

Free Methodist Church UK and Ireland Handbook



free methodist
church UK & Ireland

Free Methodist Church UK
Charity Number: 518173



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INTRODUCTION

We're glad you're interested in knowing more about the Free Methodist Church. We want to share with you the heart of who we are.

Identity

We are people who have had our lives changed through an encounter with Jesus Christ. By the empowering of His Spirit we have been set free, are living free and are bringing freedom to others.

Set **free** - Living **free** - Bringing **freedom**

In both belief and practice we are Wesleyan-Arminian in theology, Holy Spirit led and missional in word and deed.

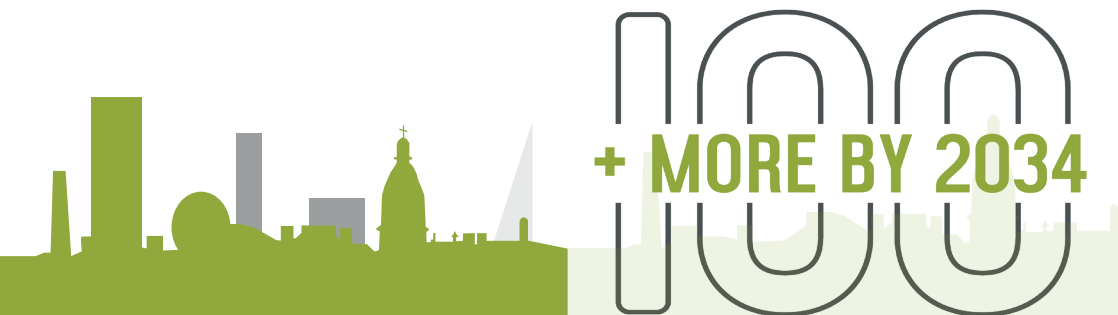


Our identity can be summed up as two sides of a coin. One side describes our beliefs and practices and the other how these are realised through us individually and collectively experiencing and sharing freedom.

Calling

We believe that from its inception God called the Free Methodist Church to, “reform the nation, in particular the church; to spread Scriptural holiness over the land”. (John Wesley)

In 2019, God spoke to the leaders in the Free Methodist Church in the UK and Ireland calling us to expand to 100 churches and more by 2034. This is primarily accomplished through church planting as we follow the Holy Spirit's leading.



Mission and Vision

To love God, love people, and make disciples. To bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches.

You will discover more about our identity, calling, mission and vision as you read on.

1. What we believe

Our core beliefs and practices date back to the New Testament church. We want Free Methodists to teach what the apostles taught, to live as passionately as they lived in their generation and to serve the great mission of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is the Centre

At the heart of our faith is the person of Jesus Christ. We worship Jesus as our Lord and Saviour and, above all else, we are a people who are devoted to Him. Our beliefs, our practices, our decisions and our lives are centred around Jesus Christ.

The Bible is our Authority

We believe the Bible is God's inspired Word. The Bible directs what we believe and the way we live.

"In common with John Wesley we acknowledge that several elements help us to understand revealed truth – such as reason, tradition and experience – but standing at the head of the line is the Bible. If the Bible and the church seem to be in disagreement, the Bible takes precedence. If the Bible and human reason appear to be in conflict the weight falls on the side of the Bible. We believe the Bible has primary authority." Bishop Donald N. Bastian

The Gospel is our Hope

We believe that the good news of Jesus is for all people and the way we express this reflects a Wesleyan perspective:

- All need to be saved (Romans 3:23)

All people are corrupted. Our very nature from birth is selfish and inclined to sin.

- All can be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

God is reaching out to all people with His grace in order to enable us to answer His call and turn to Christ for forgiveness. This is called prevenient grace.

All those who respond to God's grace are able to find forgiveness in Christ because Christ offered once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

We see every person as someone with the potential to become a devoted follower of Jesus. We believe the atonement Jesus Christ made on the cross is sufficient for the needs of all sinners of the world and is potentially effective in the lives of all, but will only be effective for those who repent and believe. During the days of John Wesley this conviction meant that, *"the gospel of Christ was offered to the poor, the downcast, the spiritually disenfranchised. It was preached with great optimism and expectancy. None was excluded from the scope of its appeal. Hope was generated in the hearts of the hopeless. Methodists' meetings became places of gladness and rejoicing."*

Bishop Donald N. Bastian



• All can know they are saved (Romans 8:15-16)

Followers of Jesus are able to have an assurance of salvation as they exercise God-given faith and experience the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. The Holy Spirit witnesses to their spirit that God has become their Father and they are His children.

• All can be saved from both the guilt and the power of sin (Galatians 5:16-25)

Jesus laid down His life to redeem our sinful nature, purify us and make us a people who belong to Him, eager to do what is good. The Bible teaches that God's divine power has given us everything we need to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. Through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit we can live free from guilt and experience victory over known and habitual sin.

The Holy Spirit is our Helper

The Holy Spirit lives within us, leading us, guiding us and transforming us step by step to become more like Jesus. He works in us to shape our character and help us to live holy lives in accordance with God's revealed will for human flourishing. When we are filled with the Spirit we are empowered to serve in the church as well as in the community. We believe the gifts of the Spirit are available today to bring God's goodness to others and are to be exercised with the love and compassion of Christ.



Making Disciples is our Mission

Jesus commissioned His disciples to "Go and make disciples of all nations." (Matt 28:19) Everything that we do, from the appointing of pastors to organisational structures and methods, serves this purpose. Our desire is to equip followers of Jesus to help others know and follow Him. We long to see disciples who make disciples who make disciples resulting in the multiplication of healthy Biblical communities. We believe God has given the Free Methodist Church in the UK and Ireland a clear vision to this end, to expand to '100 churches and more by 2034.

Freedom is our Heart

We read in John 8:36 that "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Paul writes elsewhere that, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery" (Galatians 5:1). Freedom is our heart because we believe that Jesus came so that people can be set free and that He then empowers and commissions us to go on living free and bringing freedom to others.



Not one of us walks through this broken world untouched by its consequences. From our own wrong decisions, to attitudes that trap our minds, to the way we've been treated by other people, we are all affected.

Some religious groups think that by living life around a group of rules we can rise above this, but we believe that there is no way we can find freedom through our own efforts. Instead, the only way that we can find freedom is in surrendering to God. God loves us so much that He gave His one and only Son to set us free from sin, shame and fear and experience His healing power. The good news is that this salvation is not dependent on who we are, what we have done or where we come from. Freedom comes through Jesus and is available to everyone who chooses to repent and make Jesus their King.



Having been set free by Jesus He promises to give His Holy Spirit to guide us and empower us to go on living free. We believe that the Word of God and the Spirit of God have the power to transform our minds and change the trajectory of our lives.

As we live life submitted to Jesus as our King, we are given access to His insight, His power and His purposes for our lives. His grace enables us to “throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles” (Hebrews 12:1) that we may live in His freedom today.



The freedom we have in Jesus is so amazing that we do not want to keep it to ourselves. Just as Jesus stepped down from heaven to bring us freedom, we endeavour to go beyond our place of comfort and bring this Good News to as many people as possible through both our words and actions.

We believe that we are called to be Jesus' hands, feet and voice in this hurting world. This is expressed through a passion for planting and resourcing churches as we believe the local church is best placed to work for social justice, engage in transforming mission and share the good news of Jesus.

You can find out more about what we believe and why in Appendix A – Free Methodist Doctrine. Page 30

Rev Allan Ellershaw
Former Free Methodist Superintendent
& National Leader UK



“*The Free Methodist Church is a body of dedicated Christians committed to the will of God as revealed in the Bible, Wesleyan in doctrine and practice, who consider themselves to be members of the body of Christ in this world... They view local churches as mission outposts. Pastors are appointed not just to local congregations and buildings, but to the evangelisation of whole communities, towns or cities. They believe the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve particular care and any individual can become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.*”

The Free Methodist Church recognises no geographic, social, racial or cultural limitations on Christ's command to preach the gospel of redemption and to share his message of wholeness. They are called to introduce all people to Jesus Christ.”

