

# History and Polity

of the Free Methodist Church



*Free Methodist Church*  
**AFRICA**

**Ordination Series**

*Take care of yourselves  
and of all the flock over which the Holy Spirit  
has placed you as bishops to shepherd the church of God,  
which he purchased with his own blood.*

Acts 20:28 NIV



*Free Methodist Church*  
**AFRICA**

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# Foreword

The Free Methodist Church participates with God's redemptive purposes in Africa by developing healthy leaders, multiplying committed disciples, nurturing effective partnerships, and equipping churches to transform their communities. Developing healthy leaders implies the training of conference candidates, pastors, and lay leaders with a view to the ordination of those God calls into the oversight of His church. Healthy leadership development fueling an exponential movement of church planting and evangelistic growth across the African continent remains the prayerful hope of the Free Methodist Church.

To that end, this manual is designed as an overview of key elements that express the identity, theology, and organizational culture of the Free Methodist Church with the hope that those who have belonged for a long time will refresh their memory of the foundations and principles of the church, and that those recently joining will find in the history of the church important guidelines, concepts, and perspectives for a clear theological identity and focused local ministry.

The design of the course requires students to read the material first, before coming to class. The reading will be used as a foundation for in-class discussions and activities that help the student understand the materials more deeply. This should facilitate an understanding of the materials and achieve the established goals. In this way of learning, the students receive the materials, read the assigned content for the class period, and then perform the proposed exercises before attending a class meeting. Class time then becomes useful to socialize the materials, deepen the understanding of essential elements of the lesson, review the exercises, and resolve any questions that have arisen.

Preferably this subject should be taught in a group and under the supervision of a facilitator duly endorsed by the Ministerial Education and Guidance board of the conference/mission district of the Free Methodist Church; for an exception due to special conditions, the potential student concerned should contact their district or conference. This material is intended for all those who serve in leadership within the Free Methodist Church and is required for those in the process of ordination.

This course is designed so that each lesson is taught in a minimum of three class hours. There are six lessons in the course. Therefore, it is ideal to follow one of the following modalities to complete the study:

**Extended Plan:** twelve class meetings, once a week for three months for at least one hour and a half each. Each meeting covers one half a lesson.

**Regular Plan:** six class meetings, once a week for a minimum of three hours each. Each meeting should cover one lesson. Before each class, the student must complete all the activities indicated for the lesson. It may be useful to plan eight weeks to teach the full class to provide a week for introduction and planning, and one week at the end for presentations and discussion of final projects.

**Intensive Plan:** a class of approximately eighteen hours during a condensed time frame of two-to-six days. The student must be very disciplined; so that, during each of the six weeks before the meeting, the student reads the entire content of the manual and completes any assigned homework and reading reports (if applicable). In the class meeting, the facilitator will review the activities of each lesson and indicate when and how to submit the final work.



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# Syllabus

**Course Title:** History and Polity of the Free Methodist Church (FMC).

**Course Description:** This foundational course serves to acquaint students with the basic elements of the history and organization of the Free Methodist Church.

**General objectives:** At the end of the module the student will be able to:

- Trace the historical origin and biblical foundation of Free Methodist distinctives.
- Use information in the Book of Discipline to answer questions about Free Methodist organization and doctrine.
- Assess personal agreement with the core of Free Methodist history and doctrine, raising any questions or concerns with a mentor.
- Develop the ability to teach a membership class.

## Assessment Activities

1. The student will perform the exercises at the end of each lesson in a notebook or document available to edit each week. This may be done orally if the student has trouble with written assignments.
2. The student will discuss an article on women in ministry or infant baptism, explaining how it uses the Bible, tradition, reason, and experience as materials for theological reflection.  
Appropriate modifications:
  - a. This could be a written assignment.
  - b. The teacher could interview the student.
  - c. The student could have a conversation with a mentoring pastor in her/his local context. The mentoring pastor would need to assess the student's performance. (This implies that the mentoring pastor understands the quadrilateral and has qualifications to make appropriate judgments.)
3. The student will make a scheme, graph or organization chart in which he/she presents the structure of the Free Methodist Church from the perspective of the local church to which the student belongs. Include local, district, regional, and General Conference levels.  
Appropriate modifications:
  - a. This could be done as a group project.
  - b. This could be as an in-class presentation.
  - c. This could be done in a local context with approval of a mentoring pastor.
  - d. This could be expressed using symbols/props instead of written labels.

4. The student will use the membership class outline in Appendix 4 to teach a membership course in their local church or church plant. This should be prepared in such a way that it captures the interest of your audience and effectively conveys the essential doctrines and practices of the Free Methodist Church. Work with a local mentor to create and present a membership class in a local context including key elements of history and organization of the Free Methodist Church. The mentoring pastor should be present to assist (only if necessary) and to evaluate student performance. The pastor should discuss student performance with the course facilitator to assign a grade.
5. The student will use the following conversation guide to talk with a mentor about key doctrines and practices of the Free Methodist Church.
  - a. History:
    - Give a brief explanation of social justice as a Free Methodist value.
    - Which of the original freedoms of the FMC caught your attention? Why?
    - Explain the beginning of the Free Methodist Church.
  - b. Polity:
    - How do you feel about itinerancy and the way appointments are made?
    - What will be hard about submitting to the leadership of the church? What is the value of making decisions as a community?
    - How can a leader maintain authority while allowing multiple voices and ideas to be expressed?
  - c. FM Hermeneutics and key issues:
    - What is your understanding of secret societies in Africa and the Free Methodist response?
    - Should women be allowed in all areas of church leadership?
    - What is an appropriate response when Christian parents ask you to baptize their infant?

Recommended resources for this course can be found on page 90 of this material.

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# Lesson One

## The Heritage of the Free Methodist Church



### Purpose of the Lesson

Give an overview of the heritage of the Free Methodist Church, highlighting the most relevant historical events that have shaped the culture, practices and beliefs of the FMC.

### Lesson Results

Upon completion of this lesson the student should be able to identify & describe four critical periods that helped shape Free Methodist heritage.

### Content

Introduction

Free Methodist Heritage

Identity Patterns in Methodist Behavior

Conclusion

Reflection Questions

## Introduction

Why are there so many genealogies in the Bible? The answer is simple: because genealogies gave Israel identity as a nation and legitimized them as children of Abraham, as the people of God. That is why it was very important for the ancient Hebrews to know the names and history of their ancestors.

The New Testament introduces Christians to genealogy in the very first chapter of Matthew's Gospel, where the author locates Jesus within the history of the people of Israel. The Gospel of Luke presents Jesus as the son of Adam, as well as Abraham and David, and thus introduces him from the outset as the Savior of humankind announced from the Old Testament. Matthew also recalls that four of Jesus' female ancestors had some kind of marital irregularity and were not even of

Jewish origin. There was a Canaanite (Tamar), a Moabite (Ruth), a Hittite (Bathsheba), and even a prostitute (Rahab) who converted to the faith. But each one contributed to the emergence of Israel's Messiah. Since the Messiah has this inheritance and possesses this identity, he can be the Savior of sinners of every gender, background, ethnic group, and nation. In the same way, Free Methodists must know where they come from, that is, their heritage, and who has contributed to the development of the Free Methodist identity. Free Methodists did not arrive here alone.

This lesson aims to show where the FM Church comes from and who has influenced and shaped its heritage and identity. As an introductory course, new ideas and key people may appear briefly, to be developed further in later courses such as Wesleyan Theology and Church History. As each individual's faith journey joins the Free Methodist Way, this course will show how its history and heritage form its current principles and practices.

## Free Methodist Heritage

The Free Methodist Church has been shaped by women and men who sought to build a healthy church in response to their understanding of God and Scripture. Recognizing the value of a faith heritage and stewarding the story: knowing, preserving, and transmitting it, helps the Church to avoid making the same mistakes, and allows her to carry the previous good work forward. There is no perfect church, but through more than 160 years as a denomination Free Methodists have learned, matured, and developed thoughtful responses to difficult questions. Many who have gone before have shaped Free Methodism and its doctrinal formulation. As the popular saying goes, "Those who do not know their history are doomed to repeat it." All Free Methodists are charged to steward well the legacy of those who've gone before by learning the lessons of their history.

## The Early Church and the First Councils



While the focus of this manual is the story of the Free Methodist Church, it is impossible to understand the denomination's development without placing it within the context of orthodox Christianity from the beginning. The historical roots of the FMC begin with the people of God in the Old and New Testaments. The Book of Acts records the beginning of the early church, along with the influences and contributions of many renewal movements in Christianity (*Book of Discipline*, 2019, 2). Churches, being both human and divine organizations, at times may stray, get bogged down, and even hold onto what is unbiblical. The reality of the church has always been one of continuous tension because it is made up of imperfect human beings. The book of Acts and Paul's letters demonstrate different tensions suffered by the early church. For example, there were Judeo-Christian groups that insisted that Gentile converts to Christianity must be circumcised, keep the Sabbath days, and comply with dietary laws (Galatians 2:3, 2:12-14, 4:10). These positions divided the Christians (Galatians 2:6, 3:26-28). So, Paul and the apostles met at the Jerusalem Council to solve this need. The Council of Jerusalem determined that Gentile Christians should not be put under a yoke, since even the Jews had not been able to bear it (Acts 15:10, 19, 24, 28). Rather, they advised that Gentile converts should abstain from things sacrificed to idols, from blood, from strangled animals, and from fornication (Acts 15:29).

Similarly, the church responded strongly to the heresies that arose in the first five centuries, expelling the heretics. In the course of these Councils, they summoned all of the representatives of the whole church to various Councils and confirmed these essential things: The books which were written by the truly inspired apostles, on which they based their Christian beliefs (this was necessary as some heretics did not accept certain books of the Bible as authoritative).

*The doctrine of the Holy Trinity.*

*The doctrine of the nature of Christ.*

The early church Fathers studied, researched, discussed, and wrote on all these subjects and, by mutual agreement, the Church formulated the Creeds. The Free Methodist Church follows the doctrinal tradition handed down by these ecumenical councils and accepts and believes the truths expressed in the Apostles' Creed the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. These foundational beliefs must not be forgotten or confused. In short, our forefathers and mothers in the faith guided us to understand the truth of the Holy Trinity and the nature of Christ, and in turn, they were guided by the Holy Spirit to recognize and preserve the books we have today in the New Testament. This is the foundation of Free Methodist heritage and identity.

## **The Medieval Church (4th – 15th Centuries)**

During the early part of the fourth through fifteenth centuries, the church was truly “catholic,” meaning that it was united and “universal” in its governing structure. The tensions that arose in the ninth and tenth centuries, and also other tensions in eleventh through fifteenth were related to heresies, innovations in governance and disagreements

## **The Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.

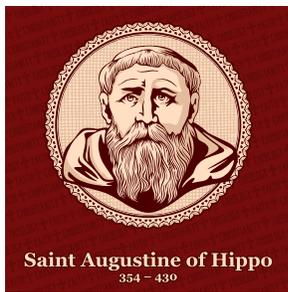
I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son,  
our Lord;  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,  
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, dead and buried;  
He descended into Hades;  
The third day He arose from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven and sits at the  
right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
From thence He shall come again  
to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
The holy catholic church,  
The communion of the saints,  
The forgiveness of sins,  
The resurrection of the body,  
And life everlasting.



over the way the church was administered. Without breaking ties with the church, some monks withdrew into the desert to escape pleasures and sins. Others simply complained that the church had become corrupted and, forming monasteries, did what they could to carry out the ministry of the church from their monastery.

Early in this period, Augustine of Hippo lived (354-430 A.D.), who, after finishing his theology studies, dedicated his life to the ministry.



Augustine prayed: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty, and in all things, charity." This phrase from Augustine highlights that churches can cooperate together

in the essentials of faith. In the beliefs that are essential to the faith, it is important to give freedom to different opinions and show charity (i.e., love) towards every expression of the church. No one church or denomination stands alone. Christianity is a universal family with multiple opinions and expressions. This diversity sometimes leads to misunderstandings between adherents to different church traditions. Ultimately these can bring about the negative consequence of potential rejection of fellowship between believers when they hold different doctrines.

Free Methodists are part of this "church universal," and therefore seek a brotherly relationship with all Christians; not a divisive spirit. In all Christian denominations, there are people with a living faith. The Free Methodist Church is not the only true church, but rather part of the Church universal. Denominations can work together to empower new churches in God's mission and participate in His kingdom work in Africa and around the world.

## An Open Heart Toward other Christian Groups

One of the hallmarks of the Wesleyan tradition that Free Methodism seeks to perpetuate is a spirit of cooperation and affection with other Christian groups.

Free Methodists can certainly find other groups that share values and even practices. Free Methodists also find other Christian groups who hold to differing values, doctrines, and practices. It is often easier to establish rigid boundaries than it is to create or foster an openness to these other groups.

Differences of opinion, values, and practice will always create distance. Sometimes it will even create division and criticism. While a debate about theology and doctrine can be healthy and can strengthen understanding, it can also create opposition and strife.

Free Methodist heritage honors discussion between groups without the intrusion of animosity. Free Methodists should seek to understand without compromising values and practices that enrich the lives of believers in Jesus Christ.

In his sermon entitled "Catholic Spirit" John Wesley addressed the need to maintain an open heart between Christian groups, as much as it is possible. He wrote, "But although a difference in opinions or modes of worship may prevent an entire external union, yet need it prevent our union in affection? Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may." *John Wesley Sermon 39 Paragraph 4*



## The Pale of Orthodoxy

“There are some essential doctrines that are necessary for correct belief unto salvation. But within these essential doctrines, there is scope for a range of Biblically possible opinions. We might call this range- being within the pale of orthodoxy.” ([andrewcorbett.blogspot.com](http://andrewcorbett.blogspot.com))

For example, that God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell with His Church on earth is an essential and unequivocal doctrine to believe and experience for salvation. However, there is a range of beliefs about what this means, how the Spirit works, how the church should behave concerning the Spirit’s indwelling, etc. This “range” of beliefs is often the basis for division within the body of Christ and has become the basis for the beginning of new denominations. But should this happen?

Think of the “pale of orthodoxy” as a fence that separates what Christians believe is right and true from what they believe is wrong or false. This fence is not made of wood or metal, but of ideas and beliefs

that have been agreed upon by Christians over many centuries. To be “beyond the pale of orthodoxy” describes a person with beliefs that lie outside the boundaries of what is considered true Christian belief. For example, to wholly reject the divinity of the Holy Spirit, as Jehovah’s Witnesses do, lies outside the fence, or “beyond the pale of orthodoxy.” Thus, Jehovah’s Witnesses would be considered a non-Christian religion.

