

¶159 AS REGARDS THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOD

As a people, we honour and support the God-ordained institutions of family, state, and church.

We commit ourselves to honour the sanctity of marriage, as the union of one male and one female in holy love, and the family they form;

We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ;

We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and to pray for all who lead.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

¶160 AS REGARDS THE CHURCH

As God's people, we express the life of Christ in the world.

We commit ourselves to contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love, and understanding in all our relationships;

We commit ourselves to practice the principles of Christian stewardship, for the glory of God and the growth of the church;

We commit ourselves to go into our world and make disciples.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

¶220 GENERAL CONFERENCES

1. Guiding Principles

The Free Methodist Church recognizes the need to preserve unity in faith and fellowship, yet allow for the distinctive characteristics of nation, language, and culture. Therefore it provides for the Free Methodist churches of one or more nations to be organized into a general conference provided that the requirements of ¶222.1 are met and maintained. When ongoing spiritual, political, economic or cultural realities make the formation of a general conference inadvisable, these areas may continue as annual conferences or provisional general conferences.

A general conference may encompass more than one nation, but there shall be no more than one general conference in a nation. Any exception to this principle requires approval by the World Conference.

When it becomes necessary for a general conference to elect more than one bishop, the bishops, once elected shall be formed into a board of bishops. Each bishop shall then be assigned to a region and where applicable, each shall be granted legal representative status for the assigned region according to the laws of the nation and the bylaws of the general conference.

2. Status

Existing general conferences must continue to meet the requirements of ¶222 to retain general conference status.

- 2.1 Existing general conferences experiencing a serious threat to viability due to physical or moral calamity, to war or to economic crisis, may propose interventions or substantial organizational adjustments. The World Conference Executive Committee is authorized to make interim rulings on such proposals. These rulings shall then be submitted to the World Conference for confirmation.
- 2.2 In the event that it is reported to the World Conference Executive Committee that a general conference no longer fulfills the requirements of ¶222, the World Conference Executive Committee shall arrange for an assessment of the situation and may use members of the Council of Bishops to make the assessment.
 - 2.2.1 If the assessment does not sustain the need for action the matter shall be dropped.
 - 2.2.2 In the event that action is required, the World Conference Executive Committee shall provide counsel and may use members of the Council of Bishops to assist the general conference in remediation.
 - 2.2.3 If remediation is successful the matter shall be dropped.
 - 2.2.4 In cases of persistent inability to meet the requisite conditions, the general conference may request, upon a majority vote of the general conference, to be returned to provisional general conference status or annual conference status in which case the World Conference Executive Committee shall take action on the request and make assignment to a general conference. Should the general conference not take appropriate actions as above, the World Conference Executive Committee shall submit the matter, with recommendation, to the World Conference for vote.

3. Amendments

Proposals to amend the Common Constitution of Free Methodism as defined in ¶210 may be initiated by a general conference as provided for in ¶230.2.

4. Relationship to the World Conference

Each general conference shall recognize the role of the Free Methodist World Conference as set out in ¶230.

4.1 Each general conference shall be represented in the World Conference as defined in ¶230.4.1.

4.2 Each general conference shall ensure that the World Conference president has a copy of its current *Book of Discipline** containing all its legislation, orders, and policies. If a question should arise concerning the agreement of any item therein with the Common Constitution of Free Methodism, the procedures of ¶230.3 shall be applied.

4.3 A general conference or its board of administration may refer to the World Conference Executive Committee, as a representative coordinating body, any problem that may arise with another general conference involving boundaries, recognition of credentials, and other inter-jurisdictional matters. The World Conference Executive Committee shall limit its involvement to the giving of counsel and assistance with mediation. If no solution satisfactory to both general conferences is reached, the matter shall be referred to the next sitting of the World Conference and its ruling shall prevail.

4.4 The board of administration of a general conference may appeal to the World Conference Executive Committee (see ¶230.7) for counsel to assist with the resolution of conflicts within its general conference, or, if the World Conference Executive Committee is convinced of a general conference's non-compliance with the Common Constitution, the World Conference Executive Committee may initiate assistance, counsel and mediation. The World Conference Executive Committee shall limit its involvement to the giving of counsel and assistance with mediation. If no solution satisfactory to the conflict is reached, the matter shall be referred to the next sitting of the World Conference and its ruling shall prevail.

4.5 A general conference may not, under any circumstances, vote to leave the denomination and/or join another denomination. It may not vote to change its name with the intention of becoming a new denomination. Any action to do either of the above shall be deemed illegal and shall result in action by the World Conference to suspend the general conference, to re-organize the loyal elements within the area of that general conference, to declare all other ministers and members to be withdrawn from the Free Methodist Church and to ensure that assets are retained by the Free Methodist Church.

