

CHAPTER 6: THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

- ¶ 600 The Goal of the Christian Journey
- ¶ 610 The Way of Salvation
 - 610.1 God's Gracious Initiative for Salvation
 - 610.2 Awakening to God
 - 610.3 Repentance and Restitution
 - 610.4 Trust / Faith
 - 610.5 Assurance
 - 610.6 Consecration
 - 610.7 Sanctification
- ¶ 620 Genuine Christian Character
 - 620.1 Prayer
 - 620.2 Study of the Scriptures
 - 620.3 Life in the Church
 - 620.4 Service and Ministry
 - 620.5 Love of Others
- ¶ 630 Christian Life in the Modern World
 - 630.1 As Regards God
 - 630.1.1 False Worship
 - 630.1.2 The Lord's Day
 - 630.1.3 Divine Healing
 - 630.1.4 Secret Societies
 - 630.2 As Regards Myself and Others
 - 630.2.1 Worth of Persons
 - 630.2.2 Self Discipline
 - 630.2.3 Possessions
 - 630.2.4 Life in the Workplace
 - 630.2.5 Entertainment
 - 630.2.6 Pornography
 - 630.2.7 Sexual Intimacy
 - 630.2.8 Sanctity of Life
 - 630.3 As Regards Divinely Appointed Institutions
 - 630.3.1 The Christian and Marriage
 - 630.3.1.1 Principles Regarding Marriage
 - 630.3.1.2 Nurturing Healthy Marriages
 - 630.3.1.3 Healing Troubled Marriages
 - 630.3.1.4 Principles Regarding Divorce
 - 630.3.1.5 Recovery after Divorce
 - 630.3.1.6 Remarriage after a Divorce
 - 630.3.1.7 Refusal of Counsel
 - 630.3.1.8 Exceptional Cases
 - 630.3.1.9 Same-Sex Unions
 - 630.3.1.10 Use of Free Methodist Church Facilities
 - 630.3.1.11 Polygamy
 - 630.3.2 Education of Children

- 630.3.3 The Christian and the Church**
- 630.3.3.1 Membership in the Church**
- 630.3.3.2 Leadership in the Church**
- 630.3.4 The Christian and the State**
- 630.3.4.1 Civic Participation**
- 630.3.4.2 War and Military Enlistment**
- 630.3.4.3 Swearing Oaths**

630.4 As Regards the Care of Creation

CHAPTER 6: THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

¶600 THE GOAL OF THE CHRISTIAN JOURNEY

The Scriptures affirm that God’s purpose for humanity, from before creation, was that we should “be holy and blameless before him in love” (Ephesians 1:3-4; I Timothy 2:4). God’s purpose was far from empty. For, from before creation, his purpose had reality in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4; II Timothy 1:8b-10). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God’s clear statement of the origin, purpose and goal that he has for humanity. For “with all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ephesians 1:8-10).

The Christian journey is a part of this plan, which was set forth in Christ. The Christian journey is only possible because of God’s eternal purpose, the redemption he made for us in Christ, and the living presence of his Spirit in our lives (I Corinthians 11:1; II Corinthians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12-13).

Because of God’s plan, the goal of the Christian journey is nothing less lofty than to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received” and to attain “to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:1, 13). The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christ-like maturity. When we enter the life to come, our journey will be complete because we will be like God in an even fuller way than is possible now: “What we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” (I John 3:2)

Therefore, we as Free Methodists affirm with God’s Word that the proper goal for our Christian life is this Christ-like maturity, which the Bible describes as holiness and righteousness (I Peter 1:15,16; Romans 6:19). We acknowledge that this is only possible because of the grace that he so richly provides

Contents

This unit of *The Manual* is intended to describe some significant features of the Free Methodist understanding of the Christian journey. It is intended to promote in our churches an understanding of the way of salvation, Christian character, and Christian responses to modern issues. It is also a place to find some resources for Christian discipleship. This unit has the following sections:

- The first section (¶610) describes the way of salvation, including the process by which God, through the activity of his Spirit, makes it possible for sinful humans to enter the Christian journey and to grow into Christ-like maturity.
- The second section (¶620) is a description of genuine Christian character and the spiritual disciplines that nourish and support Christian life.
- The third section (¶630) addresses the Christian response to certain pressing issues that are a part of Christian life in the modern world, as it relates to God, oneself and to others.

¶610 THE WAY OF SALVATION

This section, on the way of salvation, describes the Free Methodist standard of teaching on the biblical doctrine of salvation. These paragraphs are an elaboration of what is affirmed in the Articles of Religion, in their statements on Humankind (¶111-113) and Salvation (¶114-120). They represent our understanding of the clear teaching of scripture on the process by which God, through the activity of his Spirit, makes it possible for sinful humans to enter the Christian journey and to grow into Christ-like maturity. The way of salvation is the path God has laid out for us to begin the Christian journey, and to grow in faith.

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

¶610.1 GOD'S GRACIOUS INITIATIVE FOR SALVATION

In love God has graciously provided for the salvation of all humankind. God is love (I John 4:8-10). Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was sent by the Father as an expression of God's love for the world (John 3:16). The cross shows the extent of Jesus' love for all. The love of God is further expressed to the world through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Only those who respond in repentance and faith can experience His grace as a redemptive reality (Romans 3:21-26).

The Christian life can be consciously experienced because it is a relationship between persons - the personal God and humans made in His likeness. Every person is confronted by this personal God, but the outcome of this confrontation is affected by how each person responds (II Corinthians 3:16-18).

God deals with all persons as free and responsible. Therefore, He not only makes His grace available awaiting our free response, but He also reveals Himself and makes known His life to all who put their trust in Him. The redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ is experienced as an awareness of His love and fellowship.

Those who are justified by faith experience the peace of God (Romans 5:1, 2). When His Holy Spirit comes to the heart, there is joy and freedom (Romans 14:17; II Corinthians 3:17). The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is the assurance of our relationship to God as His dear children (Romans 8:15-16).