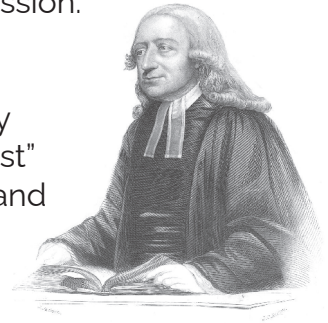
2. Who we are

Historically

All that we believe, including this emphasis on freedom, is nothing new. It can be traced back to Jesus and the New Testament church. We can see through history that the church has had a tendency to drift from the founding principles of the New Testament. In response to this God has called people to lead a restoration or reformation that brings His church back to focus on the main thing. Often this leads to the organisation of a new movement that reignites the Biblical witness that had been lost or compromised. We believe God has worked in this way to establish the Free Methodist Church and make clear our place in His great story and mission.

John Wesley

In the 18th century God raised up John Wesley and subsequently the people called "Methodist" to in Wesley's own words, "reform the nation, and in particular the Church; to spread Scriptural holiness over the land."

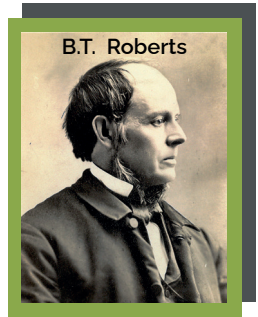


On 24th May 1738, John Wesley encountered God in what is known as his "Aldersgate experience" where he described his heart as being "strangely warmed". Following this he began to preach justification by faith to all who would listen. From 1739 until his death 52 years later it is estimated that he travelled some 225,000 miles and preached more than 40,000 times, sometimes to crowds of over 20,000. At the time of his death there were 72,000 Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland, as well as a Methodist church in America of around 75,000 members.

It is important to note that John Wesley's great quest was not to establish a new church but to see New Testament Christianity restored to the land of his birth. He did this by reviving, defending and promoting the teaching and practices of the early church. This desire to be a New Testament church is at the heart of the present day Free Methodist life and story.

B.T. Roberts and the start of the Free Methodist Church in the USA

In 1848, Benjamin Titus Roberts became a minister in the Methodist church in America. Under his ministry churches began to flourish and revival was experienced. Roberts, however, became increasingly concerned by the worldliness he found invading the church. He wrote an article entitled "New School Methodism" in which he expressed that many of the ministers of his day had no time for the holiness message.



He wrote, *"Old school Methodists rely upon the agency of the Holy Spirit and the purity of the Church. New school Methodists appeared to depend on the patronage of the worldly, the favour of the proud and various artifices of worldly policy."*

This article provoked a reaction which led to the establishment of the Free Methodist Church at Pekin, New York, on 23rd August 1860. The new movement saw themselves as Methodists because they embraced the Biblical message and lifestyle of the early church just as the early Methodists had. The title "Free" was chosen because they believed that Freedom is at the heart of the good news of Jesus.

This was expressed in their day through a desire to see:

- Freedom of the Holy Spirit in worship
- Freedom for all slaves
- Free seats for all, especially the poor
- Freedom from the influence of secret societies
- Freedom for all, that is, clergy, laity, men and women to lead and serve as they follow Jesus' call.

FREEDOM FREEDOM FREEDOM FREEDOM

Free Methodism in the UK

In the late 1960s many Methodists in the UK and Ireland became concerned about the growth of radical theology that challenged the supreme authority of Scripture, rejected New Testament teaching and dismissed miracles and spiritual experiences as outdated and irrelevant.

God spoke to a number of people at that time from Esther 4:14, *“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this.”*

Evangelicals within the Methodist Church had to decide to remain and work for reform, or leave. Through connection with Rev Victor Trinder (from Northern Ireland), Rev F. B. Mitchell, Rev R. Taylor and Rev J. B. Walton (from England) after much prayer decided to become part of the global Free Methodist Church rather than establish independent congregations.

J. B. Walton, reflecting on those early days, believed Free Methodists were called to be:

- Saturated with God
- True to the Scriptures
- Powerful in prayer
- Led by the Holy Spirit
- Winning the lost

Free Methodism
in the UK



It is clear that all who are known as “Free Methodist” are called by God to take our place in His great story and mission. As those who have gone before us, we hold true to Scripture, carry a responsibility to revive, defend and promote New Testament teaching and practice and undertake a life-transforming mission in the power of the Holy Spirit.



**B. T. Roberts establishes
the Free Methodist Church
1860**



**The Free Methodist Church
begins in the UK
1968**



**John Wesley begins the
Methodist movement
1738**



**Luther's 95 Theses
Start of the Reformation
1517**



**Wycliffe's Bible first
English translation
1382**



**Council of Nicea
325**



**Birth of the church
33AD**



Collectively

John Wesley's vision for the church in his day was to embody New Testament Christianity so vibrantly that it would affect everyone who came into contact with it. We want the same for the church in our day. Our desire is for Free Methodists to teach what the apostles taught, to live as passionately as they lived and to serve the great mission of the Kingdom of God.

To do this we uncompromisingly centre everything around the Bible, the Holy Spirit and life-transforming mission. The Free Methodist Church is a growing, global family with over 15,000 churches ministering in over 100 countries. Wherever we are called to serve, disciples are made, healthy leadership encouraged and small groups and churches planted. The local church is God's instrument to transform communities and impact nations.

Healthy Church



We believe a healthy church should have the following characteristics:

- **A Healthy Church Worships in Spirit and Truth**

Nothing can fully heal our souls, emotions and relationships more thoroughly than true worship of God. When we turn our hearts and minds toward God, we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit and His outpouring of grace. We are changed as God turns our love from self to Him and to others. Worship involves "hunger and thirst for righteousness." God promises to "fill" such people with all they need to serve Him.

• A Healthy Church Prays Without Ceasing

Throughout His ministry Jesus models to us the priority of prayer. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and gives thanks. Prayer takes us beyond ourselves and emphasises our dependence on God. God responds to our prayers by working change in us and in the circumstances and situations that we bring to Him. We encourage all people to develop a daily personal prayer time and alongside this to participate in corporate prayer. Many of our leadership initiatives arise from these times of prayer together.

• A Healthy Church Constantly Reaches the Lost for Christ

Jesus came to “seek and save” the lost. He calls us, His disciples, to do the same thing. Every church must be committed to the principles, practices and prayers of “faith sharing.” Statistics show that over 75% of those who become Christians do so because of the testimony, deeds and encouragement of someone they trust.

• A Healthy Church is an Enfolding Community that Produces Fully Devoted Disciples

We work hard to see that church is more than friendly, more than welcoming, but rather enfolding. We want everyone to feel that they belong and know that they have a place. According to the Great Commission, disciples are made as Christians go to the lost, baptise those who believe and teach those who respond to do all that Jesus commanded us to do. We value small groups within the church as an effective environment for the discipleship and care of all believers.

• A Healthy Church Grows through Multiplication

Within the church, we should regularly see the reproduction of disciples, leaders, groups and congregations. Every person and church is called for this purpose and has the joy of personally participating in Kingdom expansion.

- **A Healthy Church Ministers to the Poor and Disenfranchised**

That the poor have the gospel demonstrated to them by word and deed was one of the marks of the ministry of Jesus and the early church. Therefore, the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve our particular care. People who feel disconnected with society because of their condition, ethnicity or status need to both hear and see the good news of God's grace. We expect each of our churches to be ministering to the poor and disenfranchised.

- **A Healthy Church Engages in our World Missionary Movement**

Many Free Methodists travel abroad to work and minister in a variety of ways. Every local church is encouraged to participate in our world missionary movement by praying, supporting or going.

- **A Healthy Church Organises around its Mission**

We are committed to placing mission ahead of method. This means that all our structures must serve our mission. When a church understands its mission, making decisions about structure and function becomes clearer.

Personally

One of the distinguishing features of the church that we see in the New Testament, during the time of John Wesley and that of B. T. Roberts is that every disciple has a part to play. God has gifts and graces for every person to lead and serve as they follow Jesus. We believe that as God empowers disciples through the work of the Holy Spirit that each person is released into a joyful and purposeful life and is equipped with gifts to serve and reveal Jesus to those around them.

The Free Methodist Church desires to connect, equip and inspire each person to know God and to make Him known. We recognise that no one can fulfil this commission alone and so we are committed to building effective churches with each person fulfilling their part.