4.6 Where possible, general conferences shall work together with neighboring annual and/or general conferences and/or Free Methodist mission agencies to develop groups such as area fellowships.* Their purpose is to provide inspiration, spiritual counsel, mutual encouragement, vision casting and strategic planning to better reach the world with the gospel through Free Methodist ministries.

These partnership organizations shall operate under constitutions suited to their particular vision and mission. These constitutions and any changes thereto must be approved by the World

Conference Executive Committee and ratified by the World Conference. Such World Conference approved entities shall be granted one honorary seat at the regular sitting of the World Conference.

5. Church name

No church or other organization may use the name “Free Methodist” without the express permission of the Free Methodist World Conference, a general conference, or authorized Mission agencies/associations of a general conference. Wherever the use of the name "Free Methodist Church" is impossible or impractical, a general conference, or in the interim of its sessions, its board of administration, may authorize an adaptation of the church's name, subject to the approval of the World Conference.

¶221 Provisional General Conferences

1. One or more annual conferences may petition the general conference to which they belong for status as a provisional general conference. This intermediate developmental stage provides for the mentoring of indigenous leaders who appreciate the interdependent nature of the international church with its systems of mutual dependence and accountability and who will grow by exercising gifts, graces and authority under the leadership of the sponsoring general conference and its bishop.

¶1860 OFFICE OF BISHOP

The bishop is elected to serve the church as an overseer. This ordained minister functions as a teacher and defender of the faith, a general shepherd, a pastor to the pastors, and an administrator who by good example and faithful application of *The Manual* assures the order of the church. The bishop is to inspire the church by preaching and being an example of one who carries out Christ's great commission.

As the national pastoral leader and chief executive officer of The Free Methodist Church in Canada, the bishop's ministry of leadership encompasses spiritual, governance, administrative and representative dimensions. Overseeing a broad range of persons, teams and activities, the primary responsibilities of the bishop include the development of the spiritual vitality, the administrative effectiveness and the strategic direction of the national church. As chair of the general conference and chief executive officer of The Free Methodist Church in Canada and national leadership team, the bishop guides in the creation of vision and mission for the church today and in the future, leading to the growth and development of the church in Canada. The board of administration is responsible to ensure that a more detailed job description is kept current.

Process for the Election of a Bishop

~~A bishop will normally indicate to the board of administration no later than six months in advance of a general conference if he/she does not intend to stand for re-election.~~

~~When a bishop declines to stand for re-election or when it otherwise becomes necessary to elect a bishop, the following process will be followed:~~

- ~~1) A bishop's search committee of no less than four persons will be elected by the board of administration.~~
- ~~2) The search committee will survey all lay/ministerial delegates of the general conference for "suggestions" of Free Methodist ordained ministers to be considered.~~
- ~~3) The search committee will process the suggestions and from a short list, identify not more than three candidates to nominate for election.~~
- ~~4) The nomination(s) will be submitted to the general conference for election. To be elected an ordained minister must receive at least a majority vote.~~
- ~~5) The election shall be completed prior to the meeting of the general conference by a deadline set by the board of administration.~~
- ~~6) The board of administration shall ensure that there is a method to confidentially receive and record votes from the lay/ministerial delegates of the general conference.~~
- ~~7) The results of the election will be reported to lay/pastoral delegates of the general conference.~~
- ~~8) The incumbent bishop will provide orientation to the bishop elect in the months prior to the meeting of the general conference.~~
- ~~9) The bishop elect will normally be consecrated when the general conference meets or, if necessary, at another time arranged by the board of administration. He/she will not be employed by the general conference until he/she has been consecrated.~~
- ~~10) The bishop elect assumes office at the conclusion of his/her consecration.~~

It is understood that a term is defined as the three-year period between general conferences. An incumbent bishop will normally indicate to the spring meeting of the board of administration the year prior to a general conference whether or not he/she is willing to serve

as bishop for another term. The minimum amount of time for this notice would be at the fall meeting of the board of administration the year prior to a general conference.

If Incumbent Bishop is Willing to Serve Another Term:

If the incumbent bishop is willing to serve another term, the board of administration initiates an assessment process to determine his/her suitability for serving another term. This starts with commissioning the personnel team to conduct a full 360 performance appraisal of the incumbent bishop, to be completed by the fall board of administration meeting prior to general conference. At that fall board of administration meeting, the personnel team reports to the board of administration and makes a recommendation as to whether or not the incumbent bishop is suitable for another term. This is based upon the full 360 performance appraisal, previous annual performance appraisals, results of regular bishop-personnel team connection points, and the results of other personnel team connection points with national leadership team and The Free Methodist Church in Canada employees over the previous two years, as per the personnel team policy. The board of administration conducts a confidence vote on the incumbent bishop, based on the personnel team recommendation and other information/observations, and with a minimum 75% majority vote required, determines suitability for proceeding with a vote for the incumbent bishop at general conference.