¶610.2 AWAKENING TO GOD

The Scriptures teach that by nature, humans are corrupt in every aspect of their beings and have gone far from original righteousness (Romans 3:23). Added to the depravity common to all because of the Fall, there are the enslaving effects of committed sins (John 8:34; Romans 6:16). We are unable in ourselves to come to God, but God in His grace reaches out to every sinner (Romans 5:6-8).

God takes the initiative in making sinners aware of their needs, using His Word, the revelation in Jesus Christ, the Gospel proclamation of the church, the witness of individuals, and the circumstances of life. By such means, the Holy Spirit awakens sinners to their needs and to the truth of the Gospel (John 16:8, 13). Awakened, they must make a response, either rejecting the call of God or turning to God in repentance and faith (Acts 2:37- 39).

¶610.3 REPENTANCE AND RESTITUTION

Awakened by the Holy Spirit to their lost condition before God, persons may move toward God. Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), all must repent in order to come into a right relationship with God (Acts 20:21).

Repentance calls for a sincere and thorough change of mind. To repent is to turn from sin with genuine sorrow and to turn to God in confession and submission (I John 1:5-9). The whole person is involved: mind, feelings, will. Repentance is more than regret for wrongdoing or sorrow at being caught. It is personal sorrow that one has sinned against God (II Corinthians 7:10). Repentance demands a radical turning from sin and a sincere turning to God (James 4:7-10).

Sincere repentance leads to moral renewal, often evidenced by restitution - the effort to right one’s wrongs whenever possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zacchaeus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 19:8). Neither repentance nor restitution save, however. Salvation is by faith in Christ (Acts 4:10-12; Romans 5:1).

¶610.4 TRUST / FAITH

Trust, also known as faith, is utter reliance upon God (I Timothy 4:10; Romans 1:17). Trust includes full acceptance of the promises of God, complete dependence on Christ’s sacrifice for salvation, and unconditional commitment to the will of God. God’s grace and blessings are open to those who turn to Him with full reliance on His integrity, love and power.

Christians experience God’s loving care and guidance as they trust and follow Him (Psalm 25:1-9). When they think they are sufficient unto themselves they become frustrated by trying to do for themselves what God wants to do for them. Self-sufficiency is inconsistent with perfect trust (I Timothy 6:17).

¶610.5 ASSURANCE

God gives assurance of salvation and peace of heart to all who repent and put their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1-5). The Holy Spirit witnesses to their own spirits that they are forgiven of their sins and adopted into the family of God (Romans 8:16).

Christians have peace with God through Jesus Christ because guilt is taken away and fear of judgment removed (Hebrews 10:15-23). God continues to give assurance to believers through the Scriptures, the conscious presence of the Holy Spirit, and love for and fellowship with other Christians (I John 3:21-24).

¶610.6 CONSECRATION

God calls His people to set themselves apart to His will and purpose (Romans 6:13; 12:1-2). Anything thus set apart is said to be consecrated.

All Christians are called to be holy and without blame before God in love (I Thessalonians 3: 12-13; 5:23-24). If Christians are to witness effectively in the world, they must be distinguished by righteousness, peace, joy, faith, hope, and love (John 13:34-35; Ephesians 5:8-10). God wants a people who are fully committed and surrendered to His Lordship to do His work (Matthew 7:21; 16:24). When Christians sincerely follow Christ and listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks in the Scriptures, they should sense this need of cleansing from inward sin. They should desire earnestly

to be filled with the love of God and long for a relationship with Christ which will satisfy their deepest inward need and empower them to serve and obey the Lord (Ephesians 5:1-2; II Peter 1:3-8).

Christians, therefore, must consecrate themselves to God and surrender their wills to the will of the Heavenly Father (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 13:20-21). Those who desire inward sanctification must deny themselves, bear the cross, and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). Devotion to self is idolatry. A Christian who is divided in loyalty cannot serve God victoriously and steadfastly. Christ must be given the pre-eminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life.

Therefore, to open themselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers must give themselves without reservation to God. They freely yield all to the purposes of God and devote every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than to self (Colossians 3:8-13, 17). Christians cannot be delivered from the dominion of sin if they permit self to reign in their lives. They cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

¶610.7 SANCTIFICATION

Christ gave himself "even unto death" for the cleansing of His church (Ephesians 5:25-27; Hebrews 13:12). His disciples are called to be holy (I Peter 1:15-16; II Corinthians 7:1). Christ provided for believers to be entirely sanctified, in the atonement (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:8-10). Accordingly, Paul prayed "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (I Thessalonians 5:23-24). Sanctification begins with regeneration. It continues throughout the believer's life, as the believer co-operates with the Spirit. A deeper relationship with Christ is possible when the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; I John 1:5-2:1),

God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier (II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 1:2). Coming into the life at conversion, He fills with His unrivalled presence when the Christian's consecration is complete, cleansing the heart and empowering for witness and service (John 3:5; Acts 1:8; I Corinthians 6:11). He sheds God's love throughout the heart and life of the Christian (Romans 5:5; I John 4:12-13).

Accepting the promise of God by faith, believers will enter into a deepened relationship with God through Christ (II Corinthians 6:16-7:1; Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:14-17). They will be enabled to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and their neighbour as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:25-6:2). They will know an inner surrender to all the will of God, and their lives will be transformed from inner conflict with sin to glad obedience (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16-25).

Inward sanctification cleanses Christians from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (I Corinthians 6:19-20; Philippians 2:1-4). When they are cleansed, they are not made perfect in performance, but in love (Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 5:43-48; I John 4:12-17).

¶620 GENUINE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

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

complacent. Therefore, every Christian must ultimately choose between growth and decline (II Peter 1:3-8).

How does genuine Christian character develop? This section draws upon the scriptures and classic descriptions of the Christian life that have been written through the centuries. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, wrote comparable descriptions such as *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity* and *The Character of a Methodist*. Christian character begins with life in the Spirit, and is nourished by the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life which Methodists refer to as “Means of Grace.” For John Wesley, the Means of Grace consisted of Acts of Piety and Acts of Mercy. He taught that both were necessary for healthy spiritual development.