Belonging to a local church enables us to use our gifts to benefit those around us. We do not use our gifts to enhance our own reputation or status, but solely for the benefit of others. Spiritual gifts are given to each of us through the Holy Spirit and are given for building one another up. Every person has a valuable contribution to bring to the Body of Christ and should seek and nurture these gifts with love and wisdom. Through these acts of service God is glorified and people understand more fully the freedom they have been called into.

We believe each person has a role to play in using their gifts in a way that includes, invests, influences and increases.

• Includes

The Good News of Jesus is for all people everywhere. Together we create a place of welcome for our community. In the various ministries, from weekdays to weekends, formal or informal, at home or away, we make it our aim to encourage all to belong, and to know God's love for themselves.

• Invests

We give our time, gifts and resources generously. The modern age encourages us to pursue our own interests and the small stories of our own lives. However, Free Methodists are called to live with a vision and a purpose that is bigger than ourselves. As we serve a generous God who richly blesses us we are called to be generous people who use all we have for the blessing of others.

All are encouraged to pray and decide privately before God what they should cheerfully give in time or resources. We each have a wonderful opportunity and responsibility to invest much in the Kingdom of God.

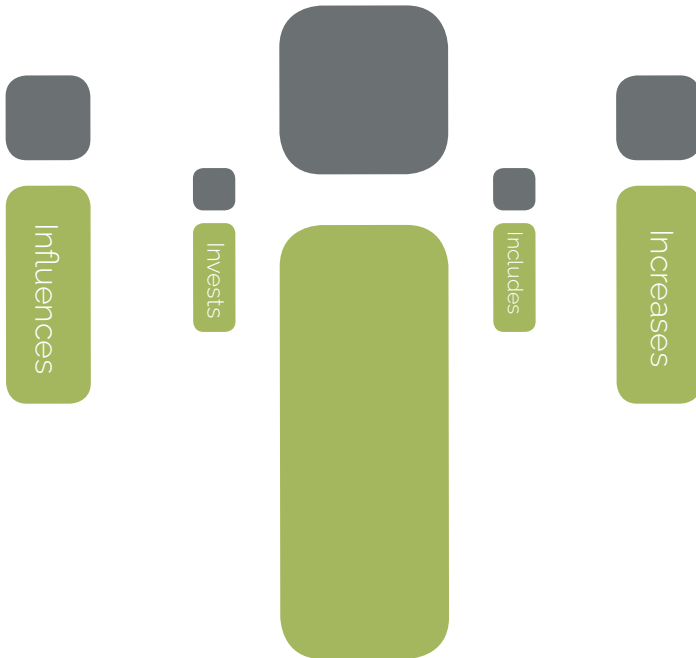
• Influences

Jesus calls each of us to be salt and light within the world. This means living in a distinct way that reveals the life and love of Jesus. Every person and as such every Free Methodist church is unique, and will influence lives, communities, even nations, in their own way. Through prayer we discern together the various ways God is calling us to influence our own communities and shape the culture around us. We follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to direct our resources rightly. When we obey God's leading, we see lives transformed.

• Increases

God has a great purpose for every person as He invites them on the adventure of making disciples. This means that the freedom that we find in Jesus is not something that we keep to ourselves but is something to be shared. Alongside inviting people to church we invite them into relationship and say with Paul, "Follow me as I follow Christ". When we do that we see disciples multiplied and the kingdom of God increases.

We commit to making disciples, raising leaders and planting new churches for the glory of God and the transforming of communities and lives all around the world as we see people Set Free, Living Free and Bringing Freedom.



Our Character

Saving faith in Jesus leads to us becoming more like Jesus. Paul writes that we “are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18) through the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe God has called us to live to a higher standard than those who have no faith so that through our lives Jesus Christ is put on display.

“In a self-indulgent world, God calls us to self-denial. In a materialistic world, God calls us to simple living. In a grasping world, God calls us to sacrificial giving. In a sinful world, God calls us to sanctified, holy living.” – Rev. Allan Ellershaw

It is the responsibility of every follower of Jesus to continually pray and seek God and allow His work of refinement in their lives. As we do that the Holy Spirit works to convict and to empower us to change.

This call to holy living is not a burden, but a gift that enables us to live in true freedom and experience life in all its fullness by delivering us from the destructive power of sin.

To help understand something of what holy living could look like within our own culture the Free Methodist Church has taken Biblical principles and developed a lifestyle that we advocate and ask all members to live in harmony with. These are not rules to be followed but a starting point as you take time to seek and submit to God and allow His transforming work in your life.

You can find out more about the lifestyle we advocate in Appendix B – page 38

3. How do we function

As Free Methodists are first and foremost a people who are centred around Jesus and His commission to be and to make disciples, our structure and how we function must serve this purpose. Free Methodists value making disciples, following New Testament Christian lifestyles, and living in the Spirit, over and above structure, style or method.

Howard Snyder

(Former Professor of Wesley Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary & Tyndale Seminary)



“ *The church gets into trouble whenever it thinks it is in the church business rather than the Kingdom business. In the church business, people are concerned with church activities, religious behaviour and spiritual things. In the Kingdom business, people are concerned with Kingdom activities, all human behaviour and everything God has made. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world* ”

Membership

We are convinced that individual believers need to be in fellowship with other Christians. The church is 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. Christians who separate from the church deprive themselves of the spiritual resources and opportunities God has ordained.

- **We believe membership is a New Testament practice**

The New Testament church clearly had a leadership structure (Acts 15:6; 20:17; 1 Tim 3), and a form of “membership” from which, in certain circumstances people could be excluded (Matt 18:15-19; 1 Cor 5:9-11). Leaders were appointed in churches (Titus 1:5) and this could only be either by each leadership group selecting successors or by being chosen by the church members. Even in the New Testament Church where the apostles had been chosen directly by the Lord Himself, there was the example of some leaders (including Stephen) who were chosen by “the whole congregation” (Acts 6:5). Having an official and clear membership clarifies who is eligible to be a part of this process.

- **We believe membership is an aid to discipleship**

All Christians belong to God's church, whether they choose to take a formal step of commitment to their local church or not. However, church membership offers Christians the opportunity to pledge publicly their love and loyalty to Christ and the church, and to identify through membership with a local congregation. It makes them integral parts of a loving community, gives them a sense of accountability necessary for spiritual growth, and through mutual Christian commitment enables them to better carry out their mission in the world.



Becoming a member involves answering five questions:

1. Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Do you believe the Bible is God's written word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit and do you accept its authority for what you believe and how you live?
3. Do you resolve, by God's grace, to be Christ-like in heart and life, opening yourself fully to the cleansing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance of the Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of the church?
4. Do you accept the Free Methodist Articles of Religion, Membership Covenant and principles for the lives of its members and the governance of the church?
5. As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you embrace the mission of the Free Methodist Church, within and beyond this congregation and will you join us in giving sacrificially of your time, talents and resources to help us carry out that mission?

Who can become Members?

The New Testament pattern of repentance, faith and baptism form the essential requirements for membership. This makes membership in the Free Methodist Church as nearly as possible synonymous with entering into the Body of Christ. Our expectation is that members will, with the encouragement of the church and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, grow in grace and Christian maturity, and serve according to the gifts and graces God gives each one. By wholeheartedly committing to a local church, we are saying that we can't go it alone. The Christian life is far more than a simple "me and Jesus" view of life. We need the family of God in order to grow and develop ourselves and to be fruitful in ministry within and without the church building.

• Membership Covenant

Being followers of Jesus and members of His church is a high privilege and comes with a high calling to a life of holiness that honours God and a life of fruitfulness as we serve His kingdom. This is not something that we are able to do alone but are reliant on the enablement of the Holy Spirit and the support of the other members of the church.

The covenant expresses God-ordained principles that we believe should govern our everyday lives. We believe these statements of principles arise out of the direct, clear teaching of Scripture and have as their authority, not human traditions but God's Word. The principles are expressed as plural statements to demonstrate our belief that biblical principles become personal practices as we belong to a living community where we support one another and are willing to hold one another accountable.

We confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By faith, we walk with Him. We commit ourselves to know Him in His full sanctifying grace.

As Regards God

As God's people, we reverence and worship Him. We commit ourselves to cultivate habits of Christian devotion, submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship and partaking of Holy Communion; We commit ourselves to observe the Lord's Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal and service; We commit ourselves to give our loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment.

