

The Christian Journey

Preamble

¶3000 Members of the Free Methodist Church accept the principles of the membership covenant for their maturing life in Christ. Together they commit to obey the teachings of Scripture. Moreover, they receive the church's wisdom as a guide for life. Under the guidance of Scripture and the church's wisdom, they welcome the Spirit's work to make them like Jesus.

The Goal of the Christian Journey

¶3010 The Scriptures affirm that God's purpose for humanity, from before creation, was that we should "be holy and blameless before him in love" (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Timothy 2:4). God's purpose was far from empty. For, from before creation, his purpose had reality in the person of the Son, Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 1:9). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are God's clear statement of the origin, purpose and goal that he has for humanity. For "he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Ephesians 1:9-10). The Christian journey is a part of this plan, which was set forth in Christ. The Christian journey is only possible because of God's eternal purpose, the redemption he made for us in Christ, and the living presence of his Spirit in our lives. Because of God's plan, the goal of the Christian journey is nothing less lofty than to attain "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). The goal of the Christian journey in this life is that we should grow into Christlike maturity. When we enter the life to come, our journey will be complete because we will be like God in an even fuller way than is possible now: "What we will be has not yet been 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). As Free Methodists we affirm with God's Word that the proper goal for our Christian life is this Christlike maturity, which the Bible describes as holiness and righteousness (Matthew 5:6; 1 Peter 1:16). We acknowledge that this is only possible because of the grace that he so richly provides. This chapter of the *Book of Discipline* describes significant features of the Free Methodist understanding of the Christian journey toward Christlikeness.

As Regards God ¶3100

In the Membership Covenant our first set of goals relates to the reverence and worship of God. These goals can only be realized by God's grace and power. "As God's people, we reverence and worship Him." (¶157)

¶3101 **Reverence and worship** is our response to God's saving acts. This section describes the Free Methodist standard of teaching on the biblical doctrine of salvation. These paragraphs are an elaboration of what is affirmed in the Articles of Religion – Salvation (see ¶114-120). They represent our understanding of the clear teaching of Scripture on the process by which God through the activity of his Spirit makes it possible for sinful humans to enter the Christian journey and to grow into Christ-like maturity. This "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.

¶3102 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. The Christian life can be consciously experienced because it is a relationship between persons – the personal God and humans made in His likeness. Every person is confronted by this personal God, but the outcome of this confrontation is affected by how each person responds. God deals with all persons as free and responsible. Therefore, He not only makes His grace available, waiting our free response, but He also reveals Himself and makes known His life to all who put their trust in Him. The redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ is experienced as an awareness of His love and fellowship. Those who are justified by faith experience the peace of God. When His Holy Spirit comes to the heart, there is joy. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence is the assurance of our relationship to God as His dear children.

¶3103 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.

¶3104 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).

¶3105 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).

¶3106 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).

¶3107 Consecration

God calls His people to set themselves apart to His will and purpose (Romans 6:13; 12:1). Anything thus set apart is said to be consecrated. All Christians are called to be holy and without blame before God in love (Ephesians 5:27). Christ demands that His disciples follow Him in mind and spirit (Romans 7:24-25). If Christians are to witness effectively in the world, they must be distinguished by righteousness, peace, joy, faith, hope and love (John 13:35; 14:15; Galatians 5:22-24). God wants a special kind of people for His work (Matthew 16:24; Romans 14:17; 8:6-9; John 17:17; Psalm 100:2).

When Christians sincerely follow Christ and listen to the Holy Spirit as He speaks in the Scriptures, they should sense this need of cleansing from inward sin. They should desire earnestly to be filled with the love of God and long for a relationship with Christ which will satisfy their deepest inward need and empower them to serve and obey the Lord (Ephesians 5:1-2:14; 1 Corinthians 13:13; 14:1; Acts 1:8). 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 preeminence. He must be the Lord of the Christian's life. Therefore, to open themselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, believers must give themselves without reservation to God. They freely yield all to the purposes of God and devote every desire and ambition to the service of Christ rather than to self (Colossians 3:8-13). Christians cannot be delivered from the dominion of sin if they permit self to reign in their lives. They cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

¶3108 Sanctification

Christ gave himself 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). Christ provided for believers to be entirely sanctified in the atonement (Hebrews 9:13-14; 10:8-10). Accordingly, Paul prayed "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Sanctification begins with regeneration. It continues throughout the believer's life, as the believer cooperates 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 fills with His unrivalled presence when the Christian's consecration is complete, cleansing the heart and empowering for witness and service (John 3:5; Romans 8:9; Galatians 3:3; Acts 1:8). He sheds God's love throughout the heart and life of the Christian (Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:12-13).