This section describes some of these Acts of Piety (prayer, study of the scriptures, life in the church) and Acts of Mercy (service and ministry, love of others). Through the exercise of these and other Means of Grace, growing Christians will be guided by the Holy Spirit, in harmony with the Scriptures, to love God, others and themselves. Growing Christians learn to be alert to the Spirit’s directives, so that they may resist temptation and respond to God’s call to live in the way of Jesus in the world.

¶620.1 PRAYER

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christ-likeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. Prayer should be as conversation, avoiding artificial phrases and tones. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often the circumstances (James 5:13-16). The Bible teaches that both individual and group prayer are effective for those who are in Christ. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasizes our dependence on God. Prayer should be regular, without becoming a mere ritual (Matthew 6: 5-8).

¶620.2 STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible is our source for discovering how we may grow. It is the Christian’s “growth manual.” It must be taken seriously as the final authority for our lives; therefore, it ought to be read regularly, and diligently studied for its meaning. God will speak to growing Christians through its pages if they are listening. The value and meaning of life are found in this book. The prayerful study and application of scripture is a means of cleansing and of changing attitudes and behaviour. Psalm 119:9,11,105; II Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12.

¶620.3 LIFE IN THE CHURCH

Growing Christians find their supportive environment in the fellowship of believers. They do not live independently from the Body of Christ (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25). Worship requires a proper attitude toward God. It involves the believer’s active participation. Believers should prepare their minds and spirits for worship so they can reach out to God in praise, thanksgiving, dedication, confession, faith, and service. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are vital parts of the life of the church that were commanded by the Lord. God has promised to graciously meet the person who faithfully takes part in these sacraments. As a part of the Body of Christ, believers must take part in corporate worship, as well as in the other ministries of the church. Small group participation is a means of grace and growth. Support, insight, inspiration, and discipline are fruits of fellowship.

¶620.4 SERVICE AND MINISTRY

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

¶620.5 LOVE OF OTHERS

Growth in Christ requires taking responsibility to love others, all of whom are loved by God and made in His image. The quality of a Christian's relationships with others affects the quality of their own lives. Growth in Christ requires readiness to mend relationships both with God and with others (Ephesians 4:32-5:2). The Ten Commandments, summarized into two commandments by Jesus, teach the nature of our relationships with God, others and ourselves (Luke 10:25-28). Christians will express their love both by deeds of kindness (Matthew 25:31-46) and by personal words of witness (Acts 1:8) that point to Christ as the embodiment of God's love and the Saviour of the world.

¶630 CHRISTIAN LIFE IN THE MODERN WORLD

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

There is no claim made that this is a complete or final description of an appropriate Christian response to all of the important issues faced in the modern world, or that such a description could ever be written. Rather, the approach taken in the following paragraphs illustrates the ways in which a Christian must form a responsible and biblically appropriate response to contemporary issues.

A member of the Free Methodist Church adopts the following description of Christian life in the modern world as an authoritative guide to living an authentic Christian life today. The church recognizes however that a Christian's conscience is not bound by this description as though it were a new law that is above the gospel itself. Rather, this vision of the Christian life is an expression of how we believe God's Word leads us to live a genuine Christian life today. We trust that the following description of genuine Christianity may be used by God to help Free Methodists form their consciences according to God's Word. We trust that the Holy Spirit's guidance will lead each member of the Free Methodist Church into a conviction about how he or she ought personally to grow into the likeness of Christ in every part of life.

The statements of principle set out below arise out of the direct, clear teaching of scripture and have as their authority not human tradition but God's Word [*statements of principle are indicated by italicized text*]. The application statements that follow each statement of principle arise from God's Word, but we do not claim that they represent in every case the direct, clear, unambiguous teaching of scripture. Rather, these paragraphs represent the historic understanding of Free Methodists concerning the implications of central biblical principles to pressing issues in

contemporary life. Therefore, the teachings of these paragraphs do not constrain us with the same authority as the principle statements, though they have the authority to instruct our consciences. Ongoing helps in applying some of these principles are available on The Free Methodist Church in Canada website.

We believe that a life lived according to all of the following statements would be a life that is “worthy of the calling to which we have been called” (Ephesians 4:1).

¶630.1. AS REGARDS GOD

¶630.1.1 *False Worship*

Jesus Christ affirmed the Old Testament commandment, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:29-30). The worship of any other person, spirit, or thing is idolatry (Exodus 20:3-6).

We abstain from all practices that lead to idolatry. Occult practices, such as spiritism, witchcraft, and astrology must be avoided. Moreover, Christians are to be on guard against the idolatries of the heart - the worship of things, pleasures, and self (I John 2:15-16).

¶630.1.2 *The Lord’s Day*

God makes clear in Scripture by both example and command that one day in seven is to be devoted to worship and rest (Genesis 2:2-3; Exodus 20:8-11). Jesus declared that the Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath. (Mark 2:27). We need a special day in which we turn from our daily work to worship God and to renew body, mind, and spirit. The early church moved from observing the last day of the week - the Jewish Sabbath to worshipping God in Christ on the first day of the week - the Lord’s day, the day of His resurrection.

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

¶630.1.3 *Divine Healing*

All healing, whether of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God who is “above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). God may heal by the mediation of surgery, medication, change of environment, counseling, corrected attitudes, or through the restorative processes of nature itself. God may heal through one or more of the above in combination with prayer, or by direct intervention in response to prayer. The Scriptures report many cases of the latter kind of healing in connection with the life and ministry of Jesus, the apostles and the early church.