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

As Regards Ourselves and Others

As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs.

We commit ourselves to be free from activities and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same;

We commit ourselves to respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God;

We commit ourselves to strive to be just and honest in all our relationships and dealings.

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

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 and the family;

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

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

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

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.

Local Leadership

The Free Methodist Church ordains pastors for ministry and appoints them to their spheres of service, in consultation with the pastors and representatives of local churches. It is our understanding that in New Testament times those who gave oversight to the local church were appointed by apostolic leaders rather than called by their congregation. Free Methodist pastors make themselves accountable to the Free Methodist UK and Ireland Conference and their character and conduct is reviewed annually.



• We Value Godly Leaders

We believe that great leadership is essential in order to see the Kingdom of God come here on earth. In His Word God raised up people to be leaders in order for His people to take new ground and to equip believers to do His work.

Experienced leaders with a servant heart are vital to any great community. The leadership of the local church is usually composed of a pastor (or more than one pastor), as well as paid or voluntary lay leaders, who may work with youth, or as evangelists or other roles as needed.

Each church selects leaders from among those members who are recognised to have the gifts and graces required. These leaders work alongside their appointed pastor to develop the life and ministry of the church in its community.

It is crucial that the leaders are people of spiritual depth. They must hold Scripture in high regard. They must be open to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. They must long to see communities impacted by the transforming love of Christ.

The Scriptures offer guidance to those in leadership. Leadership positions should be filled by members who:

1. Live consistently within the Bible's expectations for leaders.
(Ex 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9)
2. Express Christ-like attitudes in life and in relationships.
(Matt 20:26-28, Jn 15:12-17, Acts 6:1-7 and Eph 4:1-17)
3. Live in harmony with the membership covenant.
4. Live courageously, modelling obedient faith, faithful attendance and service and financial generosity to at least the level of a tithe.
5. Live in private what they profess or teach in public.

National Leadership

The Free Methodist Church is a connexional church with shared beliefs and values, in which local churches are encouraged to link up, to work together and support one another.

Local churches come together collectively to form what is called an "Annual Conference". This is an organisational term for the way the Free Methodist work is overseen in a region. Each church selects delegates who work with all the ordained ministers as members of the Annual Conference. The UK and Ireland currently forms one Annual Conference.

The Annual Conference assists churches by offering practical advice, encouraging the development of vision and leadership pathways including ordination. It continually invests in, and cares for, pastors. It works to enable and provide support for new church plants in order to accomplish the vision for 100 churches and more by 2034. It provides a national website, leadership hub, HR support and a social media presence.

The Annual Conference appoints ministers to churches for an indefinite period. This is done with much prayer and consultation between the Ministerial Education and Guidance Board (MEG), the pastor and church delegates. As far as possible, this ensures appointments are in line with God's will. The Annual Conference supports church leadership teams during periods of vacancy until a new pastor is appointed.

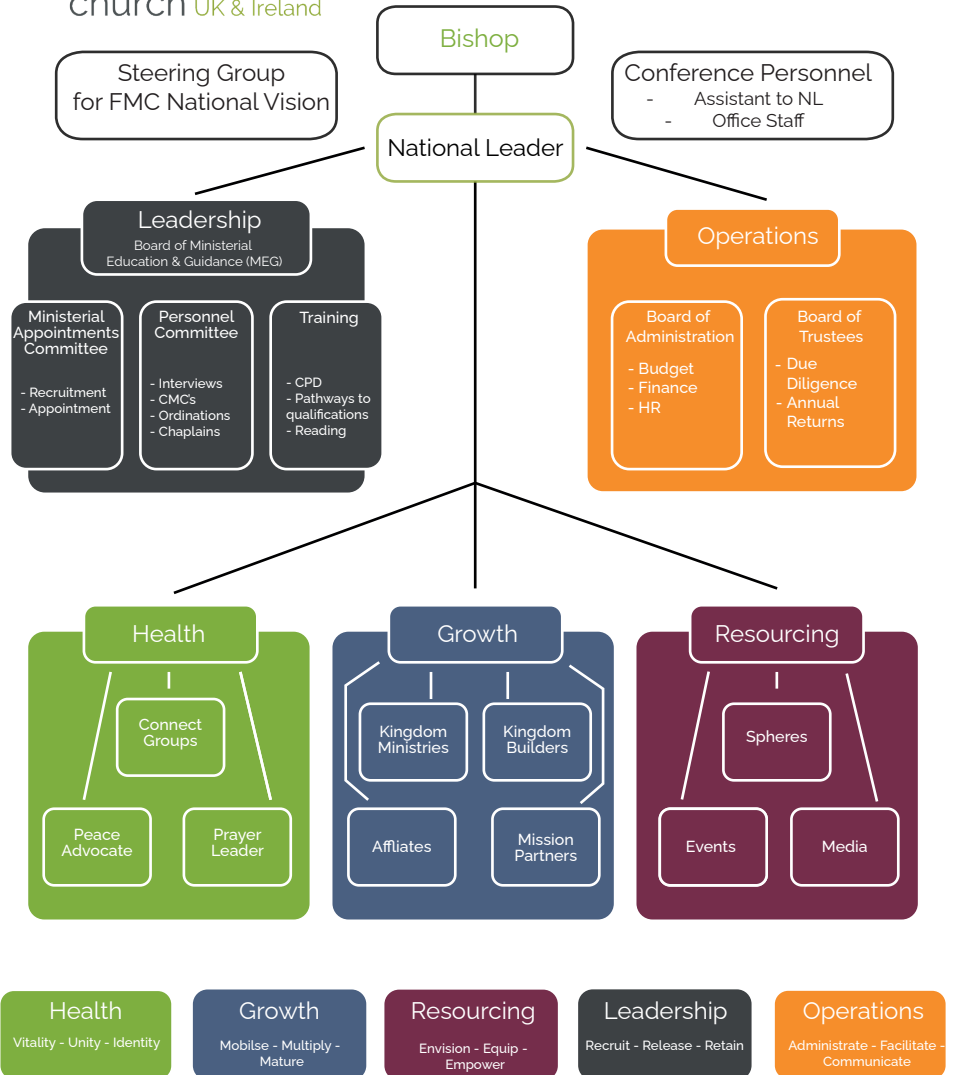
The work of the Free Methodist Church in the UK is overseen by a National Leader. The National Leader is elected by the Annual Conference to serve the denomination for a four-year period. The work of the Annual Conference is accomplished by the five departments summarised below.





Organisational Chart

free methodist church UK & Ireland



Set free - Living free - Bringing freedom

Global Leadership



The National Leader and the Annual Conference are overseen and supported by a Bishop from a "General Conference." A General Conference provides oversight and care for a number of Annual Conferences from one or more nations. The Free Methodist Church UK and Ireland Annual Conference is currently a part of the Free Methodist Church USA General Conference. Every four years, pastors and delegates from the UK attend a gathering of the General Conference in the USA where God's work through the Free Methodist Church is celebrated, our beliefs and values are upheld and a number of bishops are elected to oversee the work. The work of the Free Methodist Church worldwide is co-ordinated by a "World Conference" of ordained ministers and lay leaders drawn from each General Conference representing every continent of the world.

We believe that having a combination of local leaders and regional and national leaders has New Testament precedence. In New Testament times it seems that most leaders were selected from within the congregation, but some – such as Timothy and Titus – were appointed to oversee new congregations. They were appointed by the Apostles who exercised an itinerant ministry.

We value working together. As in the New Testament Church, in times of need believers in one congregation may be asked to help meet the needs of another congregation. Also, individual churches are not expected to iron out major doctrinal issues in isolation, because this important work is undertaken by the General and World Conferences to which individual churches send representatives (see Acts 15).

