was always part of a fellowship meal in the early church. Private celebrations would have been foreign to the early Christians.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this sacrament as an act to express the unity of the body (1 Cor.10:17). The traditional prayers of the liturgy have a community orientation, particularly the "Prayer of Approach" ("*May Your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one with all the world ...*"). The traditional understanding of the Scriptures and the Church is that the sacraments would be practiced in community – even if just a small community of two or three.

When Communion is observed, all who are present should be invited to participate. So, for example, serving Communion to a wedding couple and not the gathered community is foreign to our understanding of the sacrament.

As an exception, the church has always taken Communion to the sick and shut-in, but even in such situations, those serving share in the elements – and we frame it as something like bringing them part of the feast that they weren't able to attend with the rest of the family.

### **Frequency**

There is no scriptural direction as to how frequent Communion should be celebrated. There is evidence that the early church observed Communion weekly. The early Methodists were urged to celebrate weekly, or as often as they could. (see Wesley's sermon, "The Duty of Constant Communion.")

We encourage celebration at least monthly.

We do not believe that concerns about celebrating too frequently or taking too much time in a worship service should play any role in determining frequency.

### **The Value of Ritual**

The Communion service in early Methodism followed the Order of the Book of Common Prayer, enlarged and enlivened by hymn-singing and extemporaneous prayer.

While there are a variety of rituals available, the use of common, accepted rituals/liturgies has always been a valued part of the celebration of Communion among Methodists. Commonly held prayers, symbols, and actions of common ritual confirm and promote our identity as a community, connecting us with the church catholic through the centuries. Ritual provides structure, familiarity, and order to our experience, and reliable reaffirmation of our beliefs.

Use of a ritual/liturgy doesn't mean that Communion should be an "add-on" to the normal service. A service in which Communion is celebrated should be designed to set a path to Table from the beginning of the service, to prepare participants to meaningfully receive the sacrament.

### **Principles for Adapting Communion Liturgy**

There may be contexts where the use of a traditional Communion ritual would unduly encumber worship (e.g. in a cultural grouping far different from that in which the present services arose). To ensure that the Communion service that is used is faithful to our collective understandings of the Lord's Supper, pastors should consider the following principles:

- Does the service express both great joy and a sense of the presence of Christ (which will, of course, produce the proper "reverence")? If we are faithful to what the scriptures and church history reveal about Communion in the earliest days, the service will be more a joyful celebration of the living presence of Christ (with awe at the immensity of his love) than it will be primarily a penitential service.
- Does the service tell the story of God's saving acts from the scriptures of Old and New Testament as happens well in "the Great Thanksgiving" in the first service provided on the next page.
- Does the service contain the various components of deep intimacy (communion) with the holy, saving God: expressions of repentance, desire for cleansing, expressions of thanksgiving?
- Does the service balance the various dimensions of Communion (i.e. looking *in*, looking *back*, looking *up*, looking *around*, looking *forward*, and looking *out* ? (See introduction above.)



- Does the service incorporate the prayers of the church over the years (which have been carefully formulated so as to convey the truth of the sacrament), especially the prayer of approach and the prayers of consecration, and the biblical words of distribution?

Leaders without great experience or education in worship would be wise to interact with seasoned church leaders when making plans to innovate. Two time-tested rituals that are suitable for use in Free Methodist Churches are provided on the following pages.

Words of Consecration

In the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying: “Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In like manner, after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying: “Drink of this, all of you, for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.”

Words of Distribution

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

Benediction

The blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you forever. Amen.

**SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION (1)**The Invitation

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbours, and who intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking henceforth in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament for your comfort; and humbly bowing make your honest confession to Almighty God.

The General Confession

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Maker of all things, Judge of all people, who with great mercy has promised forgiveness and deliverance to all who turn to you with hearty repentance and true faith, we confess that we have sinned against you and are hopeless without your grace. Have mercy upon us, O merciful Father, have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins:

from blindness of heart and lack of love;  
from the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;  
from false doctrine and neglect of your Word;  
from disbelief and lack of trust.

O God, our Saviour, keep us this day without sin. Give us strength to serve and please you in newness of life, and to honour and praise your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Petition

Almighty God, you have faithfully watched over us, and graciously helped us; now hear our petitions:

for good health and sound minds;  
for strength to earn our bread;  
for rest from worry and labour;  
for safety in travel;  
for protection from enemies;  
for Christian homes; and for a just and strong nation.

Out of your compassion give us those things which are good and proper for our souls, and protect us by your might in all our tribulations. Grant us in this world the peace that is from above, and bring us to everlasting life in the world to come, through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying:

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

### The Intercession

Almighty God, who created the world from nothing, and who sustains it by your powerful Word, support and protect us that we may serve you as intercessors in your world; and to that end hear our prayers for those in need:

for the sick, the infirm and the aged;  
for widows and orphans, the poor and oppressed;  
for the lonely, discouraged, bereaved and heartbroken;  
for those in bondage to sin, unmindful of God, without knowledge of the gospel of salvation.

We pray too for all your servants who honour Christ in their work:

**for homemakers and wage earners;**  
**for teachers and students;**  
**for doctors, nurses, and others who serve the sick;**  
**for labourers and executives;**  
**for farmers and city dwellers;**  
**for the aged and the young;**  
**for those who govern and those who are ruled.**

To each of these and to all others for whom we should pray, give wisdom, strength and the power to endure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### The Great Thanksgiving

Almighty God, you created us to enjoy your fellowship; and even when we transgressed your command, you did not forsake us, but chastened us as a merciful Father;

You called Abraham from the land of his fathers, and freed the children of Israel from bondage and slavery; you gave your law and sent your prophets to guide them in your ways;

At the right time you gave the world your only Son, who by his birth to a virgin, and through his temptations and ministry, his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension, opened to us the way to heaven;

You sent your Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, who through the Apostles and the Church, called us to salvation; you adopted us and daily give us aid in the journey of faith by that same Spirit. Our hearts are full, O God, and in thanksgiving to you, we cry, Abba, Father.