A truly Christian perspective on healing reflects the New Testament view of salvation, which holds together God’s sovereignty, God’s loving goodness, and God’s ultimate wisdom. These divine realities reach beyond what humans can fully grasp. We hold together our confidence that salvation is something that has already happened (e.g. Ephesians 2:4-9) and that it is something that is happening right now (e.g. II Corinthians 2:15), and also that it is something that we still

await at the final coming of Christ (e.g. Philippians 3:20-21). Thus there are two erroneous approaches to healing: One is to stress only healing now (because in Jesus, and through the gift of the Spirit, salvation has indeed fully and powerfully come). The other is to expect healing only in the resurrection (because the final redemption will come only when Jesus returns). Both perspectives alone are distortions which miss the creative “already/not yet” tension of New Testament thought.

Consistent with the Scriptures, therefore, we urge our pastors and group leaders to help people to seek healing of every sort, be it physical, psychological, emotional, relational, spiritual. We prayerfully and with hope expect healing and, regardless of which form God's healing takes (whether it happens instantaneously, over time, or even only in eternity), we give due praise to God. We make opportunity for the sick, afflicted, and broken to come before God in the fellowship of the body of Christ in confidence that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is both able and willing to heal (James 5:14-16). We recognize that although God's sovereign purposes are good and we are sure that He is working toward a final redemption that assures wholeness to all believers, He may not grant healing for all or full healing in this life. We believe that in such cases God still receives glory both now and then through the resurrection to life everlasting.

The ministry of healing is not to be ignored in the church. We do not expect that the emphasis on, or means employed in, the varied ministries of healing will be the same in different churches (or in different small groups, or in individual Christians) or in the same church or group or individual believer at different times. We call the church to both examine and prize our differences in this regard, always aware of the ‘already/not yet’ scriptural tension outlined above.

To illustrate this dynamic tension in Scripture, we must note that all healing has spiritual implications (Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 11:2-5, Romans 8:18-23, 35-39). In any situation where healing is desired, mature discernment and wisdom are required. In some instances in the New Testament Jesus addresses a physical need through deliverance from demonic influence (Mark 5:15, Matthew 17:14-18). The New Testament, however, also presents us with other occasions of divine healing that occur without any reference to the demonic (John 9:1-7, Acts 3:1-8). As noted above, healing can come through a variety of means. What many would consider a natural remedy (e.g. surgery, medication, or therapy) remains an act of the work and grace of God.

¶630.1.4 *Secret Societies*

The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:7-9;-1 Peter 3:15). In every association Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (II Corinthians 6:14-18). Therefore, we abstain from solemn oaths of secrecy shared with unbelievers which cloud our witness.

Those voluntary associations which demand an oath, affirmation, promise of secrecy, or a secret password as conditions of membership are to be considered secret societies. In contradiction to the teaching of Christ and the New Testament, these societies require pledges and vows which bind the future actions of those who join (Matthew 5:34-37). As Christians therefore, we refuse to swear unreserved loyalty to any secret society since we see such an allegiance to be in direct conflict with unconditional surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord. We must keep ourselves free to follow the will of the Lord in all things.

Most secret societies are religious in nature. Prayers are offered, hymns are sung, and members engage in acts of worship before an altar. Chaplains are chosen to lead in worship and to conduct funerals. But the worship of these societies is unitarian, not Christian; the religion is moralistic, not redemptive; and the ends are humanistic, not evangelical (Acts 4:12). We refrain, therefore, from membership in all secret societies and when we unite with the church we resign from active membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

We do not require those who become members of the church to cease all payments necessary to keep in force insurance benefits previously contracted through lodge membership.

¶630.2 AS REGARDS MYSELF AND OTHERS

¶630.2.1 *Worth of Persons*

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

We must be actively concerned whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, stigmatized, or depersonalized, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27). We recognize that oppression and exploitation is ultimately rooted in demonic influences operating in the world to control individuals through violence, to exploit them because of greed, and to deprive them of personal freedom. We are committed to give meaning and significance to every person by God's help, including those who endure slavery in its modern forms.

Remembering our tendency to be prejudicial, as Christians we must grow in awareness of the worth, rights and needs of others (Philippians 2:3-4; James 2:1, 8-9).

¶630.2.2 *Self Discipline*

One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). As Christians we believe that life is full, abundant, and free in Jesus Christ (John 8:36; 10:10). We take seriously the words of Jesus to love God, our neighbours and ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). We also heed the Apostle Paul, when he writes, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body" (I Corinthians 6:19-20).

Therefore, we commit ourselves to be free from anything that challenges Jesus' lordship over our lives, that distracts us from joyful participation in His mission in the world and that damages, destroys, or distorts His life within us.

What God has created is good and was created for His pleasure (Revelation 4:11). He created humans with a capacity for enjoying His good creation. But as a consequence of the fall, sinful self-centeredness and intemperance (even with respect to various forms of godly pleasure) became part of the human reality.

Undisciplined seeking after pleasure is a form of idolatry that weakens the will, distracts from participation in the mission of God and models selfishness to others under our influence (Philippians 3:19; Colossians 3:5). Instead, we seek to experience the fullness of life in Christ, which includes enjoying what God has made in ways that honour God and are compatible with His mission in the world. We seek to enjoy a godly, balanced relationship with pleasure that allows us to be free to enjoy them in moderation or to abstain from them out of authentic conviction rooted in past experiences or out of love for a “weaker brother” (Romans 14:13-23).

We accept that, though all things may be allowed, not all things are beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23-24). Spirit-led self-examination surrounded by loving mutual accountability is essential to growing in holiness. Therefore, we regularly ask ourselves honestly: Do I exercise godly self-control with respect to pleasure? How does what I invest in various forms of pleasure compare to what I give of my life resources to reach people with the gospel and to alleviate suffering? Does this form of pleasure restore or fatigue me, arouse a craving for more that I then must struggle to master? Is it inherently evil because it exploits or causes unnecessary suffering? Some pleasures (e.g. that which we ingest, the forms of recreation/relaxation that we pursue, etc.) if used with self-control, restore us. Some of the same pleasures can ultimately destroy us if used selfishly. On the one hand we can become obsessively distracted, even addicted to them. On the other hand, because some legitimate pleasures tempt us to excess, we can react by becoming overly scrupulous and, out of fear, seek to limit the liberty of others by imposing our control-based convictions on them. With respect to this, the Apostle Paul wrote: “Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (Colossians 2:20-23).