Accepting the promise of God by faith, believers enter into a deepened relationship with Christ (2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 2:20; Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7). They are enabled to love God with all their heart, soul, strength, and mind, and their neighbor as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40; Galatians 5:25-62). They know an inner surrender to all the will of God, and their lives are 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).

¶3110 “We commit ourselves to cultivate habits of Christian devotion, such as submitting to mutual accountability, practicing private and corporate prayer, studying the Scriptures, attending public worship and partaking of Holy Communion.” (¶157)

¶3111 Prayer

Prayer is an indispensable means of growth toward Christ-likeness. In prayer the Christian talks and listens, confesses and adores, asks and thanks. Prayer should be as conversation, avoiding artificial phrases and tones. Sincere prayer changes the supplicant and often the circumstances (James 5:16). 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).

¶3112 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 behavior.

¶3120 “We commit ourselves to observe the Lord’s Day, setting it apart for worship, renewal and service.” (¶157)

¶3121 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 labors 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.

¶3130 “We commit ourselves to give our loyalty to Christ and the church, refraining from any alliance which compromises our Christian commitment.” (¶157)

¶3131 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).

¶3132 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, as members of the Free Methodist Church we abstain from membership in secret societies. 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.

As Regard Ourselves and Others

¶3200 In the Membership Covenant our second set of goals relates to the care of ourselves and others. These goals can be realized only by God’s grace and power. “As a people, we live wholesome and holy lives and show mercy to all, ministering to both their physical and spiritual needs.” (¶158)

¶3210 “We commit ourselves to be free from activities and attitudes that defile the mind and harm the body, or promote the same.” (¶158)

¶3211 Self Discipline

One attribute of the Spirit’s indwelling presence is self control (Galatians 5:23). The Scriptures instruct us to honor 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. Since Christians are to be characterized by a disciplined style of life, we attempt to avoid selfish indulgence in the pleasures of this world. It is our wish to live simply in service to others, and to practice stewardship of health, time, and other God-given resources. We are committed to help every Christian attain such a disciplined life. Although unhealthy habits are not easily broken, believers need not live in such bondage. We find help through the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the counsel and support of other Christians.

¶3212 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 honor 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?

¶3213 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. Because various forms of narcotics cause untold damage to people and relationships and such drugs restrict personal development, damage the body and reinforce an unrealistic view of life, we avoid their use. Because Christ admonishes us to love God with all our being and our neighbor 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 neighbors. 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. Because we believe Christians are to treat their bodies as sacred trusts, we advocate abstaining from the use of tobacco. It is a major cause of a variety of cancers and other diseases, as well as being an expensive and socially-offensive addiction. 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 honor God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Because drug dependency of any kind inhibits fullness of life in Christ, we guard against the indiscriminate use of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.

Though the therapeutic value of such substances may be great, their potency, proliferation and easy accessibility require that as Christians we be vigilant against their misuse. We believe that 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 endeavor by God’s help to be understanding and supportive toward those who come to Christ with problems of addiction. We believe in Christ’s power to deliver (Romans 6:13; Galatians 6:2). But we acknowledge the difficulties of overcoming the bondage of addictions, and desire to give whatever help and support are needed while fellow Christians seek full deliverance. As a further evidence of an awakened conscience, we advocate refraining from the cultivation, manufacture or promotion of these substances which are harmful to health.

¶3214 **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.

¶3215 **Sexual Intimacy**

Sexual intimacy is a gift from God for marital union. 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 fulfillment. 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). Post-marital intimacy which occurs after divorce or the loss of a spouse debases the biblical design of sexual intimacy (1 Corinthians 7:8-9). 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, counseling 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 persons as they learn to live a Christian life that is wholesome and pure. We oppose cultural mores and laws that legitimize adultery, pre-marital, post-marital and homosexual intimacy.