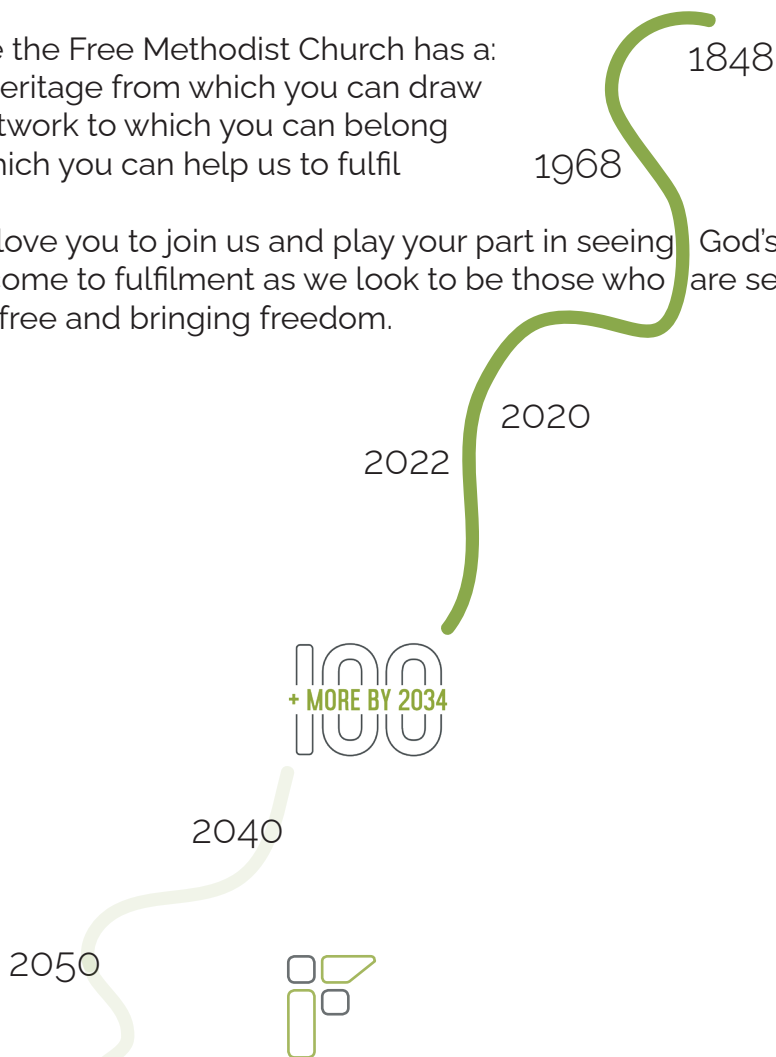
Playing Your Part

The story of the Free Methodist Church is one that is still being written. God has given us a big vision to grow to 100 churches and more by 2034, to reform the nation, in particular the church, and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.

We believe the Free Methodist Church has a:

- Spiritual heritage from which you can draw
- Family network to which you can belong
- Calling which you can help us to fulfil

We would love you to join us and play your part in seeing God's big vision come to fulfilment as we look to be those who are set free, living free and bringing freedom.



Set **free** - Living **free** - Bringing **freedom**

Appendix A – Free Methodist Doctrine

God

• The Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, the maker and preserver of all things. And in the unity of this Godhead there are three persons: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are one in eternity, deity and purpose; everlasting, of infinite power, wisdom and goodness.

• The Son – His Incarnation

God was himself in Jesus Christ to reconcile people to God. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, He joined together the deity of God and the humanity of humankind. Jesus of Nazareth was God in flesh, truly God and truly human. He came to save us. For us the Son of God suffered, was crucified, dead and buried. He poured out His life as a blameless sacrifice for our sin and transgressions. We gratefully acknowledge that He is our Saviour, the one perfect mediator between God and us.

• The Son – His Resurrection and Exaltation

Jesus Christ is risen victorious from the dead. His resurrected body became more glorious, not hindered by ordinary human limitations. Thus He ascended into heaven. There He sits as our exalted Lord at the right hand of God the Father, where He intercedes for us until all His enemies shall be brought into complete subjection. He will return to judge all people. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

• The Holy Spirit – His Person

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. Proceeding from the Father and the Son, He is one with them, the eternal Godhead, equal in deity, majesty and power. He is God effective in Creation, in life and in the church. The Incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ were accomplished by the Holy Spirit. He continues to reveal, interpret and glorify the Son.

• The Holy Spirit – His Work in Salvation

The Holy Spirit is the administrator of the salvation planned by the Father and provided by the Son's death, resurrection and ascension. He is the effective agent in our conviction, regeneration, sanctification and glorification. He is our Lord's ever-present self, indwelling, assuring and enabling the believer.

• The Holy Spirit – His Relation to the Church

The Holy Spirit is poured out upon the church by the Father and the Son. He is the church's life and witnessing power. He bestows the love of God and makes real the lordship of Jesus Christ in the believer so that both His gifts of words and service may achieve the common good and build and increase the church. In relation to the world He is the Spirit of truth, and His instrument is the Word of God.

The Scriptures

• Authority

The Bible is God's written Word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit. It bears unerring witness to Jesus Christ, the living Word. As attested by the early church and subsequent councils, it is the trustworthy record of God's revelation, completely truthful in all it affirms. It has been faithfully preserved and proves itself true in human experience.

The Scriptures have come to us through human authors who wrote, as God moved them, in the languages and literary forms of their times. God continues, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak through this Word to each generation and culture.

The Bible has authority over all human life. It teaches the truth about God, His creation, His people, His one and only Son and the destiny of humankind. It also teaches the way of salvation and the life of faith. Whatever is not found in the Bible nor can be proved by it is not to be required as an article of belief or as necessary to salvation.

•The Old Testament

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New. Both Testaments bear witness to God's salvation in Christ; both speak of God's will for His people. The ancient laws for ceremonies and rites, and the civil precepts for the nation Israel are not necessarily binding on Christians today. But, on the example of Jesus we are obligated to obey the moral commandments of the Old Testament.

•The New Testament

The New Testament fulfils and interprets the Old Testament. It is the record of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is God's final word regarding humankind, sin, salvation, the world and its destiny.

Humankind

• Free Moral Persons

God created human beings in His own image, innocent, morally free and responsible to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. By the sin of Adam, humans as the offspring of Adam are corrupted in their very nature so that from birth they are inclined to sin. They are unable by their own strength and work to restore themselves in right relationship with God and to merit eternal salvation. God, the Omnipotent, provides all the resources of the Trinity to make it possible for humans to respond to His grace through faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. By God's grace and help people are enabled to do good works with a free will.

• Law of Life and Love

God's law for all human life, personal and social, is expressed in two divine commands: Love the Lord God with all your heart, and love your neighbour as yourself. These commands reveal what is best for persons in their relationship with God, others and society. They set forth the principles of human duty in both individual and social action. They recognize God as the only Sovereign. All people as created by Him and in His image have the same inherent rights regardless of gender, race or colour. All should therefore give God absolute obedience in their individual, social and political acts. They should strive to secure to everyone respect for their person, their rights and their greatest happiness in the possession and exercise of the right within the moral law.

• Good Works

Good works are the fruit of faith in Jesus Christ, but works cannot save us from our sins nor from God's judgment. As expressions of Christian faith and love, our good works performed with reverence and humility are both acceptable and pleasing to God. However, good works do not earn God's grace.

Salvation

• Christ's Sacrifice

Christ offered once and for all the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. No other satisfaction for sin is necessary; none other can atone.

• New Life in Christ

A new life and a right relationship with God are made possible through the redemptive acts of God in Jesus Christ. God, by His Spirit, acts to impart new life and put people into a relationship with Himself as they repent and their faith responds to His grace. Justification, regeneration, adoption, sanctification and restoration speak significantly to entrance into and continuance in the new life.

• Justification

Justification is a legal term that emphasizes that by a new relationship in Jesus Christ people are in fact accounted righteous, being freed from both the guilt and the penalty of their sins.

• Regeneration

Regeneration is a biological term which illustrates that by a new relationship in Christ, one does in fact have a new life and a new spiritual nature capable of faith, love and obedience to Christ Jesus as Lord. The believer is born again and is a new creation. The old life is past; a new life is begun.

• Adoption

Adoption is a filial term full of warmth, love, and acceptance. It denotes that by a new relationship in Christ believers have become His wanted children freed from the mastery of both sin and Satan. Believers have the witness of the Spirit that they are children of God.

• Sanctification

Sanctification is that saving work of God beginning with new life in Christ whereby the Holy Spirit renews His people after the likeness of God, changing them through crisis and process, from one degree of glory to another, and conforming them to the image of Christ.