Pleasures which exploit others or which damage our health are inherently evil.

As Christians we desire to be characterized by balance and moderation. We seek to avoid extreme patterns of conduct. We also seek to keep ourselves free from addictions or compulsions. Since it is our goal to live disciplined lives, in order to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, we depend upon the Holy Spirit to enable us to make choices that displace selfish indulgence in worldly pleasures. It is our wish to live simply, in service to others, and to practice stewardship of health, time, and other God-given resources. We are committed to help every Christian attain such a disciplined life. Although unhealthy habits are not easily broken, believers need not live in such bondage. We find help through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, prayer, the counsel and support of other Christians and, if need be the help of professional services.

The following is an illustrative list of some difficult issues, habits and substances which may hinder, confuse, or distract us in seeking a disciplined, holy, Spirit-filled life.

- We believe that the intemperate consumption of food is a form of abusing the body which may result in illness and obesity. A healthy balanced diet preserves the strength of our bodies and extends our years of usefulness as servants of Christ.
- We believe that overwork causes unhealthy strain on individuals and relationships.
- We believe that the inordinate pursuit of leisure is an expression of selfishness and immaturity.

We believe that the illicit and inappropriate use of illegal, prescription or over the counter drugs causes untold damage to people and relationships. Such drug use can restrict personal development, damage the body, and reinforce an unrealistic view of life.

- We believe that medical cannabis can be useful, as are other prescription medications, provided it is used under medical guidance and with discerning Christian counsel.
- We believe that the recreational use of cannabis, while legal, is problematic. Scientists, doctors and the police have raised many concerns about its use, such as its impact on the brain development of young adults, its addictive nature, and the risks it poses to workplace health and safety. We see abstinence as a wise form of self-discipline, recognizing that what we ingest or use is to be done to God's glory" (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).
- We believe that alcohol is unpredictably addictive and the destructive effects from its abuse cannot be fully measured. We see abstinence as a wise form of self-discipline. Drunkenness is to be avoided at all costs in obedience to God's Word. (Proverbs 20:1; Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13 and Ephesians 5:17-18)
- We believe that tobacco is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as being an expensive and socially offensive addiction. Nicotine is a powerfully addictive substance, whatever the delivery method used.

We desire to be a community of people continuing to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, living free from the excesses of pleasure and overcoming the bondages of addictions so that we can joyfully participate in the mission of God in the world. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But, we also recognize the struggles associated with attaining these freedoms and are therefore committed, with the grace that God supplies, to provide support to one another within and through the church body, through making pastoral counsel available and through referring people to professional and community resources.

¶630.2.3 Possessions

As Christians we regard all we possess as the property of God entrusted to us as stewards. We are people who exercise critical judgment about what we acquire and possess. The Scriptures warn against pursuing wealth as an end in itself (I Timothy 6:9-10); therefore, we do not make possessions or wealth a priority (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:16-21). Rather, as stewards we are people who give generously, first and foremost as an act of worship and obedience. This meets the needs of others and supports ministry (II Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13).

As Christians we seek to generate income (whether through employment, investments, grants/bursaries, etc.) from sources consistent with the ethics and practices of our faith.

Income generated through gambling lacks both the dignity of wages earned and the honour of a gift. Even as entertainment, it excites greed, destroys the initiative of honest

toil, exploits a neighbour, and often results in addiction. We refrain from gambling in all its forms for conscience' sake, and as a witness to the faith we have in Christ.

We recognize debt as a form of bondage (Proverbs 22:7) that limits our capacity to be generous. In keeping with Jesus' teaching about serving only one master (Matthew 6:24), as Christians we strive to be free from debt (Romans 13:8).

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

¶630.2.4 *Life in the Workplace*

As Christians we are called to be servants of all. This norm is equally applicable to employer and employee (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-24). Our concern for justice is primarily a concern to do justice and only secondarily a concern to obtain justice (Micah 6:8).

We believe that all persons have the privilege to be gainfully employed irrespective of sex, race, colour, national origin, or creed.

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

As Christians we do not view management and labour as necessarily hostile to each other. They need not bring distrust and hostility to their place of work or the negotiating table. We resist the exploiting of people or seeing them merely as economic units. We discourage rigid confrontation and favour a problem-solving approach to disagreements. (Romans 12:18)

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

¶630.2.5 *Entertainment*

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

In a culture where pleasure is ardently pursued, we must exercise care regarding our recreational activities. We face a multitude of entertainment media - television, videos, movies, music, the internet, magazines, novels, video games etc. Since many of these are pursued in the home, we cannot be legislated into wise choices; we must make them from a renewed heart. In the case of

children and young people living at home, however, our convictions as Christian parents should prevail.

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

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

Therefore when making choices with regard to entertainment, before the Lord we should forthrightly answer such questions as: Does this activity enhance or reduce my witness as a Christian? Does it contradict the teachings of Scripture? Is my conscience clear? Will participation expose me to unnecessary temptation? Is this activity in any sense enslaving? (Psalm 19:12-14; I Corinthians 6:12, 19-20; 8:9; 10:23-24)

¶630.2.6 *Pornography*

The Scriptures warn that those who participate in sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). The use of pornography is a vicarious participation in sexual immorality. Such participation includes viewing, listening to, or purposefully imagining others engaged in sexual activities. Therefore as Christians we abstain from pornography and oppose its use and work toward removing its legitimacy and availability.

Human sexuality is a gift from God which is debased and damaged by pornography. This damage is personal, relational and cultural. Pornography causes a desensitizing of conscience, a perversion of sexual desire and a decay of moral values. It often victimizes the innocent and unsuspecting. It is a rampant degenerative force.