The creeds, like the Nicene Creed or the Apostles’ Creed, are often considered main posts in this fence. They are statements of faith that summarize the most important beliefs of Christianity. These creeds were established by early and medieval church leaders who wanted to make sure that everyone understood and agreed on the core teachings of the faith.

In short, the pale of orthodoxy is like a boundary that helps Christians know what beliefs are considered true and faithful to their religion, and the creeds are like the strong posts that help hold up that boundary.

## The Protestant Reformation (The Sixteenth Century)

In the same way that in the first centuries there were people committed to keeping the church healthy, and subject to God and the Bible, in the 16th century, the reformers fought to correct abuses and doctrinal errors in the church. The Protestant Reformation gave rise to several departures from the Catholic Church, from these the Protestant churches were born.

Although there were many reform-minded leaders before Luther, the pre-reformers ended up with a frustrated dream. Like them, Luther observed the corruption of church leaders, who to earn money sold holy relics related to Jesus and the saints under the promise that they had miraculous effects. They sold “splinters from the cross,” supposed handkerchiefs with the blood of Christ, remains of the martyrs, etc. In addition, they popularized the sale of indulgences for the forgiveness of sins and promoted the cult of relics.

This was a time of opulence and lack of holiness, and many within the Catholic Church taught that salvation was through works. All this led Luther to practice good works and to purchase indulgences. Still, he could not feel clean of sin until he discovered in Scripture a reminder that Paul makes to the church in Rome: “The righteous will live by faith.” (Romans 1:17).

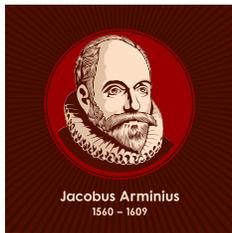


The great doctrinal disagreements had reached such a point of discontent that on October 31, 1517, Luther posted 95 theses on the church door in Wittenberg and invited the religious leaders to dialogue. The most predominant themes in Luther's theses had to do with the authority that the pope adjudicated himself, the access of all Christians to the Scriptures, the sale of indulgences, and the role of the work of Christ for salvation. The great contribution of the Reformation was:

- **We are saved by grace alone.** God justified sinners through Christ's sacrifice on the cross (Ephesians 2:8). Human beings have no merit before God, but through the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ. God has offered His salvation to every human being. However, salvation needs to be accepted. The sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice for salvation is one of the most important teachings of the gospel.
- **We are saved by faith alone.** Salvation is only obtained by believing and resting in the sacrifice of Christ, not by works. Luther's theology was based on his understanding of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Romans. From there, Luther argued that God does not justify anyone by works and that faith in Jesus is the only requirement for salvation.
- **The priesthood is exercised by all believers.** All believers can stand before God in personal communion through Christ, directly receiving forgiveness without having to resort to human intermediaries (all Protestant movements did not unanimously accept this point). In this way, religious leaders began to be prevented from falling into the corruption of indulgences.
- **Scripture is the primary authority and sole basis for Christian faith and practice.** Luther put the authority of the Bible above the authority of the pope and claimed that he would not recant what he believed unless persuaded by Scripture itself. As a result, 16th-century Protestants stopped believing in the pope's authority over the Bible. The context that necessitated this position was a doctrine known as papal infallibility, which insisted that the thoughts that the Pope had about the Bible were true and that they should not be doubted because they were on an equal or higher level than Scripture. For this reason, there were practices and beliefs contrary to the Bible, such as penances, the payment for masses, the sale of indulgences, and others. Luther showed that from the beginning of the church, believers persevered in the apostles' doctrine, that is, in Scripture, and that this was the practical guide for living the faith. Therefore, the Bible needed to be translated into the language that the believers spoke.

Thanks to the Reformation every believer can enjoy Scripture! Believers can read and corroborate the doctrine of salvation by grace, exclusively through faith, and can guard the church from unhealthy doctrinal winds. Methodism embraces the essential theology of the Reformation

that manifests itself in its dedication to the Bible as the supreme rule of faith. Historically, the Methodist Church traces its roots through the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, and many Protestant beliefs come from this historical era when there was only one expression of the Christian faith. These common beliefs can be celebrated within the Church in Africa. Thus, through these contact points, believers can approach non-believers, earn trust and the right to be heard, thus leading many on the journey from a traditional, nominal faith to a personal relationship with Christ, where the Holy Spirit convicts and purifies their faith of long-held, but mistaken beliefs.



## The Protestant Reformation and Arminius

In the attempts of recovery that began to take place at the time of the Reformation, the theologian John Calvin appeared on the scene, applying his mind, and brought a significant influence upon theology. Calvin tried to prepare and instruct people so that they could easily read the Holy Scripture, understand it correctly, and live a life of faith and virtue.

After Calvin formulated his theology and systematized it, we find Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). He followed Calvin's teaching until Arminius was asked to defend Calvin's doctrines of double predestination and limited atonement. Arminius realized these doctrines present God as a tyrant and

## Double Predestination

Double predestination is a belief held by some Christians that God decides who will go to heaven and who will go to hell before they are even born. According to this idea, God chooses some people to be saved and others to be punished for their sins. It's like God has a list of everyone's names, and He's already checked off who will get into heaven and who won't.

This concept comes from a bigger idea called predestination, which means that God has a plan for everything that happens in the world, including people's lives and their final destinations. Double predestination takes this idea one step further by saying that God's plan includes specifically choosing some people for salvation and others for damnation.

Some people believe in double predestination because they think it shows how powerful and in control God is. They believe that God's decisions are always right and just, even if humans don't always understand them. Others, like Free Methodists, disagree with this idea because they think it makes God seem unfair or unloving. They also believe that the doctrine of double predestination undermines a biblical (and Wesleyan) understanding of how God's grace works to aid human free will. Double predestination stands in contrast to the New Testament emphasis on evangelism and personal holiness. They reason that if a person's eternal destiny is already determined, Christians have no reason to tell others about Jesus, or live lives that are pleasing to God.

Overall, double predestination is a complex and controversial belief that has been debated by Christians for centuries. It raises questions about free will, justice, and the nature of God.

executioner instead of a loving Father. This disturbed Arminius because it seemed to him that Calvin denied the justice of God by saying that only some were chosen for salvation. He was also disturbed by the idea that the elect could not fall from grace, that is, that they could not be lost. Arminius reflected and formulated his response against the Calvinists. For Arminius, Christ *did* die for all human beings and gave them the ability to voluntarily choose whether they wanted to be saved (John 3:16 cf. Acts 2:38). Those who receive salvation, if they do not persevere in faith, can be lost (John 15:6; see the concept of salvation in lesson 3). John Wesley was influenced by the theology of Arminius, who taught that Christ's salvation is for all humanity without any limitation, however, it must be freely chosen. God saves those individuals who respond to the call of salvation.

Therefore, Free Methodists share the gospel broadly and seek to reach all human beings for whom Christ died because God wants everyone to be saved and no one to perish (2 Peter 3:9). Radical grace calls for radical people who radically invest their lives and resources for Christ and His cause.

## **The Radical Reformation and the Rediscovery of the Priesthood of Believers**

The Anabaptist Movement arose, at least partly, as a response to the historical situation that followed the Reformation. These reformers identified neither with the Catholic Church nor with the Protestants. The Anabaptists are the most distinguished representatives of this season of Church reform. Early in his ministry John Wesley was influenced by the Moravians, who were a branch of the Anabaptist movement.

The Anabaptists, a Christian movement that emerged in the 16th century, preached a strong belief in the priesthood of all believers. This concept means that every Christian has direct access to God and can interpret the Bible for themselves. They don't need a priest or any other religious leader to mediate their relationship with God.



The radical faith of the Anabaptists presents the Bible as the supreme authority and presents the church as the group of Christians regenerated by their encounter with Christ. They thought that without a personal encounter with Christ, an exemplary Christian life of discipleship could not be modeled, because it is through Christ that people can possess a deep love for God and human beings. For them, this is the basis of any relationship, and it generates an absolute freedom of conscience, which leads to a radical separation from sin.

Anabaptists believed that all members of the Christian community are equal in the eyes of God and that each person has the responsibility to live out their faith in their daily lives. They emphasized the importance of a personal, inner relationship with God and the ability of every believer to hear and follow God's guidance.

This belief in the priesthood of all believers led the Anabaptists to reject the hierarchical structure of the traditional church, where priests and bishops held special authority. Instead, they practiced a more democratic form of church governance, where decisions were made collectively, and leadership roles were open to anyone who felt called and equipped by God.

Overall, the Anabaptists' preaching on the priesthood of all believers emphasized the direct, personal connection between the individual believer and God, and the equality and active participation of all members in the life of the church.

John Wesley was deeply committed to the idea that the Holy Spirit was at work in the life of every believer. He believed that every believer had full access to power and guidance of the Holy Spirit without clergy mediation.

## **The Renewal Movements of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

Pietism, founded by Philipp Jacob Spener (1635-1705), also contributes to the theological heritage of the Free Methodist Church. This movement arose in response to the rigidity of the German church, which had lost its charismatic aspect of faith. (That is, faith evidenced in the use of spiritual gifts at the service of the church.) Pietists sought to "rediscover the personal implications of the depths of the Christian faith" (González, 2002, 306). Spener, on a trip to Switzerland, was struck by the vitality of faith he saw in a movement that emphasized the living faith that was produced by the continuous search for a personal relationship with God, where every day the fire of God had to be fanned. Upon returning to Germany, Spener tried to apply this new way of conceiving the faith with the church he pastored by holding devotional meetings in his home. From these experiences, he wrote his most famous book, *Pia Desiderata*. This book addresses Spener's six "holy desires":

1. That all believers might want to know more about Scripture and want to deepen their understanding of God's Word through small group meetings in homes.
2. That the laity rediscover their importance in God's work in the world and the priesthood of all believers might become a reality.
3. That Christianity be more than doctrinal formulas and become something that permeates the believer's entire life experience.
4. That all controversies that arise due to matters of faith be negotiated with a spirit of charity.
5. That pastoral education cease to be a teaching of mere logic and traditional practices and that it deepens rather in learning to be shepherds of the flock.
6. That the product of the above preaching fulfill the objective of instructing, inspiring, and nourishing believers (González, 2002, 305-308).

Spener said that “the Great Commission had been given by Christ to all Christians, and therefore all were responsible for the conversion of non-believers” (González, 2002, 310). Hence missionary work became a distinctive feature of Pietists. His passion for personal intimacy with Christ led to the founding of a missionary training school (Halle University in Germany). One can hear clear echoes of this insistence on a personal relationship with Christ in Free Methodists; 1) zeal for a life of holiness, 2) conscientious study of the Bible, and 3) interest in the proclamation of the gospel in a holistic way to all human beings, since Christ died for each individual, who must freely choose to follow Jesus’ call.

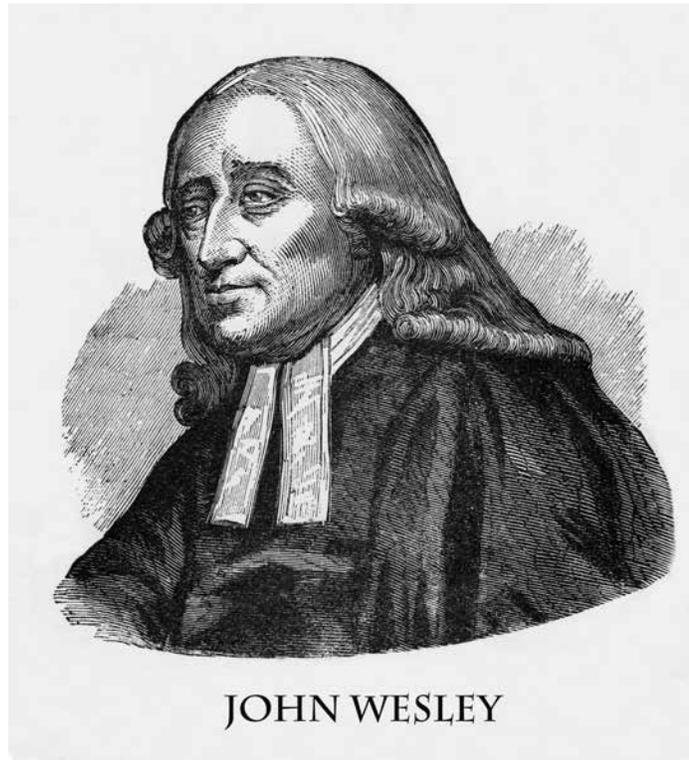
## The Birth of Methodism

The conditions brewing in England during the 18th century were optimal for a revival. Political corruption was rife, debauchery and sexual immorality ran to such high numbers that “it is said that half the children born in London were bastards” (Gilmore, 30). The reality within the church was no better. The young ministers of the Anglican Church were known for their debauchery, and the preaching lacked solid foundations, so it did not produce edification in the believers. Such ministers received their ordination after having bribed the ecclesial leaders on duty. It was amid this environment that God called John Wesley to bring about true reform in England.

John Wesley and Charles Wesley—his partner in the ministry—were the sons of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Samuel was a priest in the Anglican Church. Susanna Wesley’s teachings were practical, familiar, and engaging; she gathered her children every day for devotions in the kitchen of her house. Later, some people asked his permission to attend those meetings. In just a short season, in 1712, the group reached approximately two hundred people. This situation caused discomfort to the Anglican Church, and somewhat to Samuel who disagreed with the fact that a woman was leading a meeting like this. However, Samuel decided to support his wife. Undoubtedly, what Susanna lived through at this time must have positively influenced John Wesley, who twenty years later, together with his brother Charles, would start the Methodist movement.

The Methodist movement was born at the University of Oxford at the beginning of the 18th century, technically by Charles Wesley. It turns out that, during that time, a few students met with him to pray and study the Bible to seek holiness and flee from the wrath of God. Such meetings followed a rigorously methodical schedule. As a mockery, his university classmates called this meeting the “Holy Club”, and later gave them the name of Methodists, also in a derogatory way, due to their methodical way in spiritual planning.

In 1729, John Wesley, who at that time was already working at the University of



JOHN WESLEY

Oxford, became the leader of the “Holy Club” that his brother Charles had started. Charles was in Oxford until 1735 when he set out on a ship for Georgia, sponsored by the Anglican Church, to be a missionary to the Indians in the United States. Then John left, in 1736. John, boarded the Simmonds ship, as did a group of Moravian missionaries. He discovered that his faith was not genuine. When a strong storm broke, the Moravians remained calm and singing, while he was terrified at the thought that he might die. This event confronted Wesley, who began meeting with the Moravians daily. After they arrived in Georgia and served for a time as missionaries, the expectations of John and Charles Wesley were not met. Charles returned ill and disappointed in 1736 to England, and John followed suit a year later.