In confidence that you will bring us to our full inheritance, and give us our place at the heavenly table with your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, we offer thanksgiving, joining our voices with all the Church to confess:

**Christ has died,**  
**Christ has risen,**  
**Christ will come again.**

### Prayer of Approach

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, send the power of your Holy Spirit upon us, that we may experience anew the suffering, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. May your Spirit help us to know, in the breaking of this bread and the drinking of this cup, the presence of Christ who gave his body and blood for all. And may your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, united in service to the world. **Amen.**

**SERVICE OF HOLY COMMUNION (2)**

Hear us, O merciful Father, we humbly ask, and grant that we, receiving this bread and this cup, as He commanded and in the memory of His passion and death, may partake of His most blessed body and blood.

In the night of His betrayal, Jesus took the bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In like manner, after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of this all of you, for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." Amen.

Words of Distribution

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your soul and body unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

The Benediction

May the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be yours now and forever. **Amen.**

The Invitation

You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbours, and who intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God and walking in his holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament for your comfort; and humbly bowing, make your honest confession to Almighty God.

The General Confession

*Let us join together in the prayer of confession:*

**Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, maker of all things, judge of all people, we confess that we have sinned, and we are deeply grieved as we remember the wickedness of our past lives. We have sinned against You, Your holiness, and Your love, and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.**

**We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the things we should. Our hearts are grieved, and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without your grace.**

**Have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us most merciful Father, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who died for us.**

**Forgive us. Cleanse us. Give us strength to serve and please You in newness of life, and to honour and praise your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

*Let us continue our confession as we pray together the prayer Jesus taught his disciples:*

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.**

The Affirmation of Faith

O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great mercy has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from our sins, make us strong and faithful in all goodness, and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Collect

*Let us pray for inner cleansing:*

**Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are opened, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

The Sanctus

It is always right and proper that we should give you thanks and praise, O Lord God, for you alone reign. You judge the world in righteousness and rule over all the nations.

Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the inhabitants of heaven we honour and adore your glorious name, evermore praising you and saying:

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts!  
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Glory be to you, O Lord, most high. Amen.**

The Gloria Patri

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end.  
Amen. Amen.**

The Prayer for Spiritual Communion

We do not come to this Your table, O merciful Lord, with self-confidence and pride, trusting in our own righteousness, but we trust in Your great and many mercies. We are not worthy to gather the crumbs from under Your table. But You, O Lord, are unchanging in Your mercy, and Your nature is love; grant us, therefore, God of mercy, God of grace, so to eat at this Your table that we may receive in spirit and in truth the body of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, and the merits of His shed blood, so that we may live and grow in His likeness, and, being washed and cleansed through His most precious blood, we may evermore live in Him and He in us. Amen.

The Prayer of Consecration of the Elements

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love Your only Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, who by His sacrifice, offered once for all, did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the sins of the whole world, we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son, Jesus Christ, who in His holy Gospel commanded us to continue a perpetual memory of His precious death until He comes again.

## ¶712 INFANT BAPTISM AND DEDICATION SERVICES

### ¶712.1 Guidance Regarding Requests for Infant Baptisms/Dedications

#### **The Nature of the Baptism and Dedication of Children**

The presentation of a child to the Lord for baptism or dedication is a significant act for the parents, for the church and for the child. This is to be a community of faith event done in the context of the worship service when God's people are gathered. The covenant calls for the church to make promises to the family which are not possible if the baptism/dedication is performed in a private setting.

The presentation of a child is a mark of belonging to the community of faith and a celebration of the fact that God's grace is already at work in the life of the child as part of a Christian family and as part of the family of God. This aspect is particularly emphasized by parents who choose infant baptism.

It is also a moment of public covenant (by family and church) to be good stewards of a precious gift from the God we worship – in the care and training of the child. This is particularly emphasized by parents who choose infant dedication.

An article that more fully explains the history of the two traditions and the truth embraced by both is found in a discussion paper in ¶713.

#### **Blessing the Children of Unbelieving and Non-Attending Families**

The church must always respond with warmth and pastoral concern to seekers who are prompted to think about spiritual matters when a child is born into their family.

At the same time, if the parents are not committed to Christ and a congregation of His church, it would be rash for them to stand before the Lord and the church and take the covenantal vows of an infant baptism/dedication when clearly their hearts are not yielded to Christ and they do not participate in the life of His Body, the church.

Yet, this request can be seen as a wonderful pre-evangelistic opportunity for a pastoral person to meet with the family in their home and talk openly with them out of the Scriptures about the things of God and the wonderful privilege of living life in relationship with him. He/she could impress on them how wonderful it would be if this little baby grew up to be a person who knows God personally and lives with the knowledge of how much God loves him/her and then take the baby in his/her arms and pray a prayer for the baby asking the Lord to bless him/her and the parents and to open the way for him/her (and the parents) to come to know greater spiritual blessings through a personal relationship with the Lord.

In this way, the parents are not making a covenant with God that they are not in a place spiritually to keep, they are not given false security that their baby has been “done”, and they are not given a certificate (a legal document) certifying to a ceremony that they could not spiritually participate in.

At the same time, they are responded to lovingly and, we hope that follow-up visits will result in them eventually opening their hearts to the Lord.

## ¶712.2 Infant Baptism/Dedication Service

God, through Moses, made covenant with his people, saying to them, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

In the days of the new covenant, Christ Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these;” and on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter declared, regarding the salvation given through Christ, “The promise is for you and your children.”

It is therefore our privilege to present our children to the Lord and our duty to raise them in his ways. These parents now bring [*this child / these children*] to offer [*him/her/them*] in dedication and to pledge in the presence of this congregation, to bring [*him/her/them*] up in the Lord’s discipline and instruction.

### Let us pray:

Father, we praise you today for the gift of [*this child / these children*] into our world, among your people, and into these parents’ home[s]. Thank you for all the joy [*this child / these children*] [*has/have*] already brought to them. We praise you too for all the potential that you have packed into [*this life/these lives*]. May [*he/she/they*], as the years progress, increase in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with you and with other people.

Bless [*name parents*] as they parent their children. So work in their home[s] that at an early age in life [*this child / these children*] may affirm personally all that has been pledged on [*his/her/their*] behalf here today.

And Father, bless this whole church family in such a way that in both what we are and in what we do, we may model and minister in the power of the Spirit in ways that will lead to the fulfillment of what we ask today.