¶3220 **“We commit ourselves to respect the worth of all persons as created in the image of God.”**

¶3221 **Worth of Persons**

We are committed to the worth of all humans regardless of gender, race, color, 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 neighbor (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.

Issues surrounding immigrants and refugees in the United States are complex. They require solutions that halt criminal activity, provide for legal documentation, and serve the needs of all persons, loved and created by God, who have come to the United States under a variety of circumstances. As we minister to all immigrants and refugees, we do so with basic underlying convictions.

- A. We commit to the Biblical principle of caring for the foreigners among us regardless of racial or ethnic background, country of origin, or legal status.
- B. We commit to acting redemptively with love rather than fear, and to reach out to meet needs as we see them.
- C. We commit to identifying intolerance and working to end it, as well as ending any personal inclinations to refer to individuals in less than loving terms.
- D. Where there is conflict, it is our duty to oppose all unjust and harsh laws and seek to change them.
- E. We commit to responding to the crisis in terms of the Great Commission, seeking to reach the lost whoever they may be; ministering to all, caring for all, and showing God's grace to all people.

¶3222 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. As we attend to human suffering, we acknowledge that the ability of medical technology to end human suffering is finite. Therefore, we accept our responsibility to use this technology with wisdom and compassion; honoring God, who is ultimately supreme. 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. Therefore, Christians may not determine their rights and privileges only by the extent of the permissiveness of the law of the state or the possibilities of safe medical procedures. 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. A Christian theology of family (§3440) must also inform these decisions.

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. Induced abortion is the intentional destruction of a person after conception and before delivery by surgical or other means. Therefore, induced abortion is morally unjustifiable except when the act has been decided upon by responsible and competent persons, including Christian professional counsel, for the purpose of saving the life of a 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. The decision to terminate a pregnancy involves religious and moral values, as well as medical and legal realities. Christian morality demands that we consider both the biblical commandment and the human situation in which the law must be applied. As Christians, we believe that human life, whether in vitro, mature or senile, is sacred because life exists in relation to God. Compassionate alternatives and long-term care should be offered to women considering abortion. We counsel physicians and parents to understand that the moral commandment and the law of love are transgressed when human life is destroyed for selfish or malicious ends.

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.

D. Other Ethical Dilemmas

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

¶3230 “We commit ourselves to strive to be just and honest in all our relationships and dealings.”

¶3231 Life in the Workplace

As Christians we are called to be servants of all. This norm is equally applicable to employer and employee (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-41). Our concern for justice is primarily a concern to be just and only secondarily a concern to obtain justice. We believe that all persons have the privilege to be gainfully employed irrespective of gender, race, color, national origin, or creed (Romans 10:12). We recognize the privilege of employees to organize for their betterment. Oath-bound secret pacts or acts of violence designed to violate or defend their rights cannot be condoned. We also recognize the right of employees to remain independent of such organizations. As Christians we do not view management and labor as necessarily hostile to each other. They need not bring distrust and hostility to their place of work or the negotiating table. We resist the exploiting of people or seeing them merely as economic units. We discourage rigid confrontation and favor a problem-solving approach to disagreements. We endeavor to make our witness effective where we work, remembering that as Christian employees we are responsible first to God and then to our employer and the organization. As Christian employers we have a responsibility to deal fairly and kindly with our employees, preserving the witness of Christian character in both word and deed (Matthew 7:12; Colossians 3:17).

As Regards the Institutions of God

¶3300 In the Membership Covenant our third set of goals relates to honoring and supporting the institutions of God. These goals can be realized only by God’s grace and power. “As a people, we honor and support the God-ordained institutions of family, state and church.” (¶159)

¶3310 “We commit ourselves to honor the sanctity of marriage and the family.”

Par. ¶3311 The Christian and Marriage

A. Principles Regarding Marriage Nature of 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.” 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 and following marriage. Likewise, it condemns all unnatural sexual behavior such as incestuous abuse, child molestation, homosexual activity and prostitution (1 Corinthians 6:9; Romans 12:6-27). 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). Therefore, it would be a breach of the doctrine of our church for ministers or members of the Free Methodist Church to conduct the marriage or blessing of a union between a same-sex or same gender couple. In light of our beliefs, ministers and members of the Free Methodist Church shall not perform marriages or unions of same-sex or same-gender couples. We hold that our congregations are stewards of the 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. Further, we believe that marriage 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.