John’s experience in the United States had not been the best, and the doubt he had about his salvation and the genuineness of his faith confronted him strongly. During a meeting on Aldersgate Street, which he reluctantly attended on May 24, 1738, the leader read Luther’s commentary on the letter to the Romans that emphasized chapter 1 verse 17, “The righteous will live by faith.” At that moment, John claimed that he felt his heart “strangely warmed.” This experience would mark the beginning of a new path for him. From this date on, John continued with a radical emphasis on preaching the gospel. This experience also marked him with a strong reinforcement of holy character, with the conviction that all experience must permeate the life of the believer and reflect the holiness of God. Emerging from these two, a great social commitment was also born in John Wesley as an expression of living faith that acts out of love.

## The Establishment of Methodism



George Whitefield, the traveling preacher returning as a missionary from the United States, asked John Wesley for help in taking care of the miners he ministered to in Bristol, England. There he was forced to preach in the open air, which, he believed, should only be done inside the church building. However, this thought changed when he saw people touched by God in outdoor meetings. This awakened a strong passion for preaching anywhere and led him to understand that “the world was his parish.” John expressed that if the method of open-air preaching were to be abandoned, the entire work would gradually die out in Bristol. Open-air preaching was supported by the hymns of his brother, Charles. Charles composed hymns loaded with references to Scripture, which made a strong contribution to Methodism. “It is said that Methodism won the alliance of the masses above Calvinism because Calvinism did not produce songs” (Gilmore, 34).

All this meant that in Bristol there were soon over ten thousand people yearning to meet regularly. In response to this phenomenon, John Wesley organized the believers into *bands*, *classes*, and *societies*. The primary requirement for belonging to these meetings was that they wished to flee from the wrath to come and be saved from sins. The societies were the sum of the members of the classes and bands, in other words, in today’s language, the “society” would be called a church. They all met in large groups weekly to pray together, receiving a word of encouragement, and lovingly caring for each other, helping each other work out their salvation.



The bands were small groups of three to five lay people, who met without clergy present. According to their gender, age, and marital status, they met weekly to discuss the true state of their souls, confess one to another the faults they had committed in thought, word, or deed, and discuss the temptations that they had experienced since the last meeting. There they prayed together, received a word of encouragement, and cared for each other with love. In short, the meetings in the bands constituted a time of soul care. Confession, accountability, and encouragement were the primary purpose of the bands. Bands were voluntary and demanding. Due to the practice of confessing sin during the band meetings, many accused the members of being “papists” (an historic term for Roman Catholics), but this biblical method (James 5:16) of spiritual transformation led to great blessing of spiritual healing and growth for participants.

However, as the number of parishioners and bands increased, John Wesley did not have enough time to minister individually to everyone. So, he identified mature lay people in the faith who had gifts of exhortation, counsel, and preaching and installed them as leaders. From this was born “Class Meetings.” These were groups made up of approximately twelve people led by lay leaders or lay pastors. Wesley appointed two from each class, both men and women, to work in the ministries as leaders. They had the following tasks: 1) To visit each person in their class or band once a week, to shepherd them and receive a voluntary contribution to help the poor; 2) To deliver the offering collected to help the poor to the church; 3) to pray for the sick; and 4) To hold accountable those who were struggling in their witness.

Pastors and leaders also met and reported on their spiritual progress or needs and received the support and prayers of others. Together they offered advice or rebuke, ironed out misunderstandings, and then concluded with prayer and thanksgiving. As leaders and pastors, they also had to keep some rules, especially those described in the Bible (1 Timothy 3:1-12; Titus 1:5-16). The class meeting had an emphasis on discipline. Through a series of questions that facilitated confession, leaders learned to bear each other’s burdens. Those who confessed their sins were exhorted to always seek their restoration.

The primary role of the society meeting (weekly church gathering) was a change of understanding and the transformation of minds. The primary role of the class meeting was to facilitate a change of relationships and the transformation of behavior. The primary role of the band meetings was to facilitate a reordering of loves and the transformation of the heart.

This system was vital to the renewal and transformation of the church. Each member focused on growth in holiness. Everyone was trained to avoid all sin, do all the good they could, and thus fulfill God's commandments. Wesley wisely identified that the beginnings of faith in a person's heart needed to be incubated until they found a saving faith. Such identification helped him see salvation as a dynamic process, a pilgrimage of faith.

Wesley also realized that societies were growing and becoming stronger through bands and classes. This methodology gave a visible positive result in England, especially in terms of several of its serious social problems: the rates of family abuse and smuggling, among other vices, decreased. English family and social life changed a lot during this time. Some historians, even non-Christians, have claimed that Wesley's work was so successful that it saved England from civil war.

Methodism, with its insistence on a life of holiness and desire to nurture a holy people for God, took pains to train lay leaders prepared for ministry within and outside the country. In this movement, holiness was never perceived as something only personal, but also social, interested in supplying or at least alleviating all the needs of the human being, both physical and spiritual. Consequently, such holiness was evidenced in very practical terms: caring for the sick, providing for the needs of the poor, providing education, and continually seeking revival.

As Wesley's already mentioned motto, "the world is my parish," suggests, missionary work was widespread and encouraged. John and Charles Wesley were driven to raise up a holy people for God and to promote God's mission in a way that would respond to the needs of the whole human being.

These are some of the early influences that led to the development of the Free Methodist Church. We thank God for these men and women who taught us with their lives to persevere in holiness, in the confession of sins, and in mutual support. In the next lesson, we will turn to the nineteenth century and the story and influence of the founder of the Free Methodist Church, Benjamin Titus Roberts.

## Identity Patterns In Methodist Behavior

The Methodist heritage is reflected in the theological, ecclesiastical, and social interests articulated by the Rev. John Wesley and his associates in the 18th century and reaffirmed through the 19th century Holiness movement (*Book of Discipline*, 2019, 3). These behaviors combine to form what we might call our "community culture," an attitude of connection and open heart. We are part of a single Church connected locally, nationally, globally, and interdenominationally. We foster relationships based on truth and grace. Wherever Christ is authentically present outside of Methodism, we reach out for fellowship and cooperation.

- **Balanced Worship, Balanced People.** Because we are Protestant Christians who appreciate Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience, our worship is warm and spontaneous, but orderly, using the Bible and the sacraments, harmonizing holiness and God's love. We respect and value Christian tradition throughout the history of the Church.
- **Mission Focused, Mission Driven.** We believe that the mission of God must drive everything we do. We see our local churches as mission outposts. Our pastors are appointed not only for a

local congregation and building, but also for the ministry and proclamation of the gospel to entire communities, towns or cities, and regions. We see the church as part of an apostolic movement: we are a people “sent” with the task of reaching new territories and new populations for Christ.

- **Free Grace, Radical Grace.** We proclaim a free grace. Jesus said that the crowning work of authentic ministry is when the poor have the gospel preached to them. Therefore, the destitute and the marginalized deserve our particular care. This means that we seek to accept all who come to us, seeing the most hopeless sinner with the potential to become a devoted follower of Jesus. God’s grace has the power to radically transform people.
- **Mutual Love, Mutual Responsibility.** We view small groups within the body of Christ as the best environment for the birth, mentoring, nurturing, and maturing of new and growing believers. Based on early Methodist groups called “select classes, bands, and societies,” we seek to connect all sincere seekers and believers into groups small enough to know them well and love them remarkably.
- **Relevant Gospel, Passionate Proclamation.** We strive to make the gospel message relevant to our culture. There is no sin in being innovative and flexible in our methods of evangelism. Since we have been redeemed from sin and experience a relationship with God; we are passionate about others experiencing the freedom and joy we have found in Christ.
- **Holy God, Holy People.** Justification gives us the privilege of eternal life, but only holiness makes us fit for eternal life. Our holy God calls us to reflect His character in our lives. Our conduct and teaching should reflect God’s holiness and love. We seek nothing less than the healing of mind, body, and soul for everyone under our care.
- **Compassionate Hearts, Holistic Action.** With God’s help, we strive to participate with God as He brings comprehensive restoration through the Church. We seek to restore relationships that were lost in the Fall (Genesis 3:3-17): with God, with oneself, with our neighbor, and with the earth. The gospel message is comprehensive, and we open our hearts to show solidarity and make sacrifices for both human beings and the conservation of planet Earth. We promote practices that help conserve our planet while responding to the needs of people. We promote the integral restoration of structures, systems, and human institutions as well as the manifestations of culture that do not reflect God’s original design.

With comprehensive action, we want to participate in God’s redemptive purposes in Africa, bringing restoration and transformation to every village in every country! This attitude is part of the Free Methodist commitment to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 4:13).

## Conclusion

The Free Methodist Church can only be fully understood within the context of the different historical streams that have affected the entire Christian church. From these historic events, we inherited the truths expressed in the creeds, our attitude of global and interdenominational connection, our recognition of the Bible as the supreme standard of belief and conduct, and its emphasis on salvation by grace through faith rather than works.

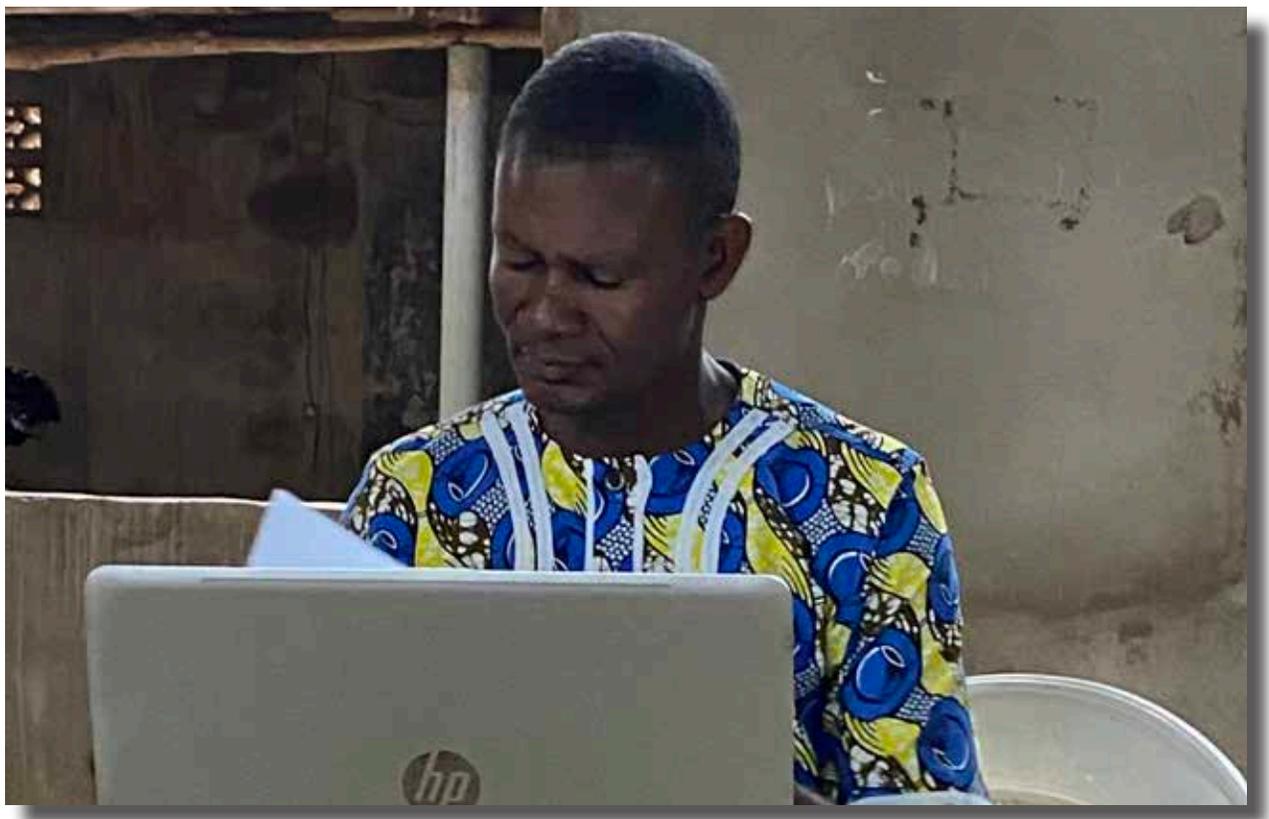
Earlier it was mentioned that the liturgy of the Free Methodist Church was inherited from the Methodist and Catholic-Anglican traditions. Perhaps it is clear that with deep respect for those traditions, African Free Methodist churches observe a range of liturgical practices, retreating

from rigidity that may rob worship of the freedom of the Spirit. Furthermore, the FMC in Africa maintains a simplicity in worship and emphasizes Scripture as the standard that guides appropriate worship practices. This comes from the Methodist Episcopal heritage, which follows the theological, ecclesiastical, and social position presented by John Wesley.

Methodism from its beginnings was interested in all the needs of the human being, understanding that this was the gospel of Jesus Christ. This marked an awakened conscience that prompted him to fight for the defense of the rights of the most vulnerable. Since the 18th century, in England, Methodists have been interested in the poor and homeless and have been constantly working to reflect God's love with words and deeds. In North America, in the middle of the 19th century, this same character is seen fighting for the defense of the liberation of slaves. That led the Free Methodist Church to the radical position of not giving membership to those who continued in favor of slavery. That same spirit of justice made them strongly reject the unhealthy practice of renting seats during church services which favored the rich. We will see this in the next lesson.

## Reflection Questions

1. Trace the preservation of doctrine from the early church councils through John Wesley. In other words, how has doctrine been kept faithfully through these years?
2. Why were the Councils, Augustine, Arminius, Pietists, and Wesley important in our history?
3. What Methodist essentials from this lesson are important to teach in your setting? (pp 15-16)
4. How can we build on the foundation of the Methodist movement for future generations?





## Lesson Two A Free Methodist Ethos



### Purpose of the Lesson

Help the student understand and care about how Free Methodists work together to help fix problems and unfairness in the world.

### Lesson Results

Upon completion of this lesson, the student should be able to:

- Explain the biblical foundations of Free Methodist concern for the poor.
  - Identify the basic freedoms of Free Methodism.
  - Contextualize and strategize for the Free Methodist Church's role in addressing African poverty.
- Understand the Free Methodist position regarding Christian care for creation.
- Be able to articulate the four relations of the Free Methodist Membership Covenant

*[See Appendix 3]*

### Content

Introduction

Early Methodism and its action for the poor

The Free Methodist Church: its origin and thought

Basic freedoms

Biblical basis of care for the poor

Social responsibility

Facing poverty in Africa

Facing ecological responsibility

Free Methodist values

Reflection questions

## Introduction

Fatoumatou and her husband Kodzo are married and have five children. Kodzo was an alcoholic and often hit his wife. Following the physical abuse, Fatoumatou divorced and left her husband. Kodzo, being an alcoholic, neglected his children. They ended up joining their mother, starting a small business. Abou, one of the children, helped his mother sell her goods in the neighborhood. He was appreciated by everyone.