At this decision point (the fall board of administration prior to the next general conference), communication is made to the general conference from the board of administration indicating the results of this process, that there will either be an upcoming general conference affirmation vote for the incumbent Bishop, or that a bishop leadership task force will be put in place to seek a new bishop.

A general conference vote of a minimum 75% approval is required for the incumbent bishop to serve another term. If the incumbent bishop does not receive a general conference vote of a minimum 75% approval, a bishop leadership task force is triggered as per the section above.

If incumbent Bishop is unwilling (or unsuitable) to serve another term:

When an incumbent bishop declines to stand for re-election or when it otherwise becomes necessary to elect a new bishop (whether he/she is found to be unsuitable to serve or other reasons), the board of administration appoints a bishop leadership task force to seek a new bishop. The bishop leadership task force will consist of five to seven people. The board of administration will appoint the chair of the bishop leadership task force and the bishop leadership task force itself will appoint a vice-chair and secretary. Other considerations in the formation of the bishop leadership task force membership will include:

- Representatives from the board of administration and personnel team
- Approximately 50% clergy and 50% lay representation
- Membership in the conference or a local Free Methodist congregation
- Not an employee of The Free Methodist Church in Canada
- Has significant involvement with the denomination (i.e. denominational committees) for at least one year
- Spiritually mature and committed to involvement in the bishop leadership task force that may last for several months
- A reputation for being able to keep information confidential
- Willing to work in cooperation with others and the board of administration

- As much as possible, represent the demographics of The Free Methodist Church in Canada (i.e. age, male/female, English/French speaking and ethnicity)
- At least one person with human resource experience would be a helpful resource

A proposed timeline for the bishop leadership task force follows (assuming notice at the spring board of administration meeting one year prior to General Conference):

- Month #1: The bishop leadership task force meets virtually for a month to pray. They will work with the national prayer team to mobilize The Free Methodist Church in Canada to pray about this process;
- Month #2:
 - The bishop leadership task force creates a strategic plan including timelines;
 - The bishop leadership task force works with the board of administration and personnel team to produce a current job description for the new bishop and a remuneration package;
 - The bishop leadership task force works with the director of communications to outline the bishop leadership task force process, communicate the qualities and competencies desired for a bishop, and invite The Free Methodist Church in Canada to pray;
- Month #3: the bishop leadership task force solicits names of potential candidates from the local church delegates and members of conference;
- Months #4-5: Potential candidates are contacted and shortlisted. References are requested;
- Month #6: Interviews and reference checks
- Month #7: Up to three potential candidates are chosen and their biography information is published for at least three weeks, for the prayerful consideration by the Conference members.
- Month #8: A conference online vote is held to elect a bishop from the name(s) put forward as potential candidate(s);
- Note that the successful candidate does not assume the Office of the Bishop until the consecration ceremony is held.

This above process will need to be abbreviated if the bishop leadership task force is triggered should the incumbent bishop not receive a minimum of 75% in a board of administration confidence vote or a general conference affirmation vote as noted above.

Other considerations:

- To be elected, a Free Methodist ordained minister must receive at least a majority vote of 50% plus one.
- The election shall be completed prior to the meeting of the general conference by a deadline set by the board of administration.
- The board of administration shall ensure that there is a method to confidentially receive and record votes from the lay and ministerial delegates of the general conference.
- The bishop-elect will be introduced to lay and ministerial delegates of the general conference.
- The incumbent bishop will provide orientation to the bishop-elect in the months prior to the meeting of the general conference.

- The bishop-elect will normally be consecrated when the general conference meets or, if necessary, at another time arranged by the board of administration. He/she will not be employed by the general conference until he/she has been consecrated.
- The bishop-elect assumes office at the conclusion of his/her consecration.
- If the bishop's office is vacated within six months of a general conference, it shall be left vacant for the ensuing general conference to fill.