B. 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. Young couples contemplating marriage should seek parental consent.

C. Healing Troubled Marriages

Human sin and rebellion against God always threaten marriages. Sin in the garden brought a change to the way marriage partners relate to each other, with profound consequences for a couple's experience of God's plan for marital oneness (Genesis 3:16b). Early in the biblical story the practice of polygamy and spousal abuse became common. Sadly, a constant feature of the story has been a hardening of heart that may lead to broken vows, marriages, and homes.

The prophets describe God's relationship with Israel against the backdrop of common marital brokenness. God pursues his faithful people as a husband who refuses to abandon his adulterous wife. Indeed, the steadfast love of Israel's God claims and wins at last a remnant of his rebellious people (Hosea 1-3; Ezekiel 16). In the fullness of time, Jesus the Messiah brings to full expression this steadfast love of the Lord. That love made in Jesus and his followers becomes the prototype of marital love in the teachings of Apostle Paul (Ephesians 5:22-23).

Therefore, the Church and the body and Bride of Christ has spiritual resources for marriages in trouble. Through the renewing power of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Scripture, the Sacraments, and the mutual support of God's people, God brings healing, reconciliation, and oneness to willing marriage partners. We encourage our members to avail themselves of these rich and powerful resources whenever a marriage relationship is strained. In some cases, pastoral and professional Christ-centered counsel should be sought.

As in the biblical story, domestic violence, emotional assault, and physical abuse sometimes occur in the homes of our people. Such sin jeopardizes safety 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.

The Church recognizes all abusive behavior as sin and destructive to the home and its members. Often in these cases separation is necessary to halt abuse and allow space for the healing of persons and their relationships. Even when the marriage and home has experienced the most grievous violation, however, we insist that God's grace can bring healing. Therefore, we counsel our members to seek the fullest measure of healing and reconciliation possible in every situation.

D. Divorce

Although God intends and wills that marriage vows be honored 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 the reason, constitute rebellion against God's plan for their lives and result in personal brokenness. After a divorce both partners need the healing that comes only from repentance and renewed faith on God. 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 behavior 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 these 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 behavior 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.

E. Care after Divorce, Singleness and Remarriage.

When a marriage fails, the church seeks to restore people from the trauma of their divorce by inviting its members into a process of restoration (see paragraphs 7110-7130). Godly counsel will help people understand what happened in their marriage; specifically, where they 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-centered patterns. The damage to children, the larger families, and their witness to Christ will also be acknowledged and where possible restitution will be made.

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. When grace restores the brother or sister who has failed, the plan God has for human well-being reopens, even the possibility of remarriage.

F. Refusal of Counsel

When a member divorces a spouse or remarries without seeking the counsel or following the guidance of the pastor or the membership care committee, the committee shall review the case and recommend appropriate action to the local board of administration. Corrective action shall include removal from leadership, and may include suspension, or expulsion from membership. Exceptional cases may arise for which the pastor or the membership care committee can find no explicit direction in this *Book of Discipline*. In such cases, the pastor, after consultation with the membership care committee, shall confer with a superintendent.

¶3320 “We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ.” (¶159)

¶3321 Nurture and Education of Children

The Free Methodist Church views the education of its children as a parental responsibility (Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Ephesians 6:4). Part of that responsibility may be delegated but not relinquished to either public or Christian institutions of education. The Free Methodist Church expects to be interactively involved with parents in teaching and nurturing all children in the foundations of the Christian faith. It is the purpose of the family, both the human and family of God, to provide a setting in which adults and children can grow together in their love of God and love for each other (Deuteronomy 11:18-19; Joel 1:3). Due to the value Jesus demonstrated toward children (Matthew 19:14), our churches make ministry to children and youth a priority. Ministries focus not only on leading young persons to faith in Jesus Christ but also on enfolded them into church membership and ministry. The church wishes to support public schools and recognizes the challenge to Christian teachers, parents and students to be as lights in the world. When parents choose to use Christian schools or home schooling, we also support them in their decision.