Abou, as he grew up, began to hang out with his neighborhood friends. These friendships with other young people would lead Abou to a negative change in behavior. Abou started by being irregular at school and also coming home late at night. The situation was getting worse. Eventually, Abou left home to join the street children who worked in the market to earn their bread. It was a very difficult time for his mom and their church friends.

In desperation Fatoumatou asked certain people to threaten Abou and even to hit him in order to dissuade him from this life. This was done without success. The church pastor went to meet Abou at the market. Abou had promised the pastor to return home and obey his mother. He returned home but only for a few days and then he returned to his companions. Abou's disastrous life continued and he began smoking drugs and threatening his mother.

One day a gentleman, a former drug addict with whom Abou's mother had shared her concerns, stopped Abou from smoking drugs. He tied him up and beat him. When she found out, Fatoumatou, the mother, called her pastor. The pastor came and found Abou tied up in a savage manner and blood on his face. The pastor had compassion for Abou and asked that he be untied. The options were to send him to the police to be kept for a few days or send him to Juvenile Prison. In any case, he had to be moved away from the neighborhood and from his companions.

The pastor spoke to him about the love of Jesus and offered to receive him in his missionary institute and if possible to enroll him in a new school close to the institute. The pastor also offered him a bicycle for his travels to school. He accepted the pastor's offer. This began a new life for Abou.

Today Abou's life has changed. He became an active member of the church. Abou encourages parents to supervise children well in order to avoid bad companions and drugs.

It is easy to see the impact of poverty, addiction, and abuse in Abou's life. Abou's story is common in Africa where poverty, lack of opportunity, and broken relationships abound. Free Methodism seeks to bring hope and restoration to people broken by these kinds of circumstances.



## Early Methodism and Its Action for the Poor



John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, especially invited people in need to experience personal salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He responded to the needs of the poor by opening a free medical clinic and writing against bribery and smuggling. He also promoted education through the creation of new schools where they taught on Sundays since many children could not be educated because they had to work in factories or mines from Monday to Saturday. The Sunday School was created to teach reading and writing. Over time it became a platform

to help students develop a more complete understanding of the Bible, doctrine, and faith. This inspired other Methodists in England to work with this methodology. In addition, Wesley fought against the slave trade, in favor of prison reforms and for the improvement of working conditions, generously contributing his finances to support these causes.

Wesley wrote: “The gospel of Christ knows no other religion but social, no other holiness but social.” In Wesley’s teachings, social holiness is evidenced by two responsibilities: 1) the spiritual responsibility of accountability to the body of Christ; and 2) the great social responsibility for the needs of the community. For Wesley and his followers faith works out of love to minister to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of all people.

Wesley taught that the sincere Christian is diligent in his work and careful in the administration of his goods, without wasting money on vices or luxuries. The logical result of a prudent lifestyle is that often a person prospers financially. Sometimes a person may become rich, and it is difficult to be rich without falling into the trap of pride, luxury and love of material things. The love of material things can destroy the love of God, because as our Lord says: “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). Wesley recognized this and taught that the Christian “should earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” In other words, the Christian must earn as much as he can without sacrificing his health or integrity. This must be without harm to family and neighbors with the goal of contributing those resources to the benefit of those in need. Wesley taught that the way to escape the trap of riches was to spend only what was necessary to cover the necessities of a simple family life. Such a lifestyle would make possible a wide generosity to supply the needs of the community.

Wesley understood and taught that evangelism could not be expressed merely in words but must be accompanied by works of mercy. Wesley



“The gospel of Christ knows no other religion but social, no other holiness but social.”

—John Wesley

advocated visiting prisoners and poor families, and sharing as much as possible to help others. At the beginning of weekly prayer and accountability meetings or Class Meetings, each member brought a small sum of money. That offering was used to meet the needs of the poor and needy. For Wesley, social work was one more expression of his desire to pursue holiness.

## **The Free Methodist Church: Its Origin and Thought**

Methodism continued to grow quickly around the world. There came a time in the United States when Methodist leaders became tempted by the values of the culture, and forgot the principles of its founder. The Methodist Episcopal Church, with the aim of collecting money for new church buildings, began to rent the pews or seats in the churches. Only wealthy people could afford to pay for the seating to participate in the worship service. Some poor people sat on the floor, others stood in the back or on the balcony, and others just didn't attend worship. The rich were the ones who contributed the most money but also enjoyed expensive luxuries while the poor found it more and more difficult to participate in church life.

Another significant issue at that time was the problem of slavery. At that time in the history of the United States, there was much debate about slavery. Some wanted to maintain the institution of slavery, particularly for the economic advantage to the rich. Others believed slavery was immoral and against the principles of love taught in the Bible. During this turbulent season of debate, the Methodist Episcopal Church did not speak out against slavery. To the contrary, it gave its blessing for slave owners to be members and leaders of the church.

In this debate, the Methodist Episcopal Church argued that the Bible spoke of slavery as something permitted, because it did not clearly prohibit it. They argued that the Bible gave guidelines for a correct relationship between a master and his slave (Ephesians 6:5-9). Slave traders believed and taught that people of African descent had no soul, and saw them as animals or objects that could be bought and sold. This type of labor was one of the main economic sources that sustained the country at this time. The Methodist Episcopal Church saw this economic activity as normal and as a source of prosperity. What John Wesley had warned about the love of money destroying the love of the neighbor had become a reality in the United States.

Economic values had overtaken spiritual convictions within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Benjamin Titus Roberts, a young law student, converted to Christ after hearing the testimony of a man who could not read or write. Roberts felt like a lost sinner in need of God's grace. After this profound experience, he felt a call to preach the gospel. Although he was close to finishing his law



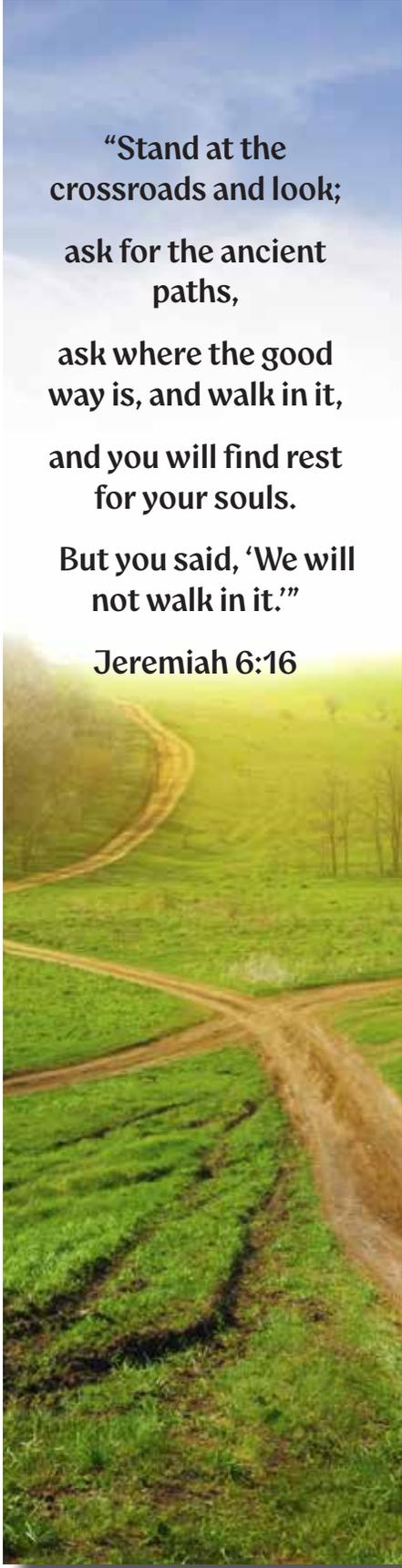
studies, he gave up his degree and enrolled in Wesleyan University to prepare for the ministry. After completing his studies at the University, he entered the Methodist Episcopal Church to work as a minister.

Roberts observed that the wealthy leaders of the church used the Bible to support slavery. He also observed discrimination toward the poor within the church. This caused many questions for him because he had learned that Methodism called people to take the gospel to the poor. From an early age, Roberts fought for the abolition of slavery. In his years studying law, he used his free time on Sundays to teach at a church of people of African descent. He believed that all people were valuable to God because they were made in His image, regardless of whether they were different.

This same conviction led him to reflect more deeply on women as created in the image of God. If all human beings are made in the image of God, so are women. In Christ, both men and women are one (Galatians 3:28). Roberts concluded that women should have equal rights in the church and they could develop and exercise leadership in the church. Practically speaking, the image of God in women and their spiritual fitness for church leadership also allows for the multiplication of ministry within the church. Roberts understood that the basis of human dignity is in the image of God. Men and women are image bearers. As a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he formally advocated the biblical doctrines and holy practices of John Wesley's earlier forms of Methodism instead of the worldly and unbiblical doctrines and practices that had invaded the church.

One of Roberts' most direct actions against these abuses was to write articles in a monthly magazine called *The Earnest Christian*. Here he opposed all kinds of slavery and oppression, inequality in the church toward the poor, and appealed for the leadership of women. One of the articles he wrote caused such a scandal that the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church accused him of being divisive. The article was called "New School Methodism". The article resulted in the expulsion of Roberts and other ministers from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In the article Roberts accused the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church of having abandoned specific doctrines and practices of Early Methodism. As a response, the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church criticized those who professed a deep experience with God, calling them fanatics. These ministers built lavish buildings and filled their services with professional musicians playing complex pieces of music. The rich dressed and lived extravagantly,



**“Stand at the  
crossroads and look;  
ask for the ancient  
paths,**

**ask where the good  
way is, and walk in it,  
and you will find rest  
for your souls.**

**But you said, ‘We will  
not walk in it.’”**

**Jeremiah 6:16**

rented the most expensive seats during church meetings. They held lavish parties and lotteries, and spent money on themselves. All of this diminished the needed attention to the poor and directly contradicted the teaching of the Epistle of James, which explicitly forbids discrimination against the poor. Roberts concluded his article with the words of Jeremiah 6:16:

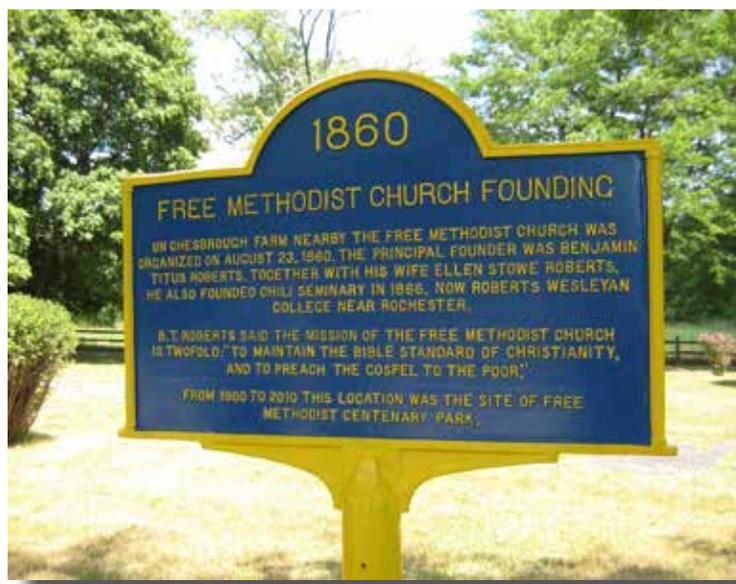
*“Stand at the crossroads and look;  
ask for the ancient paths,  
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,  
and you will find rest for your souls.  
But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”*

The desire to reform the church burned not only in Roberts’ heart but also in some other pastors of the Methodist Episcopal Church. These pastors shared his enthusiasm and spirituality. Many thanked God for the return to the teachings of true Methodism in Roberts’s thought. After being confronted by leaders in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Roberts published an article refuting the leaders and calling for a return to John Wesley’s concern for true piety which produces sacrificial advocacy for the poor. However, the majority of the Methodist Episcopal Church found Roberts and those who agreed with him to be in rebellion against the church. They voted to censure or expel them.

When Roberts and his followers were expelled, they founded the Free Methodist Church. This new church advocated for the abolition of slavery and a place where the poor and women were considered as people created in the image of God.

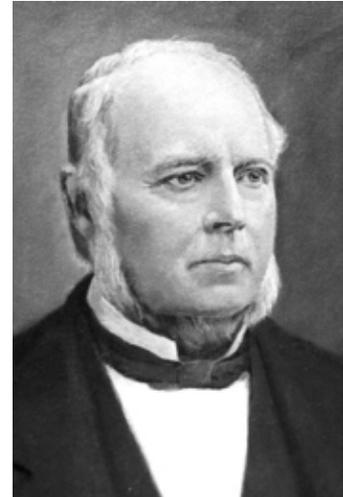
The Free Methodist Church was founded to recognize that all persons are equally made in the image of God to include all in the family of God. God is pleased to see in His church illiterates and doctors, poor and rich, women and men, blacks, browns, and whites, children, youth, adults and the elderly worshiping God together. The church consists of this mix, and it is this mixture that makes the church stronger, and more prepared for every good work. To make that a reality, Roberts thought, ministers need to be better educated. Claiming to preach to the poor without a mix that includes the rich and influential, does not serve the purpose of the church.

The birth of the Free Methodist Church was framed in a new awakening to the mission of God. “All classes of people, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest, were visited by the power of this revival and were drawn to Christ” (quoted by Snyder, in *Populist Saints*, 2006, 341). In response to the entire situation of oppression, slavery, and discrimination, the Free Methodist Church began to respond on several levels. They insisted on simplicity so



that buildings would not be intimidating places. Early Free Methodists invited believers to live simply in their homes and in their dress. The purpose was to avoid both vice and unnecessary luxuries, creating a way of life that expressed empathy for those with fewer resources.

Benjamin Titus Roberts's impact was wide-ranging. He supported the poor and advocated for economic reform, especially for farmers. He influenced the economic structure of his local community which had previously favored slavery. He used the influence of the church rather than the strength of political manipulations to make the changes. He also proposed removing restrictions on women's ordination and eventually published a book titled *Ordaining Women*. In 1894 Ellen Roberts, his wife, was elected the first president of the Women's Missionary Society.



Benjamin Titus Roberts

From its very beginning, the Free Methodist Church has sought to evangelize and serve, to be light and salt. The Free Methodist Church globally, including in Africa, continues to develop its history with a focus on the needy, the weak, the widow, the orphan, and the helpless.