Lord, we thank you that though [*this child / these children*] [*has/have*] not consciously thought about you yet, you have already been thinking about [*him/her/them*], about [*his/her/their*] place in your plan, and

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about how you want to shower your love upon [*him/her/them*]. Thank you for grace that seeks us even before we have even thought of you.

Come and bless us now as we consecrate [*this child/these children*] and ourselves to you. We pray this in the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

Now these questions I address to the parents.

1. **Do you, in the presence of God and this church, solemnly dedicate [*this child/these children*] to the Lord?**
2. **Do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways so that you will endeavour neither to follow them nor be led by them?**
3. **Will you faithfully strive by word and example to lead [*this child/these children*] to personal faith in Christ?**
4. **Do you accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God?**
5. **Out of them, will you diligently teach [*this child/these children*] the commandments and promises of the Most High God, raising [*him/her/them*] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?**
6. **And will you continue to raise your *child/children* in the fellowship of the church so that *he/she/they* might see and experience what it means to be part of the people of God.**

*(Then the pastor shall say to the congregation:)*

Let us acknowledge our duty to support this family with our prayers and encouragement, thereby aiding both parents and child[ren] to fulfill all that has here been promised. The congregation will affirm this by standing.

*(The Pastor shall take the child in his/her arms, and say:)*

**[Name this child]**

**I dedicate you to God...or I baptize you...** in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*(Then the pastor may pray for the child[ren], parents and church family.)*

## ¶713 INFANT BAPTISM /DEDICATION DISCUSSION PAPER

People coming to the Free Methodist Church from other Christian traditions are often surprised to find that babies can be dedicated *or* baptized. Most church families in Christendom have chosen only one of these. Why does the Free Methodist Church make provision for people to do either?

To clarify this matter we will ask, first, about the origins of baptism. Then we will ask what it means. This is done in the awareness that people in Christian circles range from seeing baptism as somewhat “magical” to seeing it as “merely symbolic.” Free Methodists believe that the truth lies between these extremes.

### What Are the Origins of Baptism?

Baptism, and religious rites involving the use of water, have been around a good deal longer than the Christian Church. At least three practices involving water were in use among groups who had contact with the early church.

1. The Old Testament law contained regulations requiring washings. It would probably be wise not to call them “ceremonial,” because that word implies a distinction the Jews could not make. External religious actions were seen as having spiritual implications for the whole person. Jesus, Paul, and the writers of Scripture were not rationalistic 20<sup>th</sup> century North Americans who find it easy to separate external actions from internal personal implications. Various kinds of “uncleanness” were to be cleansed by washings with water.
2. One group among the Jews performed a rite in which participants daily went down into a pool of water to experience cleansing and commit themselves to goodness, truth, and righteousness. This community withdrew from normal Jewish life in the second century before Christ and set up a separatist commune at Qumran near the Dead Sea. (The famous Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the desert of that region tell us of these practices.)
3. Furthermore, at the time of Jesus, a practice was taking shape for the initiation of Gentiles into the Jewish community of faith. Gentiles were, of course, seen as “unclean,” and so, a ceremony of purification and initiation, not unlike baptism as we know it, became a part of their “conversion” to Judaism. In Judaism, then, baptism became the sign of that change in which an “outsider” became a member of the family of faith. It was the mark of entry.

What about the New Testament itself? The Gospels tell us that before the ministry of Jesus, a man named John was in the desert preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. In fact, the Fourth Gospel tells us that some of Jesus’ disciples were initially disciples of this John the baptizer. The religious authorities were outraged by John’s baptism. They saw baptism as something for the “unclean,” something for “outsiders” who needed to get “in.” By calling *Jews* to be baptized, John was asking those who required outsiders to be baptized to consider *themselves* as outsiders in need of God’s forgiving grace. The Jewish leaders were scandalized because John was asking them to engage in a practice that implied that they too needed cleansing and forgiveness!

But John insisted that his baptism was only a preparatory rite. The water baptism he administered was only preparing people for the decisive ministry of the One who was yet to come. The Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit.



On the day of Pentecost He did. And from that day to this, the message for everyone who hears the Word of Christ's death for their sins is as Peter preached in Acts 2:38,

*Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

In the era of the church, the characteristic baptism that Jesus does is in the Holy Spirit, the visible expression of which is baptism with water.

### **What Does Baptism Mean?**

Given the fact that there were a number of kinds of baptism in the world of the early church (see Hebrews 6:2), we need to ask, "What specific meanings does *Christian* baptism have?"

1. Christian baptism has always been a visible way of identifying with the Christian community, of saying that a person now takes his or her official stand with the fellowship of believers. (This was a very strong note in the Jewish baptism of non-Jews.)

Baptism does not seem scandalous to most of us. For many it is an acceptable social convention, the proper thing to do. Not so for those who came to Christ in the New Testament era, and for many today, especially in other cultures.

Baptism means abandoning all your former first allegiances. It often meant becoming an outcast in your own family and among your friends. You could attend Christian gatherings and still not abandon all your former allegiances. You would still not be regarded for certain as a Christian. Once you submitted to baptism, you were burning all your bridges behind you. You irrevocably identified yourself with that strange little band of people who followed and worshipped as alive from the dead a man who had been executed as a criminal, a man named Jesus. You might toy with the Christian way up until baptism, but in that culture (and in some places today), you were "taking the plunge" when you submitted to baptism. Baptism meant forsaking all and identifying with Jesus Christ and His body, the church.

2. Baptism is an enactment of death and new life. This is the distinctive contribution of Paul to our understanding. In his writings he repeatedly connects baptism with a person's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. In Romans chapter six, he is concerned to articulate the inner change (with outer consequences) that has taken place in those who have become Christians. Paul alludes to what he knows his readers believe about baptism. He reminds them that when they came to faith in Christ they became personal participants in his death to sin, and in his resurrection to new life. That is, when they came to Christ in faith (which in the earliest church was accompanied by baptism), the death of Christ became theirs, too, as did his resurrection. No longer were these events limited to Jesus and to the early 30's A.D., but they became real and effective in the lives of those who trusted him. In a way we can only hint at, believers have been joined to Christ and become a part of him. Paul's oft-used phrase "in Christ" refers to this. In the earliest days of the church, baptism was closely associated with this dying and rising with Christ through which a person came to be "in Christ."
3. Finally, the true baptism, the effective baptism that washes away sin and imparts new life, is not what is done in water (whatever the mode). What the church does in those instances is the outward expression of that inward baptism in which the Holy Spirit washes away the sins of those who trust Christ, and renews them from the inside out. There is only *one* Christian baptism (cf. Ephesians 4:5), but it has an outward side (water baptism) and an inward (baptism by the Spirit into Christ.)