Note on denominational practice: We request that our children be excused from assignments and activities which conflict with the values held by the parents and/or the denomination. When conflicts arise, we request of the school that the student's academic standing not be jeopardized, and when necessary, other assignments be given. The church is concerned that concepts of first origins shall have completely fair consideration in our public schools. Instructional materials are available that permit a scientific treatment of the several concepts of origin, including special creation (that all basic life forms and life processes were created by a supernatural Creator). We therefore urge that the concept of special creation be presented in, or along with, courses, textbooks, library materials and teaching aids dealing with the subject of first origins.

¶3330 “We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and we pray for all who lead.” (¶159)

¶3331 The Christian and the State

As Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God and of this world. We receive benefits from and bear responsibilities to both relationships. Our first allegiance is to God, but that does not release us from responsibilities to our own country if such relationships do not conflict with the clear teachings of the Scriptures (Romans 13:1-7).

We recognize the sovereign authority of government and our duty to obey the law (Matthew 22:21; Romans 13:1-7). Thus, we bear the responsibilities of good citizenship.

A. Civic Participation

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

B. War and Military Enlistment God has established the state to reward right and punish evil (1 Peter 2:14). Those who serve the state in this way are God's servants and worthy of honor (Romans 13:1-7). We regard military aggression, as an instrument of national policy, as indefensible. The destruction of life and the violence 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. It is our firm conviction that the consciences of our members be respected (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29). Therefore, we claim exemption from all military service for those who register officially with the church as conscientious objectors to war.

C. Swearing Oaths as Free Methodists we do not prohibit the taking of an oath when it is required by law. In every case, the Christian must speak in justice and truth (Jeremiah 4:1-2; Ephesians 4:25).

As Regards the Church

¶3400 In the Membership Covenant our fourth set of goals relates to life together as a church. These goals can be realized only by God's grace and power. "As God's people, we express the life of Christ in the world." (¶160)

¶3401 The Christian and the Church

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

Consistent with the Scriptures, we affirm membership in the church as a biblical reality noted from the earliest days after Pentecost (Acts 2:47). When the Holy Spirit gives new life in Christ, He effects our spiritual entrance into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Free Methodist Church is one denomination among the many other legitimate visible churches in the world. Membership is a visible and local sign of entrance into the universal church.

¶3402 Leadership in the Church

Leadership in the church is an honor that has accompanying responsibilities and sacrifices. The Scriptures describe the qualities of leaders in such passages as: Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. Those who are chosen to lead in the church do so in a spirit of humility and dependence upon God. They must be spiritually mature individuals whose lifestyle shall be in harmony with the Scriptures, the doctrine of the Free Methodist Church (¶100-131), the principles of the Membership Covenant (¶154-160), which are the goals of our maturing life in Christ, and of the selection of leaders (¶6200.E).

¶3410 “We commit ourselves to contribute to unity in the church, cultivating integrity, love and understanding in all our relationships.” (¶160)

¶3411 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.

¶3412 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 Savior of the world.

¶3413 Spiritual Gifts and Ministry

Growth comes with the acceptance of full responsibility for the use of natural talents and spiritual gifts in service and ministry. The Holy Spirit endows every believer with natural abilities for service and ministry. These are a trust to be used in ways that glorify God. To use God-given abilities well is to nurture personal growth. The Holy Spirit also distributes, as he wills, spiritual gifts of speech and service for the common good and the building of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7-11; 1 Peter 4:10-11). Spiritual gifts are to be exercised under the lordship of Christ with His love and compassion, and are not to be the cause of division in the church. Therefore, everything is to be motivated first and foremost by love. Everything is also to be done decently and in order. The language of worship is to be the language of the people. All communication in worship is to be intelligible (1 Corinthians 14). The believer seeks not the gifts themselves, but the character and power of the Holy Spirit as the evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness.

¶3414 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, counseling, 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 centers 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.

¶3420 “We commit ourselves to practice the principles of Christian stewardship, for the glory of God and the growth of the church.” (¶160)

¶3421 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 honor 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.

¶3430 “We commit ourselves to go into our world and make disciples.” (¶160)

Jesus said, “Make disciples of all nations, baptizing ... and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded” (Matthew 28:19-20). Disciple-making consists in more than the transfer of knowledge. It aims at holy living. Disciples have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), seek first the priorities of His kingdom (Matthew 6:33), and fulfill His mission in the world.