## Basic Freedoms

In 1860 the word “Free” appeared in the name of the Free Methodist Church because the Free Methodist Church emphasized some basic freedoms found in Scripture:

- Human freedom, which is affirmed in the right that all people should be free.
- Freedom from rigid structures in gathered worship, and freedom to offer simple forms in worship.
- The freedom to sit in any seat in the church without paying for a seat, or anyone being discriminated against.
- Freedom, openness, and sincerity in relationships so that the truth can be spoken honestly, to avoid the practice of secret vows made in secret societies.
- The freedom is granted to lay people (that is, those who are not ordained and do not feel called to be), so that they can be involved in decision-making at all levels of leadership in the church.
- The freedom to live simply to help those in need.



The biblical principles on which these freedoms are based  
are as important today as they were yesterday  
and as they will always be.

## Biblical Basis of Care for the Poor

The God we worship loves all of His creation. He takes care of both nature and all of humanity. The oppressed and wounded are the objects of his special attention. He is the God of justice and truth (Psalm 33:5). The Old Testament prophets insisted that God demands justice (Deuteronomy 15:7-11, cf. Jeremiah 22:3). They reminded their hearers that God's people are to display His holy character (Leviticus 19:1-27). Part of God's holy character includes care for the broken. As followers of God, Christians should leave space and resources for the needy, the suffering, and the broken (Deuteronomy 24:17-22). This is part of the worship of God: loving God and loving your neighbor. Loving and worshiping God are linked with compassion for the widow, the orphan, and the needy (Deuteronomy 10:12-21).

In the New Testament, Jesus, the Son of God, announced his mission, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus taught that, on the day of judgment, those who have devoted their lives to serving and compassionately helping those in need will be viewed as actually serving Jesus Himself (Matthew 25:31-46). The Apostle James says: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world." (James 1:27). This verse refers to living in society but not sharing its value of favoring the rich and oppressing the poor out of a love for money (James 2:1,6; 5:1-6). Rather, it is having a living faith that gives to the needy, weak, and oppressed (James 2:18-26), because God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5). A living faith will change the context of oppression and will transform both the rich and the poor through love (James 2:8cf. Matthew 22:24-40).

The early church had a deep concern for all people, including the poor and needy. They spread the good news of Christ and invited people to live a new life in Him (Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-37, 6:1-7). Today Free Methodists desire to continue the commandment not to be a respecter of persons, recognizing that there is poverty of different kinds: emotional, spiritual, physical, financial, marital, or family. Poverty is caused by broken relationships with God, with self, with others, and with God's creation.

Free Methodists do not use methods of change that hurt people or compromise our witness to the world with corruption or oppression. Some Christians may be tempted by jealousy or resentment toward those with many economic resources. On the contrary, God disregards distinctions of race, color, intelligence, economic status, sex, or nationality. Love of neighbor does not give rise to partiality or favoritism to the wealthy (Matthew 22:37-39). God offers salvation to all regardless of external circumstances; giving dignity to every person and His grace and love to all. All need to accept the gift of salvation.

## **Social Responsibility**

The Bible teaches about the social responsibility of the human being. Human beings (both men and women) made in and reflecting the image of God are the only ones who can reason and reflect on their lives and environment. Part of what it means to be made in the image of God is to be a representative of God on earth with the mandate to rule His creation (Genesis 1:27, 28). For this reason, the human being rules on behalf of God and responds to God as His steward. Such stewardship must reflect the character of God by maintaining the harmony and beauty of creation (Genesis 1:31).

The image of God in the human being was seriously damaged by sin. Sin broke the relationship of human beings with God (Genesis 3:8), with themselves (Genesis 3:10), with their neighbor (Genesis 3:12, 15) and with the earth (Genesis 3:17-19). Because of such brokenness, all human institutions have been damaged by sin.

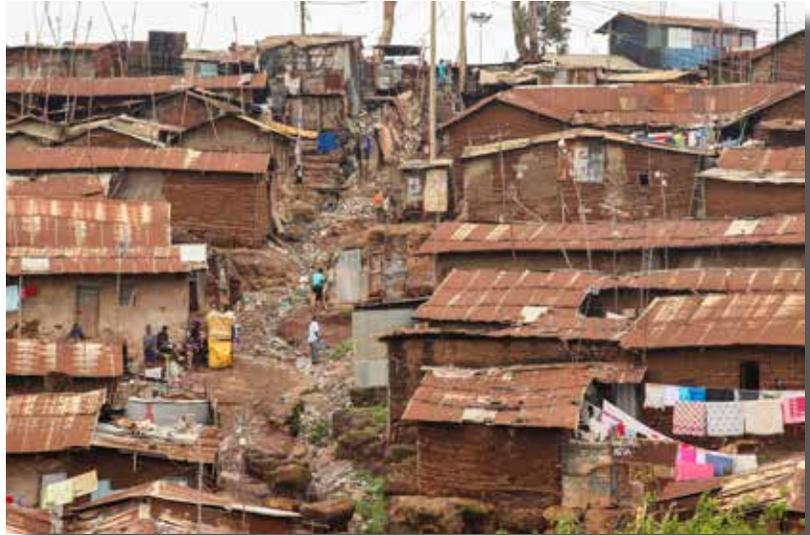
In Christ, who died for the world (John 3:16), these relationships are restored. The word “world” in Greek is *cosmos*, which means “universe.” God loved all His creation and through Christ provided for the restoration of harmony to the universe. By accepting the sacrifice of Jesus, His image is restored in the human being with the objective that each human being will be an agent of restoration in the four relationships (with God, with himself, with his neighbor and with the earth, and in all manifestations of culture that do not reflect the original design of God [2 Corinthians 5:17-19]). Trained by God and prepared for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17), every believer participates in bringing this transformation to every area of society.

## **Facing Poverty in Africa**

The Apostle John wrote: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15-17). This describes the reality of our society. The natural resources that God created have not run out, but greed has multiplied. Many in power seek to possess more without taking others’ needs into account. Poverty is a product of human brokenness; in relation to God, others, and creation. Salvation brings renewal to the human soul and a renewing of our relationships. Salvation makes possible the proper ordering and renewal of desires that otherwise tend toward poverty. The Bible urges us to put to death such desires, and deliberately work to help the poor (Ephesians 4:28 “...work...that they may have something to share with those in need”). The early church (Acts 2:44-45), James (James 1:27), Barnabas (Acts 4:32-37), and Paul (Acts 20:35), among many biblical characters, understood the call that God made in the Old Covenant carried over to the New Covenant: to care for the poor and to take responsibility for being generous with them.

Inequality and brokenness and poverty are found across Africa. War and conflict are a result of broken relationships and the primary cause of poverty and hunger in Africa. Environmental realities of drought and flood are multiplied by greed for natural resources demonstrating a broken relationship with God’s creation. Across Africa we can find people who lack food, healthcare, education, opportunity, and representation. One researcher states: “Poverty is a widespread issue

across Africa. Around 429 million people on the continent were living below the extreme poverty line of \$2.15 U.S. dollars a day in 2024. Since the continent had approximately 1.4 billion inhabitants, roughly a third of Africa's population was in extreme poverty that year" (<https://fmchr.ch/statista>). Christians in Africa must face the difficulties created by poverty with the ministry from God to restore and make whole.



The realities of poverty are contrary to the Creator's plan. Human beings were created in His image to live in harmony and enjoy all creation. Good stewardship of the resources God has given shows His character in us and honors Him. Christians must not live with indifference to the pain of the poor and the needy. Christians must not adopt the values of a society that acts as if giving means losing. Giving is born from an action of the Holy Spirit in human hearts.

This becomes a call for solidarity with the poor, but also a call to promote the transformation of all human institutions that reflect the selfishness of the fall. The ultimate act of love for both the poor and those who have plenty is to speak the truth, confronting and working to end injustices. Ideally, both the poor and the one who have abundance can be reconciled with God and with their neighbor. Ideally, each human institution and its policies would reflect the just character of God. The Christian's desire for justice must continue today, fueled by God's holy love for the unborn, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the marginalized, and people of all races and ethnicities in need.

## **Facing Ecological Responsibility**

Human beings were tasked to take care of the earth on behalf of the Creator. Often this caretaking does not reflect the good stewardship the Creator may desire. Human beings have exploited natural resources without consideration and have done serious damage to the ecological system. Thousands of hectares of forest have been destroyed and appalling damage done to flora and fauna around the world. This is especially true in Africa.

God as Creator sympathizes with all creation. God commanded Noah and his family to bring every living thing, two of each kind, and all kinds of food into the ark (Genesis 6:19-21). God cares for and wants to redeem 1) human beings, 2) land and air animals, and 3) nature. God commits himself to this:

“As long as the earth endures,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,

day and night will never cease.” (Genesis 8:22), and he makes a pact with all creation not to destroy it again (Genesis 9:9-17).

The psalmist exalts the character of God by recognizing that He is the creator, sustainer, and protector of all His creation (Psalm 65:1-13). The poet expresses with emotional passion his gratitude to God for the harvest He gives to preserve and sustain human life. God provides the rain that makes the earth fertile; provides the water that runs through the furrows and fills the vegetation with life that produces fruit in abundance. Similarly, God fills living beings with life by quenching their thirst and allowing them to eat the fruits of the earth (Psalm 95:9-13). In all this, the character of God is reflected. Christians, restored in the image of God, must exercise good stewardship of all resources within their influence and contribute to the well-being of the world (cosmos). So “well-being and harmony must reign in the environment” (Magellan, 2005).

## Free Methodist Values

The following core values, as distilled by the bishops of the FMCUSA, summarize the historical and biblical heritage of Free Methodism discussed so far in lessons one and two. It is called *The Free Methodist Way*.



**“FREE METHODISTS ARE FIRST AND FOREMOST A KINGDOM PEOPLE.** Yet throughout church history, God has raised up distinct movements like ours to enrich the larger body of Christ. Building on the legacies of John Wesley and B.T. Roberts, but always discerning where God is moving today, our identity is shaped by values that are both historical and aspirational. Of the many values we hold dear, these five lie at the heart of our movement. We view them as a whole, each one bringing necessary balance to the others. In a time of rising polarization in our nation [the United States], we resist the pull toward both fundamentalism and theological liberalism — not out of a spirit of compromise, but from a radical commitment to what Wesley called “the middle way.” It is a path that takes the whole gospel seriously and continually calls us to “both/and” convictions in an “either/or” world. We call it *The Free Methodist Way*.



**GOD'S CALL TO HOLINESS** was never meant to be a burden, but a gift that liberates us for life that is truly life by delivering us from the destructive power of sin. All who are born again are made right with God by the finished work of Jesus Christ and called to experience the fullness of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Forgiven and filled, we

approach life with confidence that we are acceptable to God even as He continues to transform our character and behavior to become more and more like Jesus. Life-giving holiness, then, is the fruit of full surrender to the loving reign of God over every aspect of our lives, establishing within us love that is truly Love. Leaving behind the legalism that once hindered our movement, *The Free Methodist Way* invites every believer to embrace the transforming work of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to love and serve God and others in joyful obedience.



**LOVE IS THE WAY WE DEMONSTRATE GOD'S HEART FOR JUSTICE** by valuing the image of God in all men, women, and children, acting with compassion toward the oppressed, resisting oppression, and stewarding creation. We devote ourselves to our founders' deep convictions around matters of injustice as they took their stand against the evils of slavery,

the oppression of the poor, the marginalization of women, and the abuse of power in the church. Our heart for justice continues and expands today, fueled by God's holy love for the unborn, the vulnerable, oppressed, marginalized, and people of all races and ethnicities. *The Free Methodist Way* is not only to realize a better society, but that all may be reconciled to God and one another in ways that reflect God's just character.



**THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST** — the message He proclaimed, the life He lived, and the ministry He modeled — set into motion a redemptive movement destined to fill the whole earth. Jesus' approach to discipleship was primarily a relational one in which He poured His life into a few with the

full expectation that they would follow His example. His aim was not merely the transmission of information, but the transformation of lives by empowering those who followed Him to do what He had been doing. His mission is now our mission. We believe this redemptive movement of multiplication applies to every believer and should permeate our Free Methodist culture at every level: the found reaching the lost, disciples making disciples, leaders developing leaders, churches planting churches, and movements birthing movements. *The Free Methodist Way* is to see God's kingdom expand exponentially as ordinary people are equipped by God's power to do extraordinary things.





**FROM THE BEGINNING, GOD’S INTENT WAS TO HAVE A PEOPLE FROM EVERY NATION**, culture and ethnicity, united in Christ and commissioned to carry out His work in the world. Today we celebrate the beauty of a multicultural and multiethnic church both in the U.S. and in over 100 countries around the world. In the U.S., we cling to the promise that we

have been made one in Christ even as we dedicate ourselves to becoming a more diverse church that looks like the kingdom of God. Globally, we continue to send missionaries to other nations even as we rejoice that the nations are increasingly coming to us. Freely sharing our own gifts and resources, we are also challenged and inspired by the faithfulness, perseverance, ceaseless prayer, theological insights, and spiritual wisdom of our international brothers and sisters. Without question, we are better together. *The Free Methodist Way* aspires to move beyond colonialism and tribalism in favor of a collaborative partnership in God’s global work in anticipation of the day when a great multitude from every tongue, tribe, people and language stands before the throne of God (Revelation 7:9).