Many Christians use the term “Spirit baptism” to refer to subsequent experiences of the Spirit in the Christian life. However, that is not our focus here. We are using the words in the basic sense of what the Holy Spirit does when we become Christians. I Corinthians 12:13 says, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

### **How Did We Get More Than One View?**

The foregoing helps us realize that there are many dimensions to baptism (just as there are many dimensions to coming to Christ). Like the other sacrament (the Lord’s Supper), baptism defies total grasp by mere humans, especially in light of our fallenness. Let us attempt to outline what seems to have happened.

In the earliest days of the church, the good news about new life in Jesus was first preached principally to adults who made public confession, by means of the act of baptism, that they had joined themselves to Jesus in repentance and trust and had died to sin and risen to newness of life along with him. From these early precedents the church has continued to baptize adult converts. What then becomes of the children of believers?

Two streams of interpretation have emerged over twenty centuries, both of which find some support in the New Testament texts. Though sharp battles have been fought between proponents of the two traditions, the Free Methodist position is that they are intrinsically complementary. Each needs the other for theological completeness.

The tradition practicing infant baptism has pointed to the priority of grace over faith. That is to say, this tradition stresses *God’s initiative* in our coming to Christ. It also affirms that the little children of Christian parents have a right to “belong” in the community of faith.

The tradition espousing believers’ baptism in which adults are baptized and infants are “blessed” or “dedicated” has placed emphasis on the importance of *the believer’s response* to God’s grace.

Both of these aspects of the drama of salvation need to be held together in tension if we are to have a full-orbed doctrine of coming to Christ. The tradition of baptizing only those who consciously repent and trust in Christ emphasizes free, adult decision. It stresses personal response to Christ, which presupposes volition, intelligence and accountability. The infant baptism tradition, on the other hand, stresses God’s initiative prior to our human response, pointing out that God is at work in our lives (especially the lives of children with Christian parents) long before we personally respond. It also stresses the “corporate” (more than individual) dimension of life among God’s people.

Acts 16:15 indicates that when Lydia opened her heart in response to Paul’s message, “she and the members of her household were baptized.” Paul wrote in I Corinthians 1:16, “I also baptized the household of Stephanus.” Other similar statements exist. One could reasonably argue that children were likely a part of those households.

Many factors will determine which side of these debates one perceives as holding the greater truth. What seems less deniable is that baptism has some relation (though not complete) to the rite of circumcision, an initiatory rite of entry into membership in the Jewish faith. Circumcision was performed on infants. Thus it is often said that as Jews enter the old covenant community through circumcision, Christians enter the community of the new covenant through baptism.

One cannot press the analogy between circumcision and baptism too far. There are major differences between the two. Circumcision is for males only. It is clear in the New Testament that Christians joyfully baptized men *and* women from the very first (cf. Acts 16:15). In addition, the covenant entered into through circumcision involved certain elements of national and racial identity that are not factors in the new community.

The church needs to avoid both extremes. The one extreme (which sees a baptism only as something *we* do as a testimony to our faith) ignores the work of God in bringing a person to faith in Jesus. The other extreme (in which baptism is sometimes regarded as almost “magical”) ignores human will, personal repentance and trust. God’s initiative (grace) and personal human response (faith) have to be held in tension. Thus Free Methodists use both rites, trying to paint the whole picture.

When they baptize babies, pastors should make sure that their prayers include clear requests that God will bring the children to a personal faith that “owns” what the parents are promising at a time when the children (who “belong” from day one) cannot act for themselves. When they dedicate children, pastors should make sure that their prayers include clear gratitude to God for the fact that he is already at work in the life of that child, who already “belongs” in the Christian community.

Here’s what must be stressed: whether at the time of baptism (in the adult baptism tradition) or at the time of the personal affirmation of the vows made earlier by the parents (in the infant-baptism tradition), it is faith in Jesus (dependent trust, not mere cognitive affirmation) that is crucial. Paul goes so far as to say that without faith and obedience, the old rite of circumcision has no value (Romans 2:25). The same is true of baptism. With either rite, clear evangelistic follow-through is crucial.

### **What Do Free Methodists Do?**

We provide a service for either baptism or dedication. In both, we emphasize the grace of God and the necessity of faith. When Christian parents – as a matter of conscience – have a preference for one service or the other, our pastors honour that request. By teaching and follow-up, we emphasize that neither practice has saving virtue and that both are appropriate only for parents who themselves are living the life of faith.

### **Conclusion**

The Free Methodist Church’s roots are clearly in the infant baptism tradition. Over the years, as the church has incorporated people whose consciences have been shaped by both traditions, it has granted parents the right to choose which service they prefer. The Free Methodist Church attempts to embrace both dimensions of Christian truth.

**¶714 CHILDREN AND ADULT BAPTISM SERVICES**

**¶714.1 Baptism of Non-Infant Children Under Twelve**

In lieu of the questions to parents or guardians (in ¶712), the following may be asked candidates for baptism who are under twelve years of age.

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, and do you desire to be baptized in His name?

**Answer: I do.**

2. Do you intend by this act to testify to all the world that you are a Christian and will be a loyal follower of Christ?

**Answer: I do.**

3. Do you believe in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?

**Answer: I do.**

4. Trusting God to help you, will you resist temptation always and keep from doing those things which you know to be sinful or displeasing to God?

**Answer: I will.**

5. Will you attend the church services and do those things you know a Christian should do?

**Answer: I will.**

## ¶714.2 Affirmation of Baptismal Vows

Dear friends in Christ, in your infancy your parents presented you at the altar of the church for the Sacrament of Baptism. That service was one of both dedication and consecration. Your parents dedicated you to the Lord and took vows on your behalf. They promised to teach you from the Word of God and to train you in the way that you should go. God in His goodness has brought you to years of responsibility, and you now desire to acknowledge before God and His church the covenant then made on your behalf, to profess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, to consecrate yourself to Him, and thereby to bind yourself anew to His service.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has said, “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.”