The church has a corporate responsibility to provide education, protection and God’s redeeming care for those susceptible to or addicted to pornography.

¶630.2.7 *Sexual Intimacy*

The biblical vision for healthy sexual intimacy is that it is a gift from God reserved for marriage between one man and one woman. Sexual intimacy creates a unique life-long bond that Scripture describes as “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). When expressed within the commitment of the marriage covenant, sexual intimacy can be a great blessing and source of fulfillment. The marriage covenant is designed to protect this one man and one woman bond against that which is destructive and harmful to the couple, their children, the extended family, and society as a whole when one acts contrary to God’s design for sexual intimacy.

Some Christians will be single and therefore celibate while they follow Jesus (Matthew 19:11-12). Scripture honours and blesses celibacy equally as one of God’s gifts (1 Corinthians 7:7-8). Therefore, those who are unmarried, have become single through divorce or have been widowed, remain sexual beings even as they respond to the call of a celibate life, which necessarily does not involve sexual intimacy. Following the biblical vision of the new family of God in Christ, Churches should support people in the unique need for intimacy that celibacy creates for single people.

- The biblical word for “fornication” or “sexual immorality” includes pre-marital sexual intimacy and lists it along with other forms of immorality as sin (Galatians 5:19-21, Ephesians 5:3-5). Bonding sexually to a person to whom one has not covenanted in marriage robs the bond of an eventual marriage of its exclusivity. Similarly, sexual intimacy outside of a marital union occurring after divorce or the loss of a spouse is also fornication and undermines the biblical design for healthy sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:8-9).
- Extra-marital sexual intimacy, which Scripture calls “adultery”, transgresses God’s moral law and betrays the marriage covenant. Adultery damages the one flesh union in that it contaminates the exclusive bond of marriage and undermines trust (Exodus 20:14, Mark 7:20-23).
- In keeping with our reading of the scriptures (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:21-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11), we do not believe that the above biblical vision is fulfilled by same-sex sexual intimacy. We maintain a distinction between same-sex sexual activity and same-sex sexual attraction. Furthermore, we acknowledge that the church has often rejected, condemned, and mistreated LGBTQ people. As followers of Jesus, this grieves us, and we strive to live out our convictions about sexuality in ways that are gracious and Christ-like.

In all of the above instances, all persons are accountable to God for their thoughts, words and deeds (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Because Christians are part of fallen humanity we must deal with many inclinations to sin. We trust the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and transform (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25, 9:14).

The church has a corporate responsibility to be God’s agent of transformation to persons as they learn to live a Christian life that pursues the best of God’s design for healthy sexuality. This transformation can best occur as the church provides a loving and supportive environment. Because the sexual desire is so powerful, counseling is recommended as a part of the church’s pastoral care.

In summary, we recognize that this biblical vision contrasts with that of the prevailing culture, and we present it graciously as an alternative to the culture’s view of sex and sexuality.

¶630.2.8 *Sanctity of Life*

All persons are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). As such, all human beings have inherent dignity and worth. As Creator, God is sovereign over life (Acts 17:24-26). Further, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is at the center of our conviction that God is also sovereign over death (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). Thus, as his creation, we cannot claim absolute sovereignty over our lives. We are stewards rather than sovereign possessors of our life. As stewards, we must value, respect and protect life at every stage. The Bible provides a general prohibition against the deliberate, intentional taking of innocent life (Exodus 20:13). For all these reasons, we affirm the sanctity of life.

The complex issues surrounding the sanctity of life involve religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Therefore, Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law or the possibilities of safe medical procedures.

¶630.2.8.1 *Reproductive Technology*

Reproductive technologies generate a large number of ethical, medical, legal and theological questions even as they offer hope. The guiding principle, that all human life must be valued, respected and protected throughout all its stages, must be carefully and consistently applied to every new development. A Christian theology of family must also inform these decisions.

¶630.2.8.2 *Abortion*

Abortion is the intentional termination, by surgical or other means, of a person's life after conception and before birth. We consider abortion to be a violation of the sanctity of human life.

The decision to terminate a pregnancy involves religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Population or birth control, personal preference or convenience, avoidance of suffering, the anticipated quality of life of the unborn child, and social or economic security are not moral justifications for abortion.

Christian morality demands that we consider both biblical commandments and the human situation in which decisions must be made. We recognize that in some rare cases of very extreme and exceptional medical conditions, following a process of careful discernment with the assistance of Christian professional counsel, an abortion may possibly be morally justifiable

In all situations, compassionate alternatives and long-term care should be offered to those considering abortion.

In responding to all situations and decisions involving abortion, the church must seek to be a redemptive community of grace.

¶630.2.8.3 *End of Life Care*

For the Christian, death is not the end of life, but the transition into eternity (John 5:24-25). Therefore, physical death is not the ultimate enemy, but part of our journey.

Christians must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living. Chronic disease, diminished physical capacity or ongoing disability do not constitute the end of life. We believe that there is no such thing as a "useless" life. The value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God whose love sustains us all through life, even to the end. He ministers to us personally and through the healing environment of Christian community. Divine wisdom in the face of end of life issues comes to us through Scripture, prayer, godly counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

"Sanctity of life" must not be confused with "quality of life." Because we affirm the sanctity of life (¶630.2.8) and the consequent worth of all persons (¶630.2.1), there can be no justification for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

We recognize and support the right of a competent individual, who is facing the end of life, to decide the aggressiveness of his/her care. If an individual is incompetent to make or incapable of making this decision, then a substitute decision maker, who respects the wishes of the individual as far as they are known, can make this decision on his/her behalf.

A request that life not be sustained by heroic measures does not constitute euthanasia or assisted suicide. We recognize that treatment, or lack of treatment, which carries the risk of shortening

life, is permissible so long as the intent is to provide relief or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death.

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We also recognize that when people choose to proceed with physician assisted death their suffering is such that they are convinced this is the only alternative. We would assert however that there are alternative therapeutic approaches available such as pain management and effective palliative care. In addition, we believe that the Holy Spirit can bring grace to situations that may otherwise seem hopeless or unendurable.