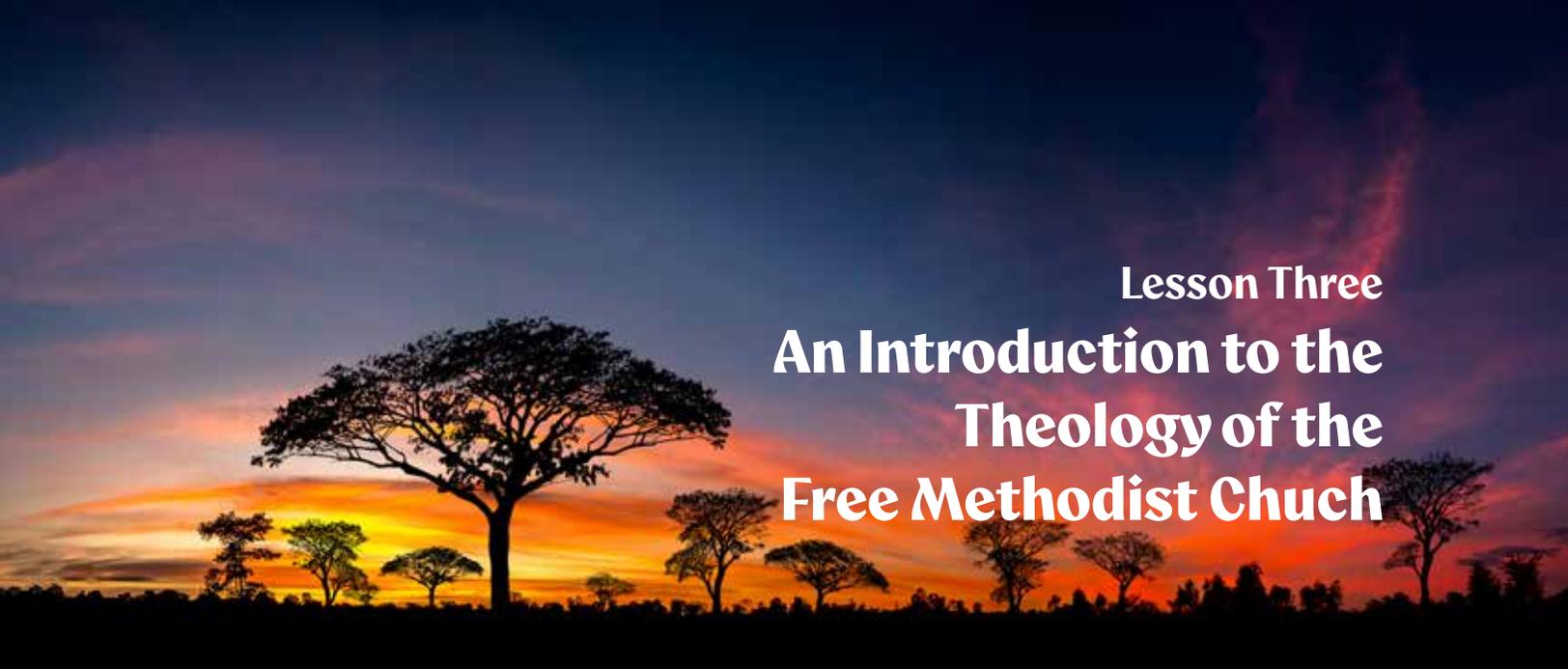


**WE HOLD UNWAVERINGLY** to our conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and our final authority in all matters of faith and practice. Drawing on our Wesleyan heritage of understanding Scripture through the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience, we keep Scripture primary.

While the church will always be tasked with authentically communicating and applying biblical truths with sensitivity to cultural dynamics, we do not subjugate the Bible’s timeless truths to cultural norms or social trends. *The Free Methodist Way* is to fully align our lives and our movement on the unshakeable foundation of God’s Word.” (<https://fmcusa.org/webelieve>)

## Reflection Questions

1. What practices of the Methodist Episcopal Church did Roberts oppose and why?
2. What are two biblical passages on caring for the poor and how can they be applied in your setting?
3. How did Wesley and Roberts contribute to the social transformation of their times?
4. Pick one of the following and tell how B.T. Roberts’ early principles gives Free Methodism in Africa a strong position on:
  - slavery
  - freedom in worship
  - lay people in leadership
  - simplicity of life



## Lesson Three

# An Introduction to the Theology of the Free Methodist Church



### **Purpose of the Lesson**

Help students to know and explain some basic theological convictions of the Free Methodist Church.

### **Lesson Results**

At the end of this lesson the student should:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the biblical and theological bases for the distinctive doctrines of the Free Methodist Church.
- Compare personal theological presuppositions with the denominational perspective, with a view to identifying personal compatibility for a healthy, effective, and long-term ministry within the Free Methodist Church.
- Explain to others the distinctive doctrinal elements of the Free Methodist Church.

### **Content**

Introduction

The Free Methodist perspective on the person of God (Theology)

The Free Methodist understanding of salvation (Soteriology)

The Free Methodist perspective on what the church is and what it does (Ecclesiology)

Some Free Methodist thinking about the “end times” (Eschatology)

Reflection Questions

## Introduction

It is possible to get to know someone in different ways. The first way is through building a personal relationship with them, and the second way is by asking others about them. Most people prefer the first way. This is how many people meet their spouse: someone introduces them, they become interested, and they keep meeting up again and again. Over time, they learn things like each other's birthdays, favorite colors, and favorite places. They also learn about each other's families, traditions, preferences, beliefs and personal traits. The more they spend time together, the more they get to know each other, and they might even fall in love. However, wisdom suggests that learning others' opinions about this person can reveal aspects of their reputation that are not easily observed on one's own, especially from those who have known them longer or in different contexts.

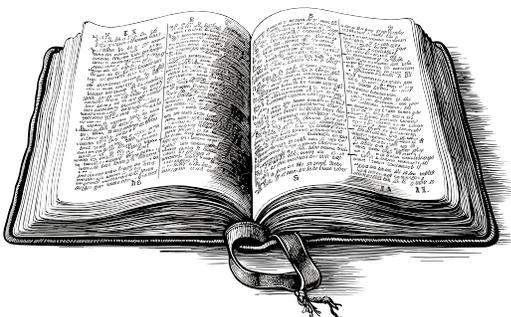
Gathering knowledge of God can be a similar process. Without knowing much, individuals experience a deep desire to spend more time with Him. Then, little by little, time together inspires investigation to learn more about Him. This lesson presents what Free Methodists have learned about God and what constitutes the Free Methodist theological heritage, an important part of a Free Methodist's identity.

Theology refers to the individual or group's understanding of God and His relationships in all His creation, especially with human beings. Free Methodist theology's primary foundation comes from John Wesley's writings. It is enriched by conversation with other evangelical, orthodox traditions of Christianity.

This lesson does not cover all the components of good theological thinking, which will be covered in-depth in later courses, including Theology I, Theology II and Wesleyan Theology. This module addresses key concepts that may distinguish Free Methodism from other Christian traditions.

## A Free Methodist Perspective on the Person of God (Theology)

The word theology means "thoughts about God." It has also been defined as "the study of God." This study or belief system includes thoughts about creation, the sinful nature of humanity, redemption, the church, and ideas about the end times, among others. To talk about theology is to ask: What is God like and how is He related to a free creation?



The Bible emphasizes that God is love (1 John 4:10, 19). Even before the beginning of time, before God created the world, He has existed eternally in a love relationship as the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3-14). God's love motivated Him to create the entire universe by the power of his Word. The good creation is the demonstration of God's universal love for all human beings. The first chapters of Genesis show God as a loving Creator who reveals

His goodness by providing the perfect environment for His creatures to live in harmony. God walked in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day. This suggests the kind of personal, close and loving relationship that God wants to have with His creation.

God also created the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and instructed the first couple not to eat of its fruit. God gave humanity freedom to obey Him in a relationship of mutual love and joyful submission to a God of goodness and generosity.

Free Methodists see God's love as the essential foundation of theology, and not His justice or power, although those are certainly important. God is three persons and at the same time one. This is a concept known as the "Trinity." This complex relationship will be studied later in another course, but for now it is important to understand that, from eternity, from before the creation of the world, a relationship of love existed between the persons of the Trinity. The triune God exists in an eternal dance in which the Father, Son and Spirit share a mutual love. Therefore, while justice and power (sovereignty) are important concepts true of God, love is the foundational characteristic of God in Wesleyan theology.

However, there is another theological perspective that emphasizes the sovereign power of God as the King who decrees and inevitably does His will. In this theology, God's loving character is filtered first through the lens of God's pre-determination of events by His sovereign will.

In a Wesleyan understanding, while God does exercise sovereign control in the world, the primary biblical metaphor of the relationship between God and His creation, revealed especially through Jesus in the New Testament, is that of the Father (see Theology I module). God, as a loving Father, seeks out His creatures and works providentially to redeem all people through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The ROSE acrostic presents the Free Methodist understanding of the person of God in relation to His creation (*From the Pastor's and Church Leaders' Manual*):

## R — God Is Relational

When it comes to God's preferred method of responding to His creation, God is relational, not distant or standoffish. In providing Jesus as our sin-bearer, God risked rejection by people, as He protected our ability to freely love Him in return. Our world is dynamic, and it calls for humankind to choose and flex in response both to the tragedies rising from sin and circumstances as well as to the providential blessings that come from God.

The Trinity is our primary example of relationship. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate and interact. God also interacts with us, drawing us with love and extending grace. God reaches and relates! It is a mutually affecting relationship (reciprocity) under the umbrella of God's transcendence.

A classic biblical example of this interaction is found in Genesis 22, where God tested Abraham regarding the sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham acted in obedience, and then God affirmed, "Now I know that you fear God ..." (Genesis 22:12 NIV). Or, see Jeremiah 32:35b, where God confesses, "nor did it enter my mind—that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin" (NIV).





## **O — God Is Open**

Rather than foreknowing our actions and ultimate destinies in a predetermining way, God works with us according to the numerous choices we make. This means that God also adjusts and flexes through means of the Spirit, through providence and through pain to nudge or nurture us toward choices that align with His will and grace. Through the prayer of Abraham, God adjusted His criteria for judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Through conversation with Moses, God changed His mind regarding the destruction of Israel. This implies that God takes risk, since He does not predetermine who among us shall be saved or that any among us will automatically choose Christ.

God chooses or elects that there will be a church, the corporate body of Christ, and that this body will come into existence through the sin-bearing work of Jesus. Election to salvation therefore is corporate not individualistic. It comprehends individual persons only as they repent and trust in Christ, thus becoming part of the corporate body of Christ.

As God risks the process, instead of taking total control, God is loving, sensitive and responsive to human choice. Human history thus flows from our decisions both good and evil. God becomes vulnerable to human choice and normally does not override (at least not immediately). The future is open, not static or predetermined.

## **S — God Suffers**

Even as pain and suffering are real parts of our experience, so God, especially in the incarnate Christ, enters into our suffering. God chose death for the Son, so that when we choose to identify by faith union with Jesus, we would not be asked to do that which He had not already done.

God allows us to reject the Son. Even as God responds to us openly, it is obvious that there were certain things about the means of salvation (i.e., Jesus' incarnation, life, death and resurrection) that were "set" or determined in the counsel of the Godhead. Nothing people did would change that, ever. For

example, in Luke 9:43b-45, Jesus informed the disciples that He was going to be betrayed. Jesus knew that betrayal, scourging and crucifixion lay ahead, if He continued to be obedient to the plan of the Father.

But even here, God's openness was displayed in how He responded to the evil perpetrated on Jesus. Jesus did not retaliate. The Father did not retaliate. Rather, the Godhead refused to break down by force the resistance of evil. God is not into dominance. God is into making a heart appeal to free individuals.

Walter Bowie wrote it, "The power of God, which can work its marvels for the eager and receptive, will not break down by force the resistance of evil. For that would leave the spirit of evil unchanged. God allows Himself to be rejected, until men, who see at last the consequences in themselves of that rejection, turn in shame and repentant sorrow toward the goodness they had denied. That is the majesty of God; the ultimate, strange power which had to be embodied in the cross."

The result to God is risk, as He works within the historical process, frustration and pain.

Clark Pinnock states, "The power of love, the power that wills genuine relationships, is certainly not a diminished or inferior form of power ... Jesus likens God to a Father, who lets his son leave home and learn for himself that sin leads to destruction ... God's true power is revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. In this act of self-sacrifice, God deploys power in the mode of servanthood, overcoming enemies not by annihilating them but by loving them."



## **E — God Is Everywhere Active**

There is no place at all where God is not present or active. By His Spirit, His Word and His body, the church, God is seeking the rescue, the reconciliation or redemption of every human being.

His preventient grace extends to all persons, regardless of the degree of exposure to the revealed Word (the Bible) or the incarnate Word (the Christ). God leaves no one alone. God pursues passionately, but does not dominate or coerce. God strives for life and wholeness among all peoples.

# A Free Methodist Understanding of Salvation (Soteriology)

Free Methodists understand salvation as a decisive moment in a person's faith journey followed by a lifelong process of growth, a path guided by the grace of God. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, explained this process by which people go from being dead in sin to living fully in Christ as mature and holy people. Wesley talked and wrote about spending your whole life trying to be more like Jesus. Along the way, there are special moments that change a believer's life, and both those moments and the slow growth happen because of God's amazing grace. At every step, God invites persons to accept His grace but also gives persons the option to reject it. Wesley identified four different biblical expressions of God's grace:

## Prevenient grace

God offers prevenient grace to all humanity. It illuminates the conscience and makes any knowledge of God possible. It awakens each person to the need for God and gives persons freedom to accept the grace of God offered in Jesus Christ.

## Justifying grace

Justifying grace is the mercy that forgives and reconciles, that absolves sins and restores peace with God.

From the point of view of Wesleyan theology, justifying grace is offered to all, but not all accept it. A person who accepts it is born again and begins a new life in Christ.

## Sanctifying grace

Sanctifying grace makes new life in Christ develop and mature; it is the continuous work of the Holy Spirit that results in holiness of thought and conduct.

Sanctifying grace transforms behavior by transforming hearts (loves, desires, fears, etc.), and thus reshaping actions.

## Glorifying grace

After a life in which we have been transformed "from glory to glory," at death we enter into the presence of God.

Grace will have totally transformed our being, making us as Jesus. By being beneficiaries of this grace, we will see Him as He is.



*Prevenient grace* is a concept in Wesleyan theology that refers to the grace of God that precedes human decision. It means that God's grace comes before a person's awareness of the need for it. This grace is available to everyone, not just a select few.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, emphasized prevenient grace as an important part of his teachings. He believed that this grace is a gift from God that enables people to respond to His call. Without prevenient grace, people would not be able to turn to God on their own because of their sinful nature. Wesley taught that this grace works to prepare hearts and minds to recognize and accept God's love.

Prevenient grace is not something people earn or deserve; it is freely given by God. It starts working in a person's life long before they realize it. This grace helps people become aware of their need for God, feel a sense of guilt for their sins, and seek forgiveness. It gently leads people toward a relationship with God, but it does not force them. People still have the free will to accept or reject God's offer of salvation.

John Wesley explained that grace, in its entirety, is the work of God in man. It is a single grace that in these four different stages generates not only the awakening of conscience, but also the reconciliation of the relationship with Christ, and the transformation of the inner person to more completely conform to the image of Jesus. Likewise, the grace of God calls and prepares believers to live a life of love. It produces the fullness of salvation, and renews in His children the likeness of God, in whose image they were created (*Adapted from Dr. Sondra Wheeler, Wesleyan Theological Journal*).

### **Key Statements About Salvation**

- Everyone can be saved. God wants to save all people. Christ died for all, not just a select group (John 3:16 cf. 1 John 2:2).
- Every believer can have assurance of a saving relationship with God. The Holy Spirit confirms it, and testifies to the inner being of the believer: “We are God’s children” (Romans 8:16-17).
- All can be transformed and released. Through the fullness of the Holy Spirit and God’s outpouring of love, people can be transformed and delivered from the destructive self-centeredness into which they are born (Romans 8:1).