Let us repeat the words of the Apostle’s Creed (together)

### The Apostles’ Creed

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

1. Do you believe these things?

**Answer: All these things I firmly believe.**

2. Do you promise with the aid of the Holy Spirit to be Christ’s faithful disciple to your life’s end?

**Answer: I do.**

3. Have you read and considered the vows taken for you in baptism, and do you affirm them with a humble and contrite heart, putting your whole trust in the mercy of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?

**Answer: I do.**

4. Do you promise to make diligent use of the means of grace, to share faithfully in the worship and service of the church, to give of your substance as the Lord may prosper you, and to give your whole heart to the service of Christ and His kingdom throughout the world?

**Answer: I do.**

*(Here may follow a benediction if the service is ending.)*

### ¶714.3 Baptism of Adults

Dear friends in Christ, our faith declares that by the sin of Adam, humanity as the offspring of Adam is corrupted in its very nature, so that from birth we are inclined to sin; and that new life and a right relationship with God are possible only through the redemptive acts of God in Christ Jesus. Believing these declarations to be true, and in obedience to the command of Christ, (*this person has/these persons have*) come to make public confession that (*his/her/their*) sins have been washed away, and by means of baptism with water, to give sign of that inward washing and new life in Christ which are now (*his/hers/theirs*) by faith. We therefore implore you to pray that through this means of grace (*he/she/they*) may be further moved to keep covenant with God and so may ever experience the constant washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.

*[Then the minister shall say]*

Let us pray. Almighty and Everlasting God, whose covenant is firm and whose promises are always to be trusted, we call upon You for *this person* that, (*he/she*), coming to (*his/her*) baptism, may by this act give clear witness that (*he/she*) has received Your inner washing through faith in the cleansing blood of Your Son, Jesus Christ. May (*he/she*) ever rejoice in the forgiveness of sins, the indwelling of Your Spirit, the fellowship of the church and the assurance of resurrection to glory in the world to come.

*[Then shall the people stand, and the minister shall say]*

Christ Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.”

You, who present yourself for water baptism, have heard this congregation’s prayers that God will continue His loving favour toward you and bring you to His eternal kingdom. And God, who keeps covenant, has promised by His only Son, who offered himself up for our redemption, to grant you these gracious favours. You must now promise, in the presence of this congregation, to keep covenant with Him, renouncing the life of sin, believing His Holy Word and obediently keeping His commandments.

*[Then shall the minister ask each candidate these questions, to be answered individually]*

1. Do you have the inward witness that your sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ our Lord?  
**Answer: I have.**
2. Do you renounce the devil and his works, the lure of this ungodly world and the sinful desires of fallen humanity, so that you will not follow nor be led by them?  
**Answer: I do.**

3. Let us repeat the words of the Apostle’s Creed (together)

#### THE APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Do you believe these things?

**Answer: All these things I firmly believe.**

4. Is it your desire to be baptized into the Christian faith?

**Answer: It is my desire.**

5. In the fellowship of the church, will you obediently do God’s will and walk in His holy commandments all the days of your life?

**Answer: I will endeavour to do so, the Lord being my helper.**

*[Then shall the persons be baptized by sprinkling, pouring or immersion as they shall desire. The minister shall say]*

I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*[Then shall the minister use the following prayer, or substitute an extemporaneous one with the same requests]*

God, our Father, who gives to all who repent and believe the Gospel the right to be called children of God, may Your grace ever be effectual in this, *Your child*. And may (*he/she*) enjoy the greater baptism of the Holy Spirit so that all sinful inclinations may be conquered by Your power, and every Christian virtue may live and grow in (*him/her*). Grant to (*him/her*) a place of service in the fellowship of Your church and may (*his/her*) witness in the world bring glory to Your holy name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*[Here may follow a benediction if the service is ending.]*

## **¶715 THE SOLEMNIZATION OF MARRIAGE**

Provincial authorization for the registration of a marriage may be granted in one of two ways: by the procurement of a marriage license by the man and woman to be married, or by the publication of banns, if applicable in their province. Those officiating at weddings should take care to acquaint themselves with the marriage act of their province to determine the particular requirements. Banns should be published only after the officiating minister has confirmed from the marriage act of the province where the wedding is to be performed that the province permits it. The banns should be published according to the direction of the province's marriage act.

## ¶715 SERVICE OF MARRIAGE

Dear friends in Christ, we are gathered together here in the sight of God and the presence of these witnesses to join together \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in holy matrimony. Marriage is an honourable estate, instituted by God in the time of creation for the well being of humankind. It is safeguarded by the laws of Moses, affirmed by the words of the prophets, and hallowed by the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. Marriage is a union close and enduring; a relationship in which a man and a woman forsake all others to become one flesh. This abiding union illustrates the holy relationship between Christ and His church. Marriage is therefore not to be entered into by any lightly, but reverently, soberly, and in the fear of God.

*[Addressing the man and woman, the minister shall say]*

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, I remind you both as you stand in the presence of God to remember that covenant love alone will avail as the foundation of a happy and enduring home. Let Christ, who was loyal to His own unto death, be your example. Let the Apostle Paul be your teacher, who wrote “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” If you keep this steadfast love ever before you and, remaining faithful to each other, resolutely endeavour to fulfill the vows you now will make, God’s blessing will be upon you, and the home you establish will endure through life’s every change.

*[Then the minister shall say to the man, using his Christian name]*

\_\_\_\_\_, will you have \_\_\_\_\_ to be your wedded wife, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and keep her, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for her, so long as you both shall live?

**I will.**



*[Then the minister shall say to the woman, using her Christian name]*

\_\_\_\_\_, will you have \_\_\_\_\_ to be your wedded husband, to live together in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love him, comfort him, honour and keep him, in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, keep yourself only for him, so long as you both shall live?

**I will.**

*[Then shall the minister say]*

Who gives \_\_\_\_\_ to be married to \_\_\_\_\_?

*[The father of the woman, or whoever gives her in marriage, shall answer]*

**I do.**

*[Then the man and woman shall face each other and join hands and say after the minister]*

I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death parts us, and thereto I promise you my faithfulness.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death parts us, and thereto I promise you my faithfulness.