Bishop Exit Process

Though it is assumed that the outgoing Bishop will be healthy and supportive of the transition process, the conference must assume a level of responsibility for a smooth passing of the baton. When an incumbent bishop indicates an unwillingness to serve an additional term, or when the board of administration has determined that the incumbent bishop is unsuitable to serve for an additional term, the exit process proceeds as follows:

- In the event that the transition is initiated by the board of administration, the board of administration meets alone with the outgoing bishop to discuss the rationale for their decision. The decision of the board of administration is final without opportunity for appeal. To allow the outgoing bishop some time to process the decision, the discussion relating to the bishop's remaining term and communication of the decision is deferred to a subsequent board of administration meeting.
- The board of administration meets alone with the outgoing bishop to discuss:
 - How the transition decision will be communicated (see following)
 - Transition of authority to the incoming bishop (see bishop onboarding)
 - Challenges, expectations and strategies for the remaining term
 - They pray together.
- The decision is then communicated by the board of administration to the personnel team, to the national leadership team, then to the remaining ministry centre staff, then to the conference.
- The outgoing bishop participates in an exit interview with the personnel team in which outstanding issues of concern are documented, ongoing issues pertaining to the office of the bishop are discussed and recorded, and an opportunity is given to the outgoing bishop to convey any suggestions or criticisms. The exit interview is summarized and presented by the personnel team chair to the board of administration.
- The personnel team is primarily responsible for helping the outgoing bishop process the transition. It is recommended that the personnel team check in with the outgoing bishop every other week to pray with him/her and ask these types of questions:
 - Do you feel supported by the board of administration, national leadership team and personnel team?
 - What concerns or challenges are you facing in this transition?
 - Are you meeting with your accountability partner throughout this time?
- Members of the personnel team are responsible to check in with members of the national leadership team regarding their experience with the outgoing bishop.

Bishop-Elect Onboarding

The bishop-elect must agree to the onboarding process as a condition of employment on the official letter of understanding for employment.

The bishop-elect assumes the office of bishop following his/her consecration ceremony. There are a variety of onboarding activities prior to consecration for the outgoing bishop to

help orient the bishop-elect; however, the bishop-elect is not to assume any decision-making authority until consecration has occurred.

In the event that the outgoing bishop is unwilling or unable to assist with onboarding the new bishop, the onboarding process is overseen by the personnel team chair, board of administration chair, and the outgoing bishop's administrative assistant. The national leadership team is to be consulted regularly through the onboarding process.

Pre-Consecration

The time period after a new bishop is elected and before his/her consecration offers an opportunity for the bishop-elect to familiarize themselves with the ministry centre calendar, personnel, processes and committees. The Bishop-elect should take this opportunity to attend and observe various staff and committee meetings (e.g. board of administration, ministerial education guidance and placement, study commission on doctrine, ministry centre staff, team and network mentors/leaders and regional coaches). The intent is to provide a solid knowledge base from which the bishop-elect can evaluate and implement changes following his/her consecration.

The outgoing bishop retains decision-making authority during this time, in consultation with the board of administration, national leadership team and personnel team, and is not authorized to make any major structural or personnel changes. The bishop-elect does not have authority to make changes until his/her consecration.

With consideration that the lead-up to general conference is a busy time, the outgoing bishop and the bishop-elect should plan for a few days of overlap in the office together in the month prior to the consecration. This gives the outgoing bishop a time to transfer confidential information, processes and any other multi-perspective information. The outgoing bishop is to understand that this is a transfer of information as opposed to transfer of management style.

The outgoing bishop should vacate his/her office prior to consecration of the bishop-elect.

Post-Consecration

At this point, the outgoing bishop's term has finished, and the new bishop assumes decision-making authority. If the pre-consecration time has been used wisely, the new bishop will be familiar with the ministry centre calendar, personnel, processes and committees; however, the new bishop must understand that the transition of authority can be stressful for staff. As such, the new bishop should incorporate the following into the early days of his/her term:

- A meeting with the outgoing bishop's Administrative Assistant
- Receiving the new employee orientation given to all new ministry centre employees
- An orientation meeting with the board of administration
- Recommending changes to and/or continuing with members of the personnel team
- Selecting and/or continuing with members of the national leadership team. The national leadership team members are required to be prepared to submit their letters of resignation upon request by the board of administration or the new bishop.
- Meeting each ministry centre staff member individually to hear about their role and how they fit into the organization
- Addressing ministry centre staff as a group

- Addressing team leaders, network mentors/leaders and regional coaches

~~If the bishop's office is vacated within six months prior to a general conference, it shall be left vacant for the ensuing general conference to fill.~~

Bishops shall be amenable to the conference for their character and for the discharge of the duties. They shall report at least annually to the board of administration on the state of the work.

When bishops or former bishops retire, they shall be given the title of Bishop Emeritus provided they have served the church as bishop for a minimum of six years.

The title of Bishop Emeritus may, due to extenuating circumstances as verified by the conference Ministerial Education Guidance and Placement committee, be granted, reviewed and/or adjusted by the Board of Administration.

The salary of a bishop shall be raised in the CORE budget. The management committee (with input from the personnel **team** committee) has authority to establish the salary of the bishop. Upon retirement the bishop shall receive a pension in accordance with the Ministers Pension Plan of The Free Methodist Church in Canada.