## **A Free Methodist Perspective on What the Church Is And What It Does (Ecclesiology)**

Free Methodist theology begins with the study of the character of God and continues with the discussion of salvation of persons. But salvation is not only a private, individual relationship with God. God does not desire persons to live disconnected from each other. The Church exists because God wants believers to connect one to another, and He designs that they walk and grow together, persevere, and stand firm in the faith, to express love for God and others, and to learn to live a life of faith in direct dependence on the Lord and His body. For that reason, God invites believers to belong to His family: the Church. The Church is not a building, a place, or an institution, but rather a living organism made up of believers in Christ. Neither is the church simply the local gathering of believers in any given place. The Church universal and invisible includes all those who by grace exercise faith, all Christians. Each local church expression includes the “wheat and the tares” growing together. It is a gathering of the faithful alongside those who may not exercise genuine saving faith in Christ. Often when Church is spelled with a capital “C” it refers to the universal body of Christ, and when an author uses a lowercase “c,” it refers to a local body of worshippers.

What the Bible says about the nature and function of the Church is called “ecclesiology.” Ecclesiology addresses issues such as mission, ministry, structure, and the Church’s role in God’s

holistic plan. The Church is the body of Christ in the world. The Holy Spirit oversees, blesses, assists, stimulates, and keeps the Church strong. The Word encourages that the “gates of hell” will not prevail against the church.

Each local church gathers for mutual edification, service, and witness to the world. A healthy and balanced church will have characteristics that motivate action in the world. It will have elements that provide the foundation for a healthy and growing community life together.

It is possible, sadly, for the local church to become distracted by cultural pressures and personal desires to the point of losing the direction of the Holy Spirit. For example, the birth of the Free Methodist Church was a realignment with the vision of the Spirit at a time when the Methodist Episcopal Church had wandered from the Spirit’s vision.

The following description highlights the practices and characteristics of a healthy church:



### The Practices of a Vibrant Church:

- A church that **spreads the Good News** encourages its members to form friendships with those who haven’t committed their lives to Jesus and to share the gospel in a way that makes sense in today’s world. God’s grace goes ahead, preparing people’s hearts and minds for these kinds of conversations about faith. (*This is the biblical concept that Wesley taught of “prevenient grace.”*)
- A church **committed to making disciples** invites those interested in following Christ to participate in the gatherings of the church. The church will help new believers grow strong in Christ and embrace the change the Holy Spirit brings, helping them to live a holy and wholesome life. This builds a positive witness and a strong desire to serve the world in God’s name.
- A church that **multiplies** puts time and prayer into raising up the next generation of strong and effective leaders. This includes those called to be ordained elders and those called to lay ministry. It shares its vision to find the right people that God is already preparing. A multiplying church starts new community churches, producing more believers, leaders, and pastors.
- A church **active in global missions** gets involved in efforts both locally and across continents to bring biblical renewal to Africa and beyond. Such a church shares resources, trains and sends leaders across cultures, works with various support and training teams, and responds to God’s call beyond its borders.
- A church **committed to justice driven by love** works for the transformation of its community. It teaches and encourages each member to discover and use their gifts and talents to love and serve others. This church also offers practical, Bible-based solutions to societal problems to bring about comprehensive change in each community.

- A church **motivated by the mission of partnering with Christ** concentrates on the mission of planting churches, developing strong leaders, growing devoted followers, encouraging transformative churches, and creating local church structures all aimed at achieving that central goal.

### Characteristics of Being a Church:

- **Empowering Leadership:** Leaders who grow healthy churches focus on training, supporting, and motivating others to serve. These leaders train new believers to reach their highest spiritual potential within God’s plan. Leaders need mentors dedicated to their growth. The more responsibility a leader has, the more they need people in their lives who care about their spiritual growth. Mentors help them unlock the potential God has placed in them (Ephesians 4:12). These mentors can come from both formal and informal relationships.
- **Gifted Ministries:** For a church to develop, each believer must serve where God has called them. When believers act according to their spiritual gifts and not their own strength, God’s Spirit works in extraordinary ways. On the other hand, if members don’t discover and use their spiritual gifts, the church can’t expect significant progress in ministry (1 Peter 4:10).
- **Fervent Spirituality:** Believers who serve God with their gifts and calling will be much more enthusiastic than those who just do their duty rote and without passion. Spiritual fervor is directly linked to the believer’s life of prayer and worship. Similarly, both spiritual depth, numerical growth, and the expansion of the church are related to the prayer life and authentic relationship of the believers with Christ (Romans 12:11-12).
- **Inspiring Worship:** The word “inspiring” should be understood in the sense of being filled with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit acts, there are tangible results in the form, development, and atmosphere of the service. Worship services should aim to not quench the Spirit’s fire. In every part of the service, from seating arrangements to music and the message, the community of believers should experience God’s Spirit and love (1 Thessalonians 5:16-19).
- **Influential Relationships:** Healthy, growing churches have a much higher and more favorable influence than stagnant ones. This is seen in the personal relationships between church members and in relationships with people coming into relation with the church. Authentic love lived out among believers, being the work of God, gives the church a much more effective attraction than any evangelistic program based solely on verbal communication (John 13:34-35; Acts 5:11-14)

## Some Free Methodist Thoughts About the “End Times” (Eschatology)

The Free Methodist Church generally avoids taking a stance on various end-time views and teachings, including the concept of “rapture.” Believing that Christians can hold differing



interpretations regarding the end times, they respect each individual's right to study the Bible and make interpretations and come to conclusions since the Bible does not provide a timeline for future events. They caution against imposing one's viewpoint on others and note that the concept of the rapture is a concept that first appeared in the 19th century. Free Methodists do not believe that a uniform position on the end times is necessary or helpful to maintain unity in the church.

Regarding denominational interpretations of apocalyptic material in the Gospels and the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, or Revelation, they refrain from applying these to specific people, nations, or contemporary empires. They affirm that Christ will return, but the timing is unknown. They acknowledge the presence of an "antichrist" and "signs" in every age, as described in the Scriptures.

Free Methodists encourage their members to focus on spreading God's message to as many people as possible. They emphasize the importance of adhering to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, believing that the details of Christ's return will unfold as they should. The goal is to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). They generally avoid creating fear in people about end times, but celebrate the joyful anticipation of Christ's return.

## Reflection Questions

1. Thinking about the attributes of God represented by the acrostic ROSE: what attribute is most important to you and why? How should this affect your daily life?
2. Our perspective on the person of God implies that He is open, that His actions are not predetermined independently of us, but are given in response to our decisions. How do you understand this? How should this affect your life everyday?
3. Write down how you personally experienced prevenient grace or justifying grace, and how you are experiencing sanctifying grace in your own life.
4. According to the characteristics of a healthy church:
  - Identify two strengths and one weakness in your local church or community church.
  - Discuss how those two strengths can be used to turn that weakness into a strength.



# Lesson Four A Free Methodist Approach to Understanding Theology

## **Purpose of the Lesson**

Help students understand and recognize Wesleyan sources of truth.

## **Lesson Results**

At the end of this lesson the student should be able to:

- Recall and define key elements of Wesley's approach to truth.
  - Recognize the use of the Wesleyan theological method in the formation of theology.
- Communicate key principles that lead Free Methodists to value the ministry of women, and to permit the baptism of infants.
- Identify areas of personal agreement and disagreement with Free Methodist doctrine and practices.

## **Content**

Introduction

Wesleyan Sources of Truth

Principles of Wesleyan Interpretation

Commitments of the Wesleyan Thinker

Brief Example of Wesleyan Thought

Reflection questions

Appendix 1: Women in Ministry

Appendix 2: Baptism and Dedication of Infants

## Introduction

Friends from different parts of Africa come together to enjoy a cup of tea. An Ethiopian might like a black tea with a blend of spices. A person from West Africa might like tea with milk and sugar. Another friend from South Africa might prefer “rooibos” or red tea served with sweetened condensed milk. If an American joined the group they might ask for iced tea!

Churches can be like tea in this regard. For some people, Christianity is a religion in which everyone believes in Christ and places all denominations under the umbrella of Christianity while others want to make sure their faith grows in a certain evangelical development. While niceties are not important to some people, those who lead in the Free Methodist Church would do well to recognize some characteristics of our church culture. This lesson is designed to describe one of the “teas “ of a particular evangelical faith: the Free Methodist Church.

Two factors, above all, characterize Free Methodists: 1) finding a vibrant faith based on Scripture, Reason, Tradition, and Experience, and 2) living out that faith among the broken and hurting. Many factors combine to produce this distinctive development some of which have been explained in earlier lessons. However, one of the main elements that go into producing such a peculiar faith is a Free Methodist theological understanding that has been heavily influenced by John Wesley’s thought.

## Wesleyan Sources of Truth

As mentioned in Lesson 3, the Free Methodist Church descends from the Wesleyan tradition. John Wesley demonstrated four sources of truth helpful for theological reflection. In the mid-twentieth century, Wesley’s form of reflection began to be called the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral.”

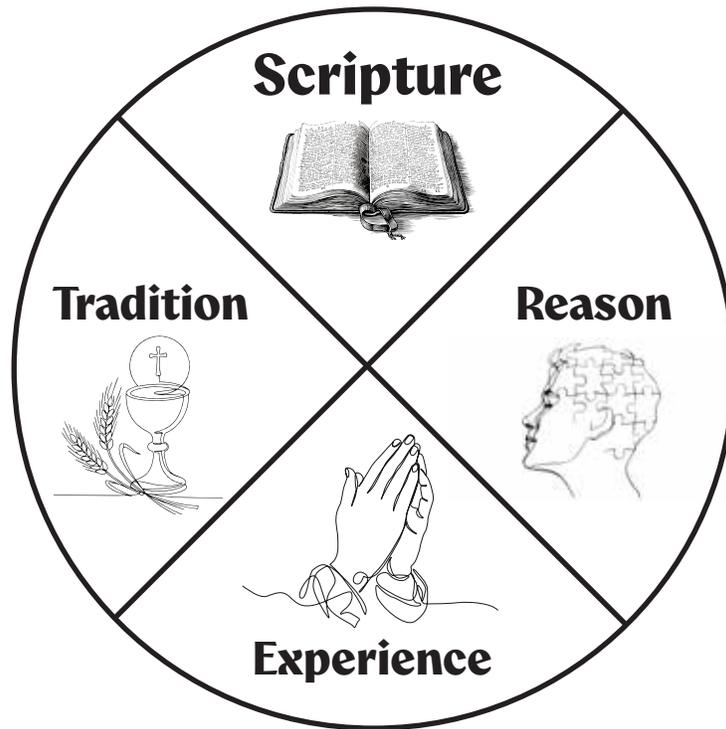
## The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

Every theology has a building plan. This can be called a theological method. The theological method identifies what materials a person is going to use. It determines how those materials contribute to the theological house that is being constructed. You start any house with a strong foundation. Jesus, the builder, knew that a house must be built on rock, not sand. The strongest houses have cement blocks or bricks instead of mud. A good metal roof may be preferred to grass thatch. The supports for the roof should be strong. Often termites eat wood, so metal would be a better choice. The materials for a roof must not leak. Bricks won’t make a good roof, but they make a good wall. In the same way, a theology is built using the best materials possible in the right places.

John Wesley defined the materials used to fashion good theology. He based his theological method on four sources. Today this is called the *Wesleyan Quadrilateral*. The four sources are: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience. He started with the Anglican Triad which included Scripture, Tradition, and Reason. He added to these three sources a fourth which was Experience. Wesley’s experience with the Moravians and his own Aldersgate experience, along with his interviews of many peoples’ experiences led him to add Experience to his theological method. Without personal faith and obedience, theology could be merely religious philosophy. It needs to change the heart as well as the mind so that the house will stand.

To build a Wesleyan understanding, one must examine each of the basic sources of truth and the way those sources contribute to a theological position.

# The Wesleyan Quadrilateral



## Scripture

The Bible is the Word of God. Studying it allows believers to hear the voice of God and invites its readers to enter into a relationship with Him through Jesus. By reading and interpreting it with the help of the Holy Spirit, believers receive an invitation to live a life that pleases Him. Wesley, in the introduction to his book “Notes on the New Testament,” wrote about the Bible: “I want to know one thing, the way to heaven — how to land safely on that happy shore. God Himself has reached down to teach the way: for this very reason He came from heaven. He has written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri [a man of one book].” This knowledge comes through a double action of the Holy Spirit both inspiring the biblical author and also, enlightening the reader in her or his study process.

## Tradition

In theological terms, tradition has to do with knowledge, understanding, and practices passed down from one generation to the next that has withstood the test of each generation of interpreters. This living faith has survived many centuries of Christianity and includes the Christian creeds and the writings of the early church fathers. The tradition contains the accepted and transmitted truths through the centuries about the practices and most useful principles for our common life in Christ. In this sense, tradition is the historical revelation of the knowledge of God that is affirmed and refined over time. While tradition serves to anchor the Church in historic orthodox belief, the Church should not close its mind and heart to the new things God may have in store.

“Traditionalism” is a term distinct from “tradition” and refers to a resistance to change that hardens the soul to any fresh expressions of faith or community life that the Holy Spirit may bring. Jaroslav Pelikan explains it this way, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.”

## Reason

God endowed human beings with the capacity to reason and distinguish truth from falsehood. For example, it is by reason that people conclude that intricate systems like the solar system or the human body must have been created by an intelligent designer of superior power. In this way, reason can guide individuals toward right beliefs about God. Additionally, reason, when illuminated by the Holy Spirit, helps uncover essential truths for faith and life in Scripture. Ultimately, if an interpretation of a biblical passage doesn’t make sense, or leads an individual or faith community into strange or destructive practices, it likely doesn’t pass the test of “reason.”

## Experience

Although Wesley learned to use Scripture, tradition, and reason, something was missing: an encounter with God that filled him with the Holy Spirit and with which his life flourished spiritually. The revival that grew out of his experience was a “heartfelt religion,” a religion of the heart, in which Wesley’s personal experience confirmed the truths that the Methodists were practicing. This component of the quadrilateral provides a doorway through which the Holy Spirit ministers, illuminates, and gives understanding and clarity to the believer. Therefore, it is important to note the role experience plays in the life of the Christian believer. However, Wesleyans also recognize that experience isolated from the other streams of theological truth may yield inadequate or destructive doctrines.

## A Wesleyan Approach to Scripture

The first important idea in a Wesleyan way of reading the Bible is that the Old Testament lays the foundation for understanding the New Testament. Many key ideas in the Bible first appear in the Old Testament. The New Testament builds on them instead of explaining them as new ideas. For example, the Old Testament talks about sacrifices for sin, and the New Testament shows how Jesus became the final and perfect sacrifice. The Old Testament prepares people to understand Jesus’ birth, life, death, and resurrection, which brings people together as God’s family. In this way, both parts of the Bible are connected.