*[The minister may receive a ring which he/she in turn will give to the groom to place on the third finger of the woman's left hand as he says after the minister]*

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

*[In case of a double ring ceremony, the minister will receive a ring which he /she in turn will give to the bride to place on the third finger of the man's left hand as she says after the minister]*

This ring I give you in token and pledge of our constant faith and steadfast love.

**Let us pray.**

O Eternal God, creator and preserver of all humankind, giver of all spiritual grace, the author of everlasting life send Your blessing upon this man and this woman whom we bless in Your name that they, living faithfully together, may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant between them made, and may ever remain in perfect love and peace together, and live according to Your laws through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*[Then the minister shall say]*

Forasmuch as \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have consented together in holy wedlock and have witnessed the same before God and this company and have pledged their faith each to the other and have declared the same by joining hands (and by giving and receiving a ring), therefore, by the authority granted to me as a minister of Jesus Christ, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder. Amen.

*[The minister shall pronounce over them the following benediction]*

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace; now and in the world to come. **Amen.**

## ¶716 THE FUNERAL SERVICE

*[The minister may use the following order of worship at the church or chapel.]*

### **OPENING SENTENCES, such as**

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

“The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no evil shall touch them. They are in peace.”

“In his favour is life, weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

“Like a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.”

“For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

“The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

### **INVOCATION**

O Eternal God, our Father, from whom we come and to whom we go, grant us the favour of Your divine presence at this time in our earthly pilgrimage; assure us by Your Spirit that the one we serve, even Jesus, has conquered death and is alive forevermore; enable us to view our temporal lives in the light of the eternal; and so may our spirits grow calm and our vision clear. Through Christ we pray. Amen.

**HYMN** (by the congregation, musicians, or organist)

### **OBITUARY AND/OR TRIBUTES**

**OLD TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES**

Psalms 23, 90, 121

**NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES**

John 14:1-6; I Corinthians 15:35-49; II Corinthians 5:1-5

**INTERLUDE** *(use a hymn with which the congregation can identify)*

**SERMON**

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

**HYMN**

**BENEDICTION** *(not used if the service is to continue at the graveside)*

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**Interment Service**

*[Any or all the following Scriptures may be read.]*

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will stand upon the earth;... then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold...” (Job 19:25-27).

“For we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world” (I Timothy 6:7).

“The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

“Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I

go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going. Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me’” (John 14:1-6).

*[Then shall the minister say]*

Inasmuch as Almighty God, in His wise providence, has received from this world our deceased *brother/sister/child*, we therefore commit this mortal body to the ground, looking for the resurrection in the last day and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ, at whose Second Coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead; and the mortal bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed, and made like unto His own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to redeem all things unto Himself.

*[The minister may pray extemporaneously or use the following]*

**The Collect**

O merciful God, you are the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the resurrection and the life, in whom whoever believes shall live, though they die, and whoever lives and believes in Him shall not die eternally. We humbly beseech You, O Father, to raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, that when we shall depart this life we may rest in Christ. And we pray that at the resurrection on the last day we may be found acceptable in Your sight and receive that blessing which Your well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all who love and fear You, saying, “Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.” Grant this, we beseech You, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.

**Benediction**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

## ¶717 THE QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

**Pastor:** Beloved in the Lord, you have been baptized into Christ and come now to be received into membership in this congregation of the Free Methodist Church. We rejoice, with you, in all God's mercies that have brought you to this hour; and we join our prayers with yours as you make this sacred undertaking.

**Pastor:** Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?

**Candidate:** I do.

**Pastor:** Do you believe the Bible is God's written word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit and do you accept its authority for what you must believe and how you must live?

**Candidate:** I do.

**Pastor:** Do you here resolve, by God's grace, to be Christ-like in heart and life, opening yourself fully to the cleansing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, the guidance of the Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of this church?

**Candidate:** By God's enabling grace, I do resolve.

**Pastor:** Do you accept the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals for Christian conduct, and the government of the Free Methodist Church, and will you endeavour to live in harmony with them?

**Candidate:** Trusting God's power to aid me, I do.

**Pastor:** As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you embrace the mission of the Free Methodist Church within and beyond this congregation, and will you join us in giving

sacrificially of your time, talents and resources to help us carry out that mission?

**Candidate:** With God's help, I will.

**Pastor:** I offer you the right hand of fellowship. I welcome you into The Free Methodist Church. May the experience of membership in this body enrich your life and the life of our church; and may your contribution to its life strengthen both you and all of us.

## ¶717 THE QUESTIONS FOR YOUTH MEMBERSHIP

**Pastor:** Do you believe that Jesus Christ has forgiven your sins and is now your Saviour?

**Candidate:** Yes.

**Pastor:** Have you received Christian baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized?

**Candidate:** Yes.

**Pastor:** Will you attend classes of instruction on living the Christian life and serving God through your church?

**Candidate:** Yes.

**Pastor:** Can the Free Methodist Church count on you? Will you pray for the church, attend regularly, give to your church and help wherever you can?

**Candidate:** Yes.

**Pastor:** Will you show your friends by the way you live what it means to be a Christian and will you try to win them to Christ?

**Candidate:** Yes.

¶718 DEDICATION OF CHURCHES

WORDS AND PRAYERS OF DEDICATION

*DEDICATORY PRAYER*

O eternal God, You are mighty in power and glorious in majesty. The heavens cannot contain Your glory, much less the walls of buildings made with hands, and yet You have been pleased to promise Your special presence wherever two or three of Your faithful gather in Your name. Be present with us today, we pray, as we, with all humility and readiness of heart, consecrate this place to the honour of Your great name, separating it from all unhallowed uses and dedicating it to Your service for the reading of Your Holy Word, for proclaiming Your everlasting gospel, for teaching Your people in the ways of righteousness, for celebrating Your matchless grace, for offering Your glorious majesty the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving, for blessing Your people in Your name, and for all other holy offices, through Jesus Christ our blessed Lord and Saviour. Amen.