In situations like these we reserve the right for our ministers to be involved pastorally to the degree their conscience allows. Even though we do not celebrate this type of end of life nor do we encourage it, ministers should continue to be willing to provide pastoral comfort to all involved.

¶630.2.8.4 *Other Ethical Dilemmas*

These biblical principles, which guide our approach to bioethics will need to be applied on an ongoing basis to other ethical dilemmas rising from advances in medical technology. Such ethical dilemmas may include but not be limited to: the allocation of finite resources, organ transplantation, genetic engineering and testing, and gender identity issues.

As we attend to human suffering, we acknowledge that the ability of medical technology to end human suffering is limited. Therefore, we accept our responsibility to use this technology with wisdom and compassion; honouring God, who is ultimately supreme.

¶630.3 AS REGARDS DIVINELY APPOINTED INSTITUTIONS

There are at least three divinely appointed, earthly institutions. One of these is marriage and the family. A second is the church. A third is the secular government. Only the church, among these institutions, will last in eternity. Nevertheless, the Scriptures have clearly placed a great deal of importance on how we act with respect to each of these institutions, before the return of Christ.

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

¶630.3.1 *The Christian and Marriage*

¶630.3.1.1 *Principles Regarding Marriage*

Nature of Marriage: At creation God instituted marriage for the well being of humanity. Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong, covenant relationship which

the Scriptures call “one flesh.” (Genesis 2:18-24; Mark 10:6-9). The Scriptures also say that this covenant relationship illustrates the enduring, holy relationship between Christ and His Church. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

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

Sexual intercourse is God’s gift to humanity, for the intimate union of a man and woman within marriage. In this relationship, it is to be honoured (Hebrews 13:4, I Corinthians 7:3-5). Marriage is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires chastity: celibacy outside of marriage and faithfulness within marriage. (See ¶630.2.8)

¶630.3.1.2 Nurturing Healthy Marriages

The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the apostle’s command (II Corinthians 6:14), we expect them to marry only believers. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnize a marriage. While our ministers may officiate at the marriage of two unbelievers, those who unite believers to unbelievers go contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures. Before entering into marriage, our people should counsel with their Christian leaders. Young people contemplating marriage should seek parental consent. Our ministers shall not officiate at the marriage of any person under age, unless parents or guardians are present or have given written consent, and unless two witnesses are present who know the couple. There are wedding guidelines available from the director of leadership development’s office that you need to follow with respect to requests to officiate at marriages.

We desire that our churches provide instruction in sex education and preparation for marriage. Pastors shall see that all candidates for marriage have received premarital guidance, using materials consistent with denominational teaching. We further encourage local churches to provide resources such as seminars and retreats to strengthen marriages and build Christian homes.

¶630.3.1.3 Healing Troubled Marriages

The church which is alive to God has spiritual resources for marriages in trouble. The chief resources are the renewing power of the Holy Spirit and the Word, prayer and the sacraments, counsel and support. Through the church’s ministry, God can bring healing and reconciliation. Therefore, if our members find their marriage in crisis, we encourage them to seek the counsel of the pastor and submit to the guidance of the church. Professional counsel may be necessary.

We recognize that domestic violence, emotional and/or physical, does occur in church-related families. It often jeopardizes the safety of a spouse or children and may threaten life itself. Where there are signs of possible violence, these families need to be monitored. Where there are reports or signs of abuse (particularly of children), the intervention of trained social service professionals must be sought and separation may be necessary to ensure safety. In all cases, these family members will need both spiritual and emotional healing.

Separation should not be entered into lightly, or as a matter of convenience. When after counsel with the pastor, it is recognized that a deteriorating situation is destroying the marriage relationship, Christians may separate. In all cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (I

Corinthians 7:10-11). Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union.

¶630.3.1.4 *Principles Regarding Divorce*

When one marriage partner is a Christian and the other a nonbeliever, we believe that the Christian may not for that reason divorce the unchristian mate (I Corinthians 7:12-13), because Christian love may redeem the unbeliever and unite the home in Christ (I Corinthians 7:16, I Peter 3:1-2).

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

Desertion is the abandoning of a marriage without just cause. We believe that a person denies the faith that deserts a spouse deliberately and for an extended period of time. When the desertion leads subsequently to divorce, the deserted partner is no longer bound by the marriage (I Corinthians 7:15).

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

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

¶630.3.1.5 *Recovery After Divorce*

Divorce always produces trauma. It is the breaking of a covenant, thus violating God’s intention for faithfulness in marriage (Malachi 2:13-16). For this reason divorced persons should be helped to understand and remedy the causes for the divorce. They should seek pastoral counsel. Professional counsel may also be necessary. If unhealthy patterns of relating exist, they must be helped to replace them with new attitudes and behaviours that are Christ-like (Colossians 3:1-15). Repentance and forgiveness are crucial to recovery. The goals of the process are personal healing and restoration to wholesome participation within the church. The church must extend its concern to family and others affected by the divorce.

¶630.3.1.6 *Remarriage After a Divorce*

A divorced member or one who is considering marriage to a divorced person must come under the authority, counsel and guidance of the church.

Persons who have been involved in divorce while in a state of unbelief shall not for that reason alone be barred from becoming members, even though they remarry. Similarly, believers are not prohibited from marrying a person who was divorced while an unbeliever. A member of the church divorced from an adulterous spouse or, deserted by an unbelieving mate, after attempts at forgiveness and reconciliation have been rejected, may remarry (I Corinthians 7:15).

¶630.3.1.7 *Refusal of Counsel*

When a member divorces a spouse in violation of the Scriptures, or remarries without seeking the counsel or following the guidance of the pastor or the membership care committee, the committee shall review the case and recommend appropriate action to the official board. Corrective action shall include removal from leadership, and may include suspension, or expulsion from membership.