Since the Old and New Testaments work together, there is another important idea: the Bible helps explain itself. This means that one part



### Experience and Tradition in the African Context

There is a practical examination of tradition and experience as it relates to African culture in Lesson 6. John Wesley clearly intends the Christian Tradition (that is, the historical interpretations of the Christian faith) not African traditional religions when he refers to “tradition,” and when Wesley refers to “experience” he means an encounter with the Holy Spirit in the life of the follower of Jesus.



of Scripture can help us understand another. If a Bible verse is confusing, other verses might make the meaning clearer. Sometimes, different verses show different sides of the same idea, helping us see the full picture. For example, in some places, God is shown as a powerful king, while in others, He is a loving father. Both are true, and they help us understand who God is. God made sure His message was written in a way that people could understand, using different types of writing like stories, poems, and laws.

Wesleyan teaching also uses other areas of study like history, psychology, and archaeology. These help us understand the Bible better. By studying ancient cultures, we can see what life was like when the Bible was written. Reading books by Bible scholars, looking at different translations, and learning about church history also help people understand the meaning of Scripture. This way, Christians can see how people throughout history have read and applied the Bible.

For example, if someone is looking for proof in the Bible that God is like a father, they will find it in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God is called the Father of Israel (Exodus 4:21-23, Deuteronomy 14:1-2, Isaiah 43:1-7). In the New Testament, God is the Father of Jesus and of all believers (Matthew 3:17, Ephesians 1:5, 11). This theme runs throughout the Bible, showing that God wants a close relationship with His people, just like a loving father cares for his children.

People's personal experiences can affect how they understand the Bible. Someone with a caring and supportive father might easily see God as loving and protective. Another person who had a distant or unkind father might struggle with this idea. Their past experiences might make it hard to believe that God is a good Father. This shows how personal experiences can shape how someone reads and understands Scripture.

Even when people use logic, church traditions, personal experiences, and the Bible to form their beliefs, mistakes can still happen. That's why Christians trust in the Holy Spirit to guide them in understanding Scripture. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral — a way of building faith through Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience — helps believers grow closer to God. The Holy Spirit works through all these areas to teach and encourage people in their faith.

## **Commitments of the Wesleyan Thinker**

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral helps Free Methodists discern truth from various sources. However, even using this helpful model, readers still must make the following commitments when thinking theologically:

### **1. Commitment to Humility**

When applying Wesleyan thought to arrive at a doctrinal or theological position, it is important to allow the process to lead. Even though a person may have existing ideas or opinions, humbly allow for the introduction of Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. This process is about giving room for other voices from all four of the contributing materials.

Remember that *Scripture is always the basis or starting point for a Wesleyan method*. Search Scripture for an accurate understanding of the text. A future course in biblical interpretation will help to build the skills for handling Scripture with integrity.

Regarding reason, apply best thinking for logical and sensible arguments for and against a position. Do not simply settle for rationale that supports, but also allow room for arguments against a position.

Refer to tradition in the sense that a careful examination of Christian practice, thought, and values includes a historical review. Look back at opinions and positions in the history of the Church.

Allow room for the personal experience of believers to confirm, challenge, or further explain doctrines as understood from Scripture and tradition.

Finally, submit to the possibility of arriving at a new perspective or understanding. Do not become entrenched or stuck when new information challenges your experience or views. Remember that the Holy Spirit is at work to build, shape, and correct the believer.

## 2. Commitment to Conviction

The purpose of using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is to provide confidence and peace in our understanding of truth. Conviction is closely related to confidence. Trust the process and trust the Holy Spirit. Once a position of peace is found, it can be defended and even settled.

If a believer cannot speak with conviction and boldness, perhaps further work is needed. Uncertainty is to be expected. Some things can only be known in part. Even so, when God brings people to a place of understanding, it is safe to be confident.



Confidence and humility must be held in tension with each other. A leader must be humble to admit that other voices are needed in the process and yet confident enough to make declarations based on the process. There is always room to grow, and yet strength and stability come from believing in the work God is doing.

Reasonable believers may come to different conclusions. Each believer can build practices based on their conclusions. So, let each community of faith read, learn, listen, understand, and then humbly choose a practice in keeping with their communal conscience and understanding of the Bible.

Further, may God lead each to respect fellow Christians who have chosen a different position. At all times, humility should lead believers to remain humbly open to the possibility of changing convictions if new biblically-based and Spirit-inspired information stirs the soul.

Many honest believers differ in many ways about faith and life. In some cases, it is difficult to understand how brothers and sisters in Christ can hold such diverse convictions. A Wesleyan hermeneutic allows a reader to have deep convictions and at the same time remain open to the

possibility of being wrong, and that a brother or sister in Christ may have a valid perspective. Humility does not suggest weakness or confusion of mind, but commitment to the truth. Ultimately, truth produces a life of holiness.

### 3. Commitment to the Entire Counsel of Scripture

In short, Free Methodists recognize the entire Bible, Old and New Testament alike, as the inspired Word of God, which speaks of the human condition and the nature of God. A commitment to biblical theology means that when a reader reads and ponders Scripture, the Holy Spirit illuminates and makes connections between passages. These connections and learned commitments color and share later readings and learning. In the same way, later readings and learning may lead an interpreter to rethink prior conclusions and established convictions. This dynamic interaction admonishes the mature believer toward a posture of humility in teaching, preaching, and discerning God's will.

Example: A reader of Paul's writings on gender roles may mistakenly conclude that the Bible teaches the inferiority of women in ministry, but may later change his mind about his interpretation by reading a passage, such as the account of the creation of man in Genesis 1 and 2, which describe the role of women as co-equal to the role of men (Genesis 1:28).

### 4. Commitment to Cultural Responsibility

Christians are called to solidarity with the poor and oppressed (Matthew 25). This requires the believer to adopt a prophetic voice against all kinds of injustice and sociopolitical cruelty. The FMC recognizes that the Bible speaks to contemporary issues, and when the believer responds to the text in compassionate action on behalf of the voiceless, this is an act of holiness.

However, a prophetic or countercultural stance should not prevent the Christian leader from using positive elements of a culture to share the gospel with others and to demonstrate the tangible grace of God to those who are immersed in it. Cultures are not wholly bad (or good), so communication in culturally relevant ways should not be viewed as suspect or misguided.

## Brief Example of Wesleyan Thought: Infant Baptism

### Infant Baptism

The Free Methodist Church allows, but does not insist on, infant baptism. The topic is too detailed to be fully discussed in this lesson. Appendix 2 contains an article that expands on the topic. However, as an example of the use of interpretive lenses, the following four elements have been extracted from the article.

- **Scripture.** Lydia, when God opened her heart to her in response to Paul's message, was baptized with her family (Acts 16:15). And Paul wrote: "I also baptized the household of Stephanas" (1 Corinthians 1:16). Scripture shows us the baptism of entire families.
- **Reason.** It could be argued reasonably that there were babies who were probably part of the baptized families (such as Lydia or Stephanas).

- **Tradition.** For many years, the universal church practiced infant baptism as the norm. The Free Methodist Church springs from church traditions (Catholic, Anglican, Methodist) which affirm the baptism of infants. From inception, the FMC accepted and practiced infant baptism as normative.
- **Experience.** As the Free Methodist Church has included people whose consciences have been shaped by both traditions on this point, it has given parents the right to choose the sacrament of infant baptism or the ceremony of baby dedication. The Free Methodist Church attempts to embrace both dimensions of Christian truth.

## Reflection Questions

Read either the article “Women in Ministry” or “Infant Baptism” and describe how the article uses the Bible and church tradition (history) to make its point. Also, look for ways that reason and personal experience factor into the article’s argument in favor of women in ministry or infant baptism. Give one example of each (Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience), and tell how using all four helps you understand the topic better and more fairly.

## Assessment Activity

The student will discuss an article on women in ministry or infant baptism, explaining how it uses Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as materials for theological reflection.

Appropriate modifications:

- This could be a written assignment.
- The teacher could interview the student.
- The student could have a conversation with a mentoring pastor in her/his local context. The mentoring pastor would need to assess the student’s performance. (This implies that the mentoring pastor understands the quadrilateral and has qualifications to make appropriate judgments.)



## Lesson Five

# The Basic Organization of the Free Methodist Church

### **Purpose of the Lesson**

Help students function within the Free Methodist organization.

### **Lesson Results**

Upon completion of this lesson the student should be able to:

- Recognize different types of church government and explain the one we use in the Free Methodist Church.
- Define FM negotiables and non-negotiables within our institutional organization.
- Navigate the Book of Discipline, explaining each part and finding specific sections quickly.
  - Demonstrate a familiarity with and an ability to use the Free Methodist Book of Discipline either in an online or paper format.

### **Contents**

Introduction

Forms of organization of the church

Stages of development

World Conference and Council of Bishops

Free Methodist World Missions

Book of Discipline

Reflection Questions

## Introduction

If you are reading this manual and taking this course, you are likely either a member of a local Free Methodist church wanting to deepen your understanding of our identity as Free Methodists or are taking this course along with other ministerial candidates in your district or conference. You may have even participated in a district or conference annual meeting.



So, by now you may know that a local Free Methodist church does not exist by itself. There is a relationship of interdependence and cooperation with other churches that share the same heritage, theology, and organizational system. This lesson introduces you to the Free Methodist family, and answers some questions like:

“How is the church organized nationally or globally?”

“How does the church make decisions?”

“How does leadership mobilize members to participate in the cause of Christ beyond our local group?”

The family of God is truly universal and spiritual and has no denominational barriers or geographic or political boundaries. But, at the same time, the church must function organizationally in today’s world. Each group of people has certain norms and structures to be able to organize and mobilize to fulfill God’s mission on earth. For example, churches must comply with the laws of each country to be officially recognized and to do activities like open bank accounts, buy property, or have employees, among other things.

In the New Testament and in history the church has adopted multiple forms of organization or governance in an effort to do things decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). The Bible does not present a single organizational rule that every church must follow. The New Testament offers various examples which have led to different structural forms and structures depending on local cultures and contexts.



## Forms of Organization of the Church

The church, throughout history, has developed different forms of government. From its beginnings in the first century, different organizational patterns emerged to establish order and unity within the church. The New Testament does not specify an exact model for church organization. As time has passed and the church has developed in different ways new organization and leadership structures have emerged. The letters of the apostles to the churches reveal the important role that a leader plays in the preservation of sound doctrine, unity, discipline, and the very life of the congregation. The form this leadership has taken over time has shifted.

As history progressed, the church developed different forms of government, adjusting methodologies to contextualize the biblical parameters of church leadership to each historical stage of the church. Four primary models emerged (Erikson, 2008):

### Episcopal

This system bears this name because the church is led by bishops (the “bishops,” *episkopos* in Greek). Episcopal churches delegate authority to one or more persons as their highest authority. Examples of this are the Catholic Church with the Pope (though they would say he has authority over the whole Church), the Anglican Church with its Archbishop, and the Orthodox Church with its Patriarchs. The idea that one person holds all the authority of the church is often overstated, for the episcopal model is based on a hierarchy with different levels of authority and responsibilities. Although the highest authority in the episcopal model is one or a few persons, the entire government rests on a structure of ministers who participate in decision-making.

### Autocratic

Many congregations follow the leadership of a single person who has full authority over the church. Unlike the episcopal model, autocratic churches generally do not have an election process. All responsibility for decisions rest with the leader. This leader, almost always, is a charismatic person in whom the church recognizes some kind of special power from God. For this reason they do not question his decisions. An example of this model of government is visible in the Pentecostal or independent churches, especially those that do not have a recognized historical current.

### Congregational

In this organizational model, the highest authority is the congregational assembly. This model is opposite to the previous two because the authority is held by the members of the congregation. Churches may belong to a denomination, but each local church is independent in its administrative and ministerial decisions. For example, each church chooses its own pastor and determines the budget for the development of his ministerial activities. Generally these churches are characterized by their independence, however, church councils bring congregations together to develop common programs. Some examples of this model of government are visible in Baptist churches and some independent ones.



This system of government is representative and democratic and is directly related to the reformed current of the church. Its name comes from the Greek term *presbuteros*, which translates as “older man,” and refers to an organization in which there is a group of people chosen from the congregation who are in charge of the pastoral and administrative care of the church. The assembly of members elects representatives to the governing bodies by means of a popular vote. The chosen ones, generally called lay presbyters, occupy their positions for certain periods in which the different required functions are fulfilled. This form of government is characteristic of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

### **A Free Methodist Application of These Models**

In practice, many churches use a mixture of these four forms of organization, including the Free Methodist Church. The Free Methodist Church has tried to combine the best of each system. Each general conference has a bishop or a board of bishops who have spiritual and organizational authority. A bishop is chosen by vote for a specified period; that is, they do not serve for life. Free Methodism recognizes the authority of the ordained pastor to minister who has been assigned by the bishop or director of an area. In this system, pastors are assigned to minister to a local church, with a view to reaching that geographic area for Christ through the work of the local church.

In addition to the pastor, every established church should have a local board of administration that supports the pastor and shares responsibility for guiding the ministry. The pastor is accountable to the national leader or conference superintendent and to the local church board of administration. The pastor leads the local church, but not as a dictator. The pastor and the local board together make decisions. A few decisions can be made by the body of members to gain the support of the entire congregation. It is evident, then, that elements of each of the four organizational systems can be seen within the Free Methodist organizational model, can you identify them? Therefore, officially, the organizational model of the Free Methodist Church would be considered a “modified Episcopal” style.

The Free Methodist Church is also considered “connectional.” This means that each leader and each church is in relationship with other pastors and churches. The district (or conference) and the local church cooperate. Pastors are assigned to a church and a locality by the Ministerial Appointments Committee (MAC), led by the superintendent and by the bishop, but in dialogue with local church boards of administration. Every leader in the FM system is under the authority of and is accountable to a supervisor. A pastor serves under the authority of the national leader or conference superintendent. A mission district leader serves under the authority of the area director. The area director and conference superintendent serve under the authority of the bishop. Bishops submit to one another serving on a Board of Bishops and under the authority of the Board of Administration of the General Conference. They also submit to one another globally through the World Conference.



Various levels of maturity and development exist from country to country within the Free Methodist network of churches. This section provides more details regarding the development of Annual and General Conferences.

## Church in Formation

When the Free Methodist Church is just getting started in a new country it is called a “church in formation.” It usually begins with the planting of one or two churches. Often there are no ordained pastors at that time. The ministry is under the supervision of the area director who may delegate responsibility for a new region or country to the leader of a nearby district. At the time of this writing, the “churches in formation” in Africa under the jurisdiction of FMWM are: Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Sierra Leone.

## Mission District

When there are at least two fully organized churches and at least one ordained pastor, a “Mission District” may be organized. At this stage, there is a pastor with enough maturity and fruitful ministry that he can be appointed National Leader by the area director. A Mission District must form a National