*All Standing, the Bishop shall say, the people responding:*

To the glory of God the Father, who has called us by His Grace;  
To the honour of His Son, who loved us and gave himself for us;  
To the praise of the Holy Spirit, who illumines and sanctifies us;

*we dedicate this building.*

For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry;  
For the nurture of our children and our teens;  
For the upbuilding of our community;

*we dedicate this building.*

For the comfort of all who mourn;  
For strength for those who are tempted;  
For light to those who seek the way;

*we dedicate this building.*

For the hallowing of family life;  
For teaching and guiding the young;  
For the maturing of the saints;

*we dedicate this building.*

For the conversion of sinners;  
For the promotion of righteousness;  
For the extension of the kingdom of God;

*we dedicate this building.*

In the unity of the faith;  
In the bond of Christian fellowship;  
In charity and good will to all;

*we dedicate this building.*

## ¶720 CHRISTIAN EVANGELISM (LOCAL AND GLOBAL)

### *Biblical Principles*

The modern church has tended towards a theology of evangelism that focuses primarily on conversion, emphasizing the role of the believer to “win others to Christ”. It is important to re-affirm a broader view of God’s desire for “salvation” not just conversion. John Wesley describes salvation as follows:

“So the Salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul till it is consummated in glory.” (*Scripture Way of Salvation*)

Wesley took a broader view of “salvation” which includes “all that is wrought in the soul” by grace. God by his grace acts to draw us to himself: from a “natural” state in which we have little understanding of spiritual things, to an “awakened” state in which we are conscious of spiritual need of a relationship with God, to a point of conversion and subsequent growth to maturity in Christ.

Evangelism is not simply proselytizing and converting the lost, rather it is our cooperation with the Spirit of God already at work in the lives of those within our sphere of influence. The parable of the sower and the seed provides a useful model of this process of cultivation, sowing, and harvesting (Mark 4:1-20) as illustrated in the table shown below.

### *Practical Application*

Understanding evangelism as PROCESS rather than EVENT only, frees the church to continuously work creatively to cooperate with the Spirit at each step of grace. Christian evangelism ultimately results in the multiplication of disciples and involves:

**PRESENCE** – individual believers, small groups, and churches engage in the lives of their communities, both individually and corporately, being Christ to those around them.

**PRESENTATION** – ensure that believers are equipped to clearly enunciate the essentials of the gospel. Provide events attractive to spiritual “seekers” so that believers and small groups can develop relationships with them.

**PERSUASION** – within the context of relationship and community, there is a commitment to make clear, purposeful, presentations of the gospel.

**PARTICIPATION** – the harvest is incorporated with new believers being led to maturity in Christ and to be effective witnesses of the gospel.

The following table provides examples of these types of evangelistic activities:

PHASE	I. Cultivation	II. Sowing	III. Harvesting	IV. Multiplication
<b>Picture</b>	Soil = Human Hearts	Seed = Gospel	Grain = Reproduced Life of Christ	Crop = Christian Community
<b>Explanation</b>	Speak to the <b>Heart</b> - relationship and caring	Speak to the <b>Mind</b> - communication and clarity	Speak to the <b>Will</b> - conversion and commitment	Speak to the <b>Whole Person</b> - maturity and completion
<b>Emphasis</b>	<b>Presence</b> of the believer - building friendships	<b>Presentation</b> of the gospel - giving understanding of the truth	<b>Persuasion</b> - encouraging a meaningful decision	<b>Participation</b> - Integration into the body
<b>Obstacles</b>	Indifference Antagonism	Ignorance Error	Indecision Love of World	Isolation Inward Focus
<b>Examples</b>	Nicodemus - John 3 Woman at well - John 4	Ethiopian Eunuch - Acts 8 Woman at well - John 4	Philippian Jailer - Acts 16 Woman at well - John 4	Jerusalem Converts - Acts 2 Samaritan awakening - Acts 8
<b>Application</b>	- community involvement - personal relationships - church presence in community - small groups	- 'Fishing Pool' events - Evangelism Training for believers - small groups	- personal and corporate presentation of the gospel - small groups	- small groups

[Adapted from K.C. Hinckley, *Living Proof: A Small Group Discussion Guide* (NavPress, 1991)]

- “Becoming a Contagious Christian” seminars are recommended for training people to understand themselves and how they can be natural witnesses. The seminar identifies the following six styles of evangelism and helps people to understand what their natural style is and how it can be used effectively:
  - Confrontational style
  - Invitational style
  - Intellectual style
  - Interpersonal style
  - Serving style
  - Testimonial style

### ¶730 CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Life in Christ is a shared life. The term “fellowship” comes from a word meaning “common.” It can also mean to “share”, “to *have* a share,” “to *give* a share” (see Philippians 3:10: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and *share* ‘fellowship in’ his sufferings.” See Hebrews 13:16, “Do good and share ‘fellowship’ what you have....”)

It can also mean “taking part,” or “participating”. Paul uses it in this way in I Corinthians 10:16. “The cup of blessing (referring to the Lord’s Supper) which we bless, is it not a participation ‘fellowship’ in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation ‘fellowship’ in the body of Christ?”

Fellowship involves giving a part of oneself to such an extent that Bible writers can actually use the word for *the offering*. In Romans 15:16 Paul refers to “... an offering ‘fellowship’ for the poor Christians in Jerusalem . . . .” And in II Corinthians 9:13 he writes that “... your contribution ‘fellowship’ was generous . . . .”

The word is also used for *partnership* (see Philippians 1:5, “I am thankful for your partnership ‘fellowship’ in the Gospel.”)

This call to a deeply shared life together comes to us from the New Testament (see the many “one another” and “each other” commands), and was stressed afresh in early Methodism. It is in the context of this life together that Christians worship God, share his love with the lost, build each other up toward maturity, and serve the needy and broken.

There is likely no clearer description of the church in Christian Fellowship than that given in Acts chapter two:

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47 NRSV)*

In spite of nearly 2000 years of cultural change the image of the church is clearly that of a living, growing, organism rather than an organization, fulfilling in community the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39) of Christ. Two facets of this picture of particular note are the church in community, and the church in evangelism. In the truest sense, they should not be separate since they function fully intertwined; however, in order to provide resources to our church each is described separately.

## **1. The Church In Community – Small Groups**

### *Biblical Principles*

The example of the early church clearly highlights the centrality of community in the life of the church. It is in the context of community that we are drawn to Christ, we hear the gospel proclaimed, we are built up and grow in maturity, and we take up lives of service and ministry to others. It is in Christian community where all the “one another” (Hebrews 10:24-25) exhortations can be fulfilled.

