

THE MANUAL *of*

The Free Methodist Church in CanadaTM

(Book of Discipline)

*“Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock,
of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,
to shepherd the church of God that
He obtained with the blood of His own Son.”*

Acts 20:28



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FOREWORD

At the close of each General Conference that has taken place throughout the history of The Free Methodist Church, a *Book of Discipline* has been published that reflects the changes that were made at the recent conference.

The 1999 edition of *The Book of Discipline* underwent significant change. The title was changed to *The Manual of The Free Methodist Church in Canada* in order to more accurately communicate its purpose and function to people who are new to our church and to the people we are trying to reach.

Even more far reaching was a second significant improvement. Former *Books of Discipline* contained a mixture of elements including denominational requirements, explanation of principles, teaching materials, sample documents, and other resource materials. Distinctions between elements were not clear and nothing could be changed or added between meetings of the General Conference. This new edition contains this same mixture of materials, but clear distinctions have been made among the types of material.

The former editions of the *Book of Discipline* were often perceived as “law,” placing limitations on freedom, rather than as resources to empower churches and leaders. That was not the intention, but having all of its material arranged in by-law form tended to give the impression of a set of laws to be obeyed, rather than counsel given to guide the church. Of course both kinds of literature are necessary. So, on the one hand, parts of this new format will contain words that should be seen as denominational requirements while, on the other hand, there are significant sections of this book that offer only guidance and advice, and trust local churches and their leaders to be creative and wise in their application.

The Manual's loose-leaf format was chosen for several important reasons. Up until this change in format, approximately every four years the denomination had to publish a new *Book of Discipline* to reflect the changes dictated by decisions made at the most recent General Conference. The Free Methodist Church in Canada has chosen to meet in a General Conference approximately every three years, rather than four, believing that this greater frequency keeps the church better “connected.” But if the church were to publish an entire new *Book of Discipline* every time it meets, the cost in time, energy and money would be an abuse of wise stewardship. Accordingly, the new manual is “bound” in a more useful form. Much of this book comes “loose-leaf” to enable the church to revise only those pages where changes need to be made. At the close of each subsequent General Conference we shall quickly re-publish those pages that need revision, and make them available to all Manual owners for inclusion in their copies of *The Manual*.

It should be noted that the first two chapters of *The Manual* contain the Constitution of The Free Methodist Church. This material appears in every *Book of Discipline* or *Manual* in every General Conference around the world. No General Conference of The Free Methodist Church anywhere in the world has power to change the Constitution. These chapters are to be considered foundational for all Free Methodist Churches and the major articulation of the connectedness of all Free Methodist Churches.

Primarily this book is a resource for the empowerment of churches across Canada. In this one volume, the best of the former *Book of Discipline*, and the *Pastor's Handbook* have been combined. Because it is loose leaf, other materials may be added to *The Manual* from time to time. Denominational leaders may forward additional resources that have value to all churches, for inclusion in this book. The “8½ by 11” format of each page will make it easier to insert

materials that are created in the more standard form. We also expect that as local churches create vision and mission statements, and the policies that guide the life of their own congregations, these too may be added into *The Manual* in the appropriate sections.

This loose-leaf format may tempt some people to throw out what they do not like and retain only the things with which they agree. That is far from the intention of this form. To clarify this matter an “authority code” has been included at the bottom of each page, identifying the body that initiated the material on that particular page and holds the authority to revise the material.

This is what those codes mean:

- *WC World Conference of the Free Methodist Church.
- *CGC Canadian General Conference.
- *BOA Board of Administration of The Free Methodist Church in Canada
- *MEGaP National Ministerial Education, Guidance, and Placement Committee

Editorial Committee: The Study Commission on Doctrine acts as the editorial committee to ensure that this document is kept up to date as changes are authorized by the various bodies having responsibility for making changes to its chapters. The dates of updates are noted at the bottom of the pages. Should you wish to verify that you have received all updates, a master file of all changes to *The Manual* is kept in the bishop’s office and you can contact the bishop’s administrative assistant for a list of changes.