¶630.3.1.8 *Exceptional Cases*

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

¶630.3.1.9 *Same-Sex Unions*

The Free Methodist Church in Canada holds that Christian marriage can only be the union of “one man and one woman” who have made a public covenant and vow before God and the state (Genesis 2:20-24, Mark 10:6-9). Therefore, it would be a breach of the doctrine and polity of our church for ministers or members of The Free Methodist Church in Canada to conduct a Christian blessing of a union between a same-sex couple, or to perform the marriage of a same-sex couple. In light of our beliefs, ministers and members of The Free Methodist Church in Canada reserve the right of conscientious objection to any demands to perform marriages of same-sex couples.

The Free Methodist Church in Canada holds that its congregations are stewards of the church property. The blessing of a union between a same-sex couple or the performance of a same-sex marriage in any Free Methodist church would be a violation of consecrated Free Methodist property. Therefore, such blessings or marriages may not be performed at Free Methodist churches.

¶630.3.1.10 *Use of Free Methodist Church Facilities*

It is the policy of The Free Methodist Church in Canada that the facilities of Free Methodist churches are to be rented or used only by individuals or groups that are not incompatible with the goals, values, policies and statements of The Free Methodist Church in Canada and for purposes which are not incompatible with the goals, values, policies and statements of The Free Methodist Church in Canada

¶630.3.1.11 *Polygamy*

In some of our mission districts polygamy is a current reality. This statement seeks to give guidance to these contexts and to those who come to Canada from those contexts.

When individuals involved in a polygamist marriage confess Jesus Christ as their Saviour and testify to their desire to follow him as Lord, the Free Methodist Church responds graciously while remaining faithful to the biblical “one man and one woman” vision of marriage. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6).

In polygamy, a man has entered into legal covenants with more than one women and, as an honorable person, he must honor his promises. He must provide for the welfare of his wives. The church gives the family the responsibility to determine whether they will all continue to live

together. As the children grow, the parents will rear them to understand and embrace a Christian view of marriage and the family.

The husband must take an interest in all of his children as a Christian father and provide for the well-being of all of his children. Such believers living in polygamous relationships cannot be given positions of leadership within the church. (1 Timothy 3:2, 13; Titus 1:6)

¶630.3.2 Education of Children

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

The church wishes to support public schools and recognizes the responsibility that Christian teachers, parents and students have to be a positive influence in the world. We support parents in their decisions regarding the education of their children whether it be to use public school, Christian schools, or homeschooling.

In the public school setting, the church wants a Christian worldview to be given fair consideration. We therefore advocate for the inclusion of teaching materials that present a worldview consistent with a Christian perspective on matters such as justice, human sexuality, cosmology, etc. If assignments and activities conflict with the values of our families, we may request that our children be excused from them. When such conflicts arise, we request that the student's academic standing not be jeopardized and that alternative assignments be given.

¶630.3.3 The Christian and the Church

The church is part of God's eternal plan to make a people for himself who would be "holy and blameless before him" (Ephesians 1:4). It was instituted by Christ during his ministry when he commissioned the church to be his unique representative in the world. Therefore, the Scriptures speak of the church as the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-13, 27). The church has been empowered for its ministry by the active, ongoing work of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost. Just as New Testament letters were written to churches in particular places, made up of particular people, the church is not only universal, but also must be visible and local.

The church is also the people of God in the world. In both Old and New Testaments this fact is amply illustrated. The Lord of the church gives gifts to His people to serve one another and to minister in the world (I Corinthians 12:4-7; Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-16). Christians who live in independence from the church may not forfeit their faith but will deprive themselves of the spiritual resources and opportunities God Himself has ordained. Consistent with the Scriptures, we affirm membership in the church.

When the Holy Spirit gives new life in Christ, at the same time He effects our spiritual entrance into the church (I Corinthians 12:13). The Free Methodist Church in Canada is one denomination among the many other legitimate visible churches in Canada and the world. Entrance into the membership of one of our churches is a visible and local sign of entrance into the universal church.

¶630.3.3.1 Membership in the Church

In accordance with this, our church provides means by which persons who are born of the Spirit may enter into a Membership Covenant (¶156-160) and register their membership in a local

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

¶630.3.3.2 Leadership in the Church

Leadership in the church is an honour that has accompanying responsibilities and sacrifices. The Scriptures provide descriptions of the qualities of leaders in such passages as: Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. Those who are chosen to lead in the church do so in a spirit of humility and dependence upon God. They must be spiritually mature individuals whose lifestyle shall be in harmony with the Scriptures, the doctrine of The Free Methodist Church in Canada (¶100-131), the principles of the Membership Covenant (¶156-160) and of ¶620, ¶630. They must live personal and public lives that clearly exemplify these principles.

¶630.3.4 The Christian and the State

As Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God and of this world. We receive benefits from and bear responsibilities to both relationships. Our first allegiance is to God, but that does not release us from responsibilities to our own country if such relationships do not conflict with the clear teachings of the Scriptures. We recognise the sovereign authority of government and our duty to obey the law (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). Thus, we bear the responsibilities of good citizenship.

¶630.3.4.1 Civic Participation

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

¶630.3.4.2 War and Military Enlistment

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

We believe that military service is a matter where the consciences of our members must be respected (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). We further acknowledge, as Christians, our responsibility to intervene when there is massive, extreme or violent injustice. While we must support our nation in addressing such perils, we do not believe that this must necessarily take the form of active military service. Therefore, we claim exemption from all military service for those who register officially with the church as conscientious objectors to war.

¶630.3.4.3 Swearing Oaths

As Free Methodists we do not prohibit the taking of an oath when it is required by law. In every case, the Christian must speak in justice and truth (Jeremiah 4:1-2; Matthew 5:33-37; Ephesians 4:25; James 5:12).

¶630.4 AS REGARDS THE CARE OF CREATION

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

¶640 Resources

Other resources on these and other topics are available on The Free Methodist Church in Canada website <http://www.fmcic.ca>.