A second, equally vivid description of Christian community is that presented in Paul’s description of the “Body of Christ” (I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:15-16). As we live in community we are not just “like” the body of Christ, we are the Body of Christ. It is within the context of the body and for the edification of the body that the Gifts of the Spirit are provided. It is as “living stones” that we are called to be built up as a temple spiritual house, a holy priesthood. (1 Peter 2:5).

Finally, we have the example of Christ and the disciples. In the context of a community we see a rather rag-tag group of mismatched individuals grow up into spiritual leaders.

‘Small groups’ are not simply a program within the church. They are the church as the Body of Christ. Their key purpose is not simply teaching or support. Their key purpose is ‘building one another up’ (Romans 15:2; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Jude 20) as the Body of Christ.



### *Organizational Principles*

Numerous resources for providing an organization structure for small groups are available and some of these are cited below. The clearest biblical direction for the organization of small groups is the guidance of Jethro to Moses (Exodus 18:1-27). The 'Meta' model of ministry is one example of a system of organization built upon the 'Jethro Model'. Principles of organization that can be derived from this model include:

1. Organize a systematic approach to leadership.
2. Enlist qualified and trustworthy peoples.
3. Create a clear chain of communication so everyone has access to a leader for authority and support.
4. Train your leaders.
5. Delegate the work so that it is more evenly distributed.

*[Adapted from the Ginghamburg United Methodist Church Leaders' Training Manual.]*

In such a model the lay leader or coordinating pastor would develop a strategy to discover, and nurture a group of leaders, often referred to as coaches. These leaders in turn are responsible to give care and guidance to 5 to 10 small group leaders they are developing. They also assist the small group leaders in training new leaders (often called apprentices) that will then be available to provide leadership to new groups that form as each small group reproduces itself. The small group leaders facilitate and nurture a group of generally 6 to 15 persons, as they grow together towards spiritual maturity. These communities are the church at the most intimate and caring level.

The structuring the church in this type of model serves two primary purposes:

- Leadership development happens continuously and systematically.
- Everyone is cared for and no one cares for more than 10.

### **Resources**

- Carl George's *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Fleming H. Revell Publishing, 1992) is a very practical guide to developing the cell/small group church.
- Cell group resources developed by Ralph W. Neighbour, Jr. and associates are available from World Team Canada (1-800-610-9788).
- Small group resources by Carl George, Dale Galloway, Michael Slaughter and others, as well as Serendipity House resources developed by Lyman Coleman are available from The International Centre for Leadership Development and Evangelism (1-800-804-0777)

Other resources exist in books, magazines, journals and elsewhere for developing full-orbed theology and practice for fellowship and life together in small groups. Denominational leaders and others who demonstrate discernment and understanding regarding fellowship theology and practice can guide people to these resources.

## ¶740 Christian Compassion and Justice Ministries

The God we worship has a heart for the lost and hurting. He is a God of justice and truth.

The Old Testament prophets insisted that God always demands righteousness and justice. They kept reminding people that the people of *this* God must, as a part of life, leave space and resources for the needy and the hurting and the broken. (See Deuteronomy 24:17-22.) Talk of worshipping, praising and fearing God are found *along side* references to compassion for the widow and orphan (See Deuteronomy 10:12-21.)

When Jesus, the Son of God appeared, He announced that His mission was:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4:16ff.)

He also taught that on judgment day true followers will discover that when they have lived out their life in him serving and helping compassionately, they were in fact been ministering to him! (See Matthew 25:31-46.)

The early church had a concern for the poor and needy alongside a passion to spread the good news of Christ and to invite new people to come to new life in Him.

Many years later John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called people to experience personal salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, while also pursuing social change. He opened a free medical dispensary for the poor. He wrote against bribe taking and smuggling. He supported the rise of education, particularly the Sunday School movement. He fought against the slave trade in every way he could. He supported prison reforms and the improvement of working conditions, and he freely gave his money in support of these various reforms.

The Free Methodist Church seeks both to evangelize and to serve, to be light and salt, and urges individual Christians and local churches to seek a variety of means to do both. (See ¶440)

### Resources

Abundant resources exist in books, magazines, journals and elsewhere for developing full-orbed theology and practice for compassion and justice ministries. Denominational leaders and others who demonstrate discernment and understanding regarding compassion and justice theology and practice can guide people to these resources.

The Free Methodist Church in Canada has also agreed to partner with the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada. Because of their good work on moral issues and social action (MISA) we highly recommend each church join the membership of EFC. We also recommend partnering with World Relief Canada in worldwide compassionate ministries.

## ¶750 CHRISTIAN NURTURE

Images of growth and development abound in the New Testament. The Free Methodist Church seeks to help every believer to grow up into Christ (see Ephesians 4). Initiation into the life of the kingdom involves a variety of components:

- Conversion (regeneration of persons repentant and trusting in Christ by the Holy Spirit)
- Baptism (joining the community of faith)
- Creed (owning the basic intellectual claims of Christendom)
- Morality (appropriating the moral vision of Christ's Kingdom)
- Spiritual Gifts (receiving, understanding and developing particular gifts and capacities which enable the Christian to serve)
- Disciplines (appropriating the basic spiritual disciplines to ensure ongoing spiritual maturation)

With each, there is need for Christian Education, encouragement, accountability and care. Free Methodist Churches will seek to nurture believers toward growth in each of these areas, and in our mission to evangelize and serve.

One way of conceptualizing the nurture process is found in Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* (Zondervan, 1995). The "Base" materials described in this book have been adapted for use in Free Methodist Churches. It depicts the Christian nurture process (using the diagram of a baseball diamond) as follows:

- Base 1** - leading people to Christ and church membership
- Base 2** - growing people to spiritual maturity
- Base 3** - equipping people with the skills they need for ministry
- Base 4** - enlisting people in the worldwide mission of sharing Christ

### *Resources*

Abundant resources exist in books, magazines, journals and elsewhere for developing full-orbed theology and practice for Christian nurture. Many Free Methodist Churches are further developing processes based on the four-base model of Warren. Denominational leaders and others who demonstrate discernment and understanding regarding Christian nurture theology and practice can guide people to these resources.