As believers surrender to God in faith and die to self through full consecration, the Holy Spirit fills them with love and purifies them from sin. This sanctifying relationship with God remedies the divided mind, redirects the heart to God, and empowers believers to please and serve God in their daily lives.

Thus, God sets His people free to love Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbour as themselves.

• Restoration

Christians may be sustained in a growing relationship with Jesus as Saviour and Lord. However, they may grieve the Holy Spirit in the relationships of life without returning to the dominion of sin. When they do, they must humbly accept the correction of the Holy Spirit, trust in the advocacy of Jesus, and mend their relationships.

Christians can sin wilfully and sever their relationship with Christ. Even so by repentance before God, forgiveness is granted and the relationship with Christ restored, for not every sin is the sin against the Holy Spirit and unpardonable. God's grace is sufficient for those who truly repent and, by His enabling, amend their lives. However, forgiveness does not give believers liberty to sin and escape the consequences of sinning.

God has given responsibility and power to the church to restore penitent believers through loving reproof, counsel and acceptance.

The Church

The church is created by God. It is the people of God. Christ Jesus is its Lord and Head. The Holy Spirit is its life and power. It is both divine and human, heavenly and earthly, ideal and imperfect. It is an organism, not an unchanging institution. It exists to fulfil the purposes of God in Christ. It redemptively ministers to persons. Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it that it should be holy and without blemish. The church is a fellowship of the redeemed and the redeeming, preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments according to Christ's instruction. The Free Methodist Church purposes to be representative of what the church of Jesus Christ should be on earth. It therefore requires specific commitment regarding the faith and life of its members. In its requirements it seeks to honour Christ and obey the written Word of God.

• The Language of Worship

According to the Word of God and the custom of the early church, public worship and prayer and the administration of the sacraments should be in a language understood by the people.

• The Holy Sacraments

Water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ. They are means of grace through faith, tokens of our profession of Christian faith, and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen and confirm our faith.

• Baptism

Water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord, signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers as declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour.

While the Free Methodist Church globally allows for infant baptism we do not believe that children become regenerate through infant baptism. To avoid misunderstandings, in the UK and Ireland we dedicate infants and baptise believers.

Where someone has previously been baptised as an infant they shall be required to affirm their baptism for themselves before being accepted into church membership.

• The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. To those who rightly, worthily and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves. Christ, according to His promise, is really present in the sacrament. But His body is given, taken and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. No change is effected in the element; the bread and wine are not literally the body and blood of Christ. Nor is the body and blood of Christ literally present with the elements. The elements are never to be considered objects of worship. The body of Christ is received and eaten in faith.

Last Things

• The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God is a prominent Bible theme providing Christians with both their tasks and hope. Jesus announced its presence. The kingdom is realized now as God's reign is established in the hearts and lives of believers. The church, by its prayers, example and proclamation of the gospel, is the appointed and appropriate instrument of God in building His kingdom. But the kingdom is also future and is related to the return of Christ when judgment will fall upon the present order. The enemies of Christ will be subdued; the reign of God will be established; a total cosmic renewal which is both material and moral shall occur; and the hope of the redeemed will be fully realized.

• The Return of Christ

The return of Christ is certain and may occur at any moment, although it is not given us to know the hour. At His return He will fulfil all prophecies concerning His final triumph over all evil. The believer's response is joyous expectation, watchfulness, readiness and diligence.

• Resurrection

There will be a bodily resurrection from the dead of both the just and the unjust, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrected body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable. The Resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of resurrection unto life to those who are in Him.

- **Judgment**

God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness in accordance with the gospel and our deeds in this life.

- **Final Destiny**

Our eternal destiny is determined by God's grace and our response, not by arbitrary decrees of God. For those who trust Him and obediently follow Jesus as Saviour and Lord, there is a heaven of eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence. But for the finally impenitent there is a hell of eternal suffering and of separation from God.

Appendix B – Free Methodist Lifestyle

The Goal of the Christian Journey

The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christ-like maturity, which the Bible describes as holiness and righteousness, as we enjoy union with Christ and each other (Matthew 5:6; 1 Peter 1:16; Ephesians 4:13). We acknowledge that this is only possible because of the grace that God so richly provides.

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 made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

The Way of Salvation

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.

• God's Gracious Initiative for Salvation

In love God has graciously provided for the salvation of all humankind. God is love. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was sent by the Father as an expression of God's love for the world. 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. Only those who respond in repentance and faith can experience His grace as a redemptive reality.

• 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. Added to the depravity common to all because of the Fall, there are the enslaving effects of committed sins. We are unable in ourselves to come to God, but God in His grace reaches out to every sinner.

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.

• **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.

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. 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. Repentance demands a radical turning from sin and a sincere turning to God.

Sincere repentance leads to moral renewal, often evidenced by restitution – the effort to right one's wrongs when possible. Acts of restitution, as in the case of Zacchaeus, are certainly fruits befitting repentance (Luke 3:8). Neither repentance nor restitution saves, however. Salvation is by faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

• **Trust / Faith**

Trust, also known as faith, is utter reliance upon God (2 Corinthians 3:4-5; 1 Timothy 4:10). 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 (Ephesians 3:12). 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 (1 Timothy 6:17).

• Assurance

God gives assurance of salvation and peace of heart to all who repent and put their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1). 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 6:11; 10:22). 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 (1 John 3:14).

• Consecration

God calls His people to set themselves apart to His will and purpose (Romans 6:13; 12:1). This is what we mean by consecration. Christians, therefore, must consecrate themselves to God and surrender their wills to the will of the Heavenly Father (Matthew 19:21). Those who desire inward sanctification must deny themselves, bear the cross, and follow Christ. Devotion to self is idolatry. A Christian who is divided in loyalty cannot serve God victoriously and steadfastly. Christ must be given pre-eminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life. This means freely yielding every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than self (Colossians 3:8-13).

• 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 (1 Peter 1:15-16; 2 Corinthians 7:1). 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" (1 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 as the believer is fully cleansed in heart (Psalm 51:5-13; 1 John 1:5-2:1).

God the Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier (1 Thessalonians 4:7- 8; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). Coming into one's life at conversion, He cleanses the heart and empowers for witness and service (John 3:5; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:3; Acts 1:8).

The Holy Spirit sheds God's love throughout the heart and life of the Christian (Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:12-13). He enables the Christian to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and their neighbour as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:25-62). Through the work of the Holy Spirit the Christian's life is transformed from inner conflict with sin to glad obedience (Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:16-25).

Sanctification cleanses Christians from sin and delivers from the idolatry of self (1 Peter 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:15-20). When they are cleansed, they are not made perfect in performance, but in love (Hebrews 6:1; 12:14; Matthew 5:43-48; 1 John 4:12-13).

Genuine Christian Character

Christian character begins with life in the Spirit, and is nourished by the spiritual disciplines of the Christian life.

• Prayer

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christlikeness. 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 5:16). 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. Both prayer and Bible study should be regular, without becoming mere rituals (Psalm 119:11; 10:5).

• Study of the Word

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 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.

• 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. Worship requires a proper attitude toward God. It involves the believer's active participation. Mature believers prepare their minds and spirits for worship. Sincere followers of Christ 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 take part in corporate church 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 the fruit of fellowship.

• Spiritual Gifts and Ministry

Followers of Jesus are called to exercise both natural abilities and spiritual gifts in the church for the sake of the kingdom of God. God endows all persons with natural abilities that may be employed for service and ministry. The believer uses these in ways that glorify God. In addition, the Holy Spirit also distributes, as he wills, spiritual gifts for the common good and the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Peter 4:7-11). We welcome the exercise of spiritual gifts when under the lordship of Christ and guided by His love (1 Corinthians 12). Their usage is motivated by the Spirit, and they are to be employed in "a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40). The believer seeks the gifts not for personal aggrandizement, but to further kingdom of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

• 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 Christians' relationships with others affects the quality of their lives. Growth in Christ requires readiness to mend relationships both with God and with others (James 5:16). The Ten Commandments, summarized into two commandments by Jesus (Luke 10:25-28), teach the nature of our relationships with God and with others. Christians express their love both by deeds of kindness and by personal words of witness that point to Christ as the embodiment of God's love and the Saviour of the world.

• **Divine Healing**

All healing of body, mind, or spirit has its ultimate source in God. Consistent with the Scriptures (James 5:14-15), we urge our pastors to make opportunity for the sick and afflicted to come before God in the fellowship of the church, in strong faith that the God and Father of Jesus Christ is both able and willing to heal. He may heal by the mediation of surgery, medication, change of environment, counselling, corrected attitudes or through the restorative processes of nature itself. He may heal through one or more of the above in combination with prayer, or He may heal by direct intervention in response to prayer. The Scriptures report many cases of the latter kind of healing, which centres in the life and ministry of the apostles and the church. At the same time, we recognize that although God's sovereign purposes are good and He is working toward a final redemption which assures wholeness to all believers, He may not grant physical healing for all in this life. We believe that in such cases He can glorify himself through the resurrection to life everlasting.

Christian Living in our own Culture

As Free Methodists have endeavoured to live out Christ's command to holiness in our own culture this has necessitated a response to some of the 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 in our culture, 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.

For each issue identified we seek to first identify a biblical principle that all Christians must seek to live out. These principles (indicated by italicized text) arise out of the direct, clear teaching of Scripture.

Following the principle there is an application statement to provide an example of what living out the principle may look like in our own culture that represents the historic understanding of Free Methodists.

• **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" (Mark 12:29-30; Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The worship of any other person, spirit, or thing is idolatry. 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 (1 John 2:16).

• **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 New Testament reveals that 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). Pastors and others who must be involved in necessary work on Sunday are encouraged to observe the Sabbath principle on another day.

• **Secret Societies**

The Christian's supreme loyalty is to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Romans 14:9; Acts 2:36). In every association Christians must keep themselves free to follow Christ and obey the will of God (2 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 typically 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.

• **Self-Discipline**

One attribute of the Spirit's indwelling presence is self-control (Galatians 5:23). The Scriptures instruct us to honour the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). 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 and compulsions.

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, and the counsel and support of other Christians.

• **Stewardship of Possessions**

Although as Christians we accumulate goods, we should not make possessions or wealth the goal of our lives (Matthew 6:19-20; Luke 12:16-21). Rather, as stewards we give generously to meet the needs of others and to support ministry (2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-13).

The Scriptures allow the privilege of private ownership. Though we hold title to possessions under civil law, we regard all we have as the property of God entrusted to us as stewards.

Gambling contradicts faith in God who rules all the affairs of His world, not by chance but by His providential care. Gambling lacks both the dignity of wages earned and the honour of a gift. It takes substance without yielding a fair exchange. Because it excites greed, it destroys the initiative of honest toil and often results in addiction. Government sponsorship of lotteries only enlarges the problem. We refrain from gambling in all its forms because of the evils it encourages, for conscience' sake and as a witness to the faith we have in Christ.

While customs and community standards change, there are changeless scriptural principles 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 (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). We therefore avoid extravagance and live in simplicity.

• **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). 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?

• **Misuse of Substances**

As Christians we believe that life is full, abundant and free in Jesus Christ (John 8:35; 10:10). Therefore, we abstain from whatever damages, destroys or distorts His life in us.

Illicit drugs are prime offenders. We avoid their use because various forms of narcotics cause untold damage to people and relationships, such drugs restrict personal development, damage the body and reinforce an unrealistic view of life.

Because Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbour as ourselves, we advocate abstaining from the use of alcoholic beverages (Mark 12:30-31). The abuse of alcohol, a legalized drug, is damaging to individuals, families, and society. It is unpredictably addictive and its destructive effects cannot be fully measured. Its abuse leaves a trail of broken marriages, family violence, crime, industrial loss, ill health, injury and death. As concerned Christians, we advocate abstinence for the sake of health, family and neighbours. Moreover, we see the adverse social consequences as so pervasive that we seek by advocating abstinence to make a united social witness to the freedom Christ gives.

We advocate abstaining from the use of tobacco because we believe Christians are to treat their bodies as sacred trusts. It is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as being an expensive and socially-offensive addiction. Likewise, the intemperate consumption of food is a form of abusing the body which may result in illness and obesity. We eat healthily so as to preserve the strength of our bodies and so extend our years of usefulness as servants of Christ. We take seriously the words of Paul, the apostle, "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" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

We endeavour by God's help to be understanding and supportive toward those who have abused or are currently misusing substances. We acknowledge that the misuse of substances is understood as a disease that harms the body, mind and spirit, causing physical, emotional and spiritual difficulty. We believe in Christ's power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we acknowledge the difficulties of overcoming the bondage of a substance, and desire to give help and support as needed while fellow Christians seek healing, including professional counselling and pastoral care.

• **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.

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 by pornography. Therefore, as Christians we abstain from pornography and oppose its use and work toward removing its legitimacy and availability.

• **Sexual Intimacy**

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God for marital union of one man and one woman. As such it creates a bond that scripture describes as one flesh (Genesis 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:16). When expressed within marriage, sexual intimacy is a great blessing and source of fulfilment. The sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman is to be protected against all manner of immoral conduct (Exodus 22:16-17; Deuteronomy 22:23- 28; Leviticus 20:10-16). Pre-marital intimacy robs the marital union of the exclusive bond that sexual intimacy is given to create. Fornication is listed along with other forms of immorality. (Galatians 5:19-21).

Extra-marital intimacy, which Scripture describes as adultery, transgresses the moral law and betrays the marriage bond. Adultery is a degrading and destructive force. It undermines trust and contaminates the exclusive bond of marriage (Exodus 20:14).

Homosexual intimacy is regarded by the Scriptures as immoral because it is a distortion of God's created order. The Scriptures speak explicitly against homosexual intimacy (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10). All persons are accountable to God for their thoughts, words and deeds (Romans 14:12; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10). For those who have fallen, the grace of God is available and completely adequate to forgive and deliver (1 John 1:9; Hebrews 7:25; Luke 4:18; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). Because the sexual desire is so powerful, counselling is recommended as a part of the church's pastoral care.

The church has a corporate responsibility to be God's agent of transformation to each person as they learn to live a Christian life that is wholesome and pure. We oppose cultural mores and laws that legitimize adultery, pre-marital, and homosexual intimacy.

• **Dignity and Worth of Persons**

We are committed to the worth of all humans, including the unborn, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, colour, socio-economic status, disability, 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 5:11-21). 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 are therefore pledged to active concern whenever human beings are demeaned, abused, depersonalized, enslaved or subjected to demonic forces in the world, whether by individuals or institutions (Galatians 3:28; Mark 2:27; 1 Timothy 1:8-10). We are committed to give meaning and significance to every person by God's help. Remembering our tendency to be prejudicial, as Christians we must grow in awareness of the rights and needs of others

• Sanctity of Life

God is sovereign: the world and all that is in it belongs to God. Though God's eternal purposes may never be thwarted by human action we are still free and responsible to make God-consistent choices in matters of life and death. Christians live in the reality that human beings are created for an eternal purpose.

Our convictions about the inherent worth of human life form the foundation of our approach to bioethics. These complex bioethical issues involve religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. God meets us in our suffering, to comfort us, to shape a Christ-like character within, and to make us instruments of his healing. Chronic disease, diminished physical capacity or ongoing disability do not constitute the end of life and need not compromise one's trust in God.

For the Christian death is not the end of life, but the transition into eternity. Therefore, physical death is not the ultimate enemy, but part of our journey. God's love sustains us in our suffering. He ministers to us personally and through the healing environment of Christian community. Divine wisdom in the face of suffering comes to us through scripture, prayer, godly counsel and the work of the Holy Spirit. As we are comforted, we are called to extend God's comfort to those who suffer.

a) 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.

b) Abortion

The intentional abortion of a person's life, from conception on, must be judged to be a violation of God's command, "You shall not commit murder," except when extreme circumstances require the termination of a pregnancy to save the life of the pregnant woman. Abortion, when it serves the ends of population or birth control, personal preference or convenience, and social or economic security, must be considered as selfish and malicious. Compassionate alternatives and long-term care should be offered to women considering abortion.

c) Euthanasia

There is no justification for euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. On the other hand, a terminally ill person's request that life not be sustained by heroic measures, does not constitute euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide. We recognize that the use of painkillers and other medications which carry the risk of shortening life is permissible so long as the intent is to relieve or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death. We further recognize the responsibility of medical professionals to alleviate pain within these parameters. Christians, however, must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living. 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 who loves us.

• The Christian and Marriage

At creation God instituted marriage for the well-being of humanity (Genesis 2:20-24; Mark 10:6-9). Marriage is the joining of one man and one woman into a lifelong relationship which the Scriptures call "one flesh." Such a marriage should be based on the mutuality of partnership, patterned not according to prescribed hierarchies but according to the creation of male and female both in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and the call to mutual submission as illustrated by Christ in His relationship with the Church (Ephesians 5:21-31). We look not to the state but to the Scriptures for our understanding of human personhood and well-being, including human sexuality and marriage. We order our life of faith and our ministries according to the Scriptures, not according to the shifting values of society 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 celebrative (Hebrews 13:4). Marriage, between one man and one woman, is therefore the only proper setting for sexual intimacy. Scripture requires purity before and faithfulness within marriage. With deep compassion for persons who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and especially those who have been mistreated and marginalized in various settings, the Free Methodist Church encourages its congregations to practice welcoming hospitality and embracing lovingkindness toward all who desire to worship among us. We will be a people who offer ourselves as agents of Jesus' grace and love to others – all others. We will trust the Holy Spirit to convict people of their sin, to enliven hope of transforming possibilities, and then to lead people to God's best for their lives.

Nevertheless, we hold that 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). In light of our beliefs, ministers or members of the Free Methodist Church shall not conduct, officiate, or assist in officiating, the marriages or unions of same-sex or same-gender couples.

We hold that our congregations are stewards of church property. Performing a marriage or blessing between a same-sex or same-gender couple in any Free Methodist Church building or on any Free Methodist property would be a violation of consecrated Free Methodist property. Therefore, such blessings or marriages may not be performed at Free Methodist churches or on Free Methodist properties.

Marriage that the Free Methodist Church deems doctrinally acceptable, legal and appropriate 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.

a) Nurturing Healthy Marriages

The Free Methodist Church urges its people to enter the covenant of marriage prayerfully. In accordance with the apostle's command (2 Corinthians 6:14), we expect believers to marry only believers. Ministers are required to use diligent care when being requested to solemnize a marriage. It is contrary to the explicit teachings of the Scriptures to unite a believer with an unbeliever.

Couples considering marriage should seek the wisdom of mature Christian leaders for instruction that promotes full equality in communication, finances, family dynamics, sex and spiritual formation. Young couples contemplating marriage should seek parental consent.

b) Healing Troubled Marriages

Human sin and rebellion against God always threatens marriages. Sin in the Garden brought a change to the way marriage partners related to each other, with profound consequences for a couple's experience of God's plan for marital oneness (Genesis 3:16b). Sadly, a constant feature of the story has been the hardening of heart that may lead to broken vows, marriages and homes.

Sadly, domestic violence, emotional assault, and physical abuse sometimes occurs in the homes of our people. Such sin jeopardizes the safety of spouse and children and may threaten their very lives. These family members need the special care of the church family for spiritual and emotional protection and healing (Malachi 2:13-16).

When an impossible situation is destroying the home, we advise that Christians may separate to halt the abuse and allow space for the healing of persons and their relationships. In such cases, the way to reconciliation must be kept open (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). Even when a marriage is violated by sexual infidelity, the partners are encouraged to work for restoration of the union as we believe that God's grace can bring healing.

c) Divorce

Although God intends and wills that marriage vows be honoured for life, some marriages fail even within the fellowship of God's people. When marriages fail and partners divorce, they have violated God's intention for marriage and often one or both have violated their vows to love and cherish the other. Such violations, whatever their reason, constitute rebellion against God's plan for their lives and result in personal brokenness. After a divorce each partner needs healing from God, with counsel towards repentance where needed and renewed faith in God for all involved. The church must stand ready to be agents of this healing work in their lives.

A divorce may result from a variety of sinful acts, attitudes, and responses. Sexual infidelity, abandonment, and patterns of abusive behaviour that threaten spouse and children are the most commonly identified sins destructive of marriages. Other sins, however, also sometimes lead to divorce, such as selfishness, anger, fear, obsessive preoccupation, and careless neglect. The hardness of heart that drives partners to divorce may trace back to many different manifestations of sin. When questioned about marriage and divorce, Jesus stressed three principles. First, He cites the intent from the beginning that no marriage would fail. Second, He identifies "hardness of heart" as the ultimate marriage killer – because either it causes destructive behaviour or refuses the grace that can heal and reconcile. And, third, He refuses to support the common assumption that in some cases one partner has a right (i.e., enjoys freedom) simply to walk away. Whatever the particulars, Jesus offered grace that heals and empowers people to live according to God's plan – to move from their sin to a life that pleases God.

Though the Scriptures allow divorce on the grounds of adultery (Matthew 5:32) and desertion (1 Corinthians 7:10-16), they do not mandate divorce and we advise counsel with church leaders to seek other alternatives. One of these may be for both to live celibately.

d) 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. Godly counsel will help people understand what happened in their marriage; specifically, where they may have contributed to the failure and how they have been wounded by it. Sinful relational patterns will be exposed, forsaken, and replaced with Spirit-directed and Christ-centred patterns. The damage to children, the larger families, and their witness to Christ will also be acknowledged and where possible restitution will be made

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.

e) Remarriage after a Divorce

Persons who have suffered the trauma of divorce must exercise extreme caution when considering remarriage. Unless they have experienced healing and restoration from their failure in marriage, they will likely fail again. In some cases, wisdom will insist upon remaining single and free to live in devotion only to Christ.

One who has been divorced shall not by that fact alone be denied the privileges and responsibilities of a future marriage in the Lord. The grace that brings correction, conviction, repentance, faith, healing, and restoration can make all things new, even for a Christian whose sin may have broken a marriage.

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 (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-11; 1 Corinthians 7:15).

• The Christian and the State

As Christians, we are first and foremost citizens of the kingdom of God and secondarily of this world (Phil. 3:20). Such dual citizenship carries with it both privilege and responsibility. We recognize the legitimate authority of human governments, as part of God's plan to bless the world through wise governance that supports what is good and protects against what is evil. (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-15).

Although our ultimate allegiance is to God, we respectfully submit to governmental authority as an expression of obedience to the Lord Jesus and His saving plans for the world. Thus, we commit to good citizenship and good deeds as salt and light in our nation and world that will glorify God and bless our neighbours now and always (Matthew 5:16).

As Christians we pray for "all who are in high positions" (1 Timothy 2:2) and live in submission "for the Lord's sake to every human institution". We pursue faithfulness to Jesus Christ in all things, work for the common good of all, and actively seek to influence social, cultural and political systems toward the example and teachings of Jesus Christ (Matthew 5:13-16). We oppose all that degrades, demeans and dehumanises human persons and the dignity and value with which God invests them (1 Corinthians 13). With these commitments in mind, we exercise our responsibility to vote in ways that are informed by biblical teaching and the church's best understanding of contemporary issues.

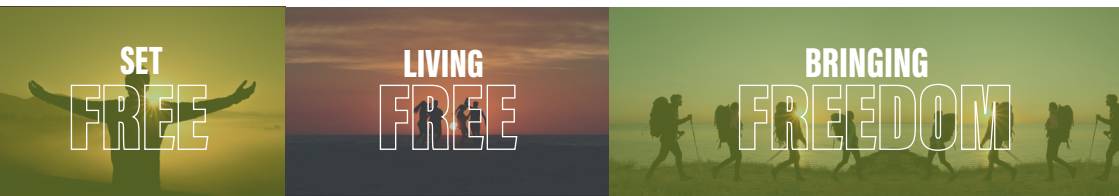
a) Law Enforcement and Military Service

God has authorised human governments to reward right and punish evil. Thus, those who serve in law enforcement perform worthy and honourable service for the sake of their neighbours.

We hold that every nation has a responsibility to protect itself against invasion and aggression. Therefore, those who serve in the armed forces make a worthy and honourable contribution to the well-being of the nation. At the same time, we regard aggression, as an instrument of local or national policy, as indefensible. The destruction of life and property necessary to warfare are contrary to the spirit and mind of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 2:4; 9:6-7; Matthew 5:44-45). It is our duty as Christians to promote peace and goodwill, to foster understanding and trust among all people, and to work for the renunciation of war as a means to settle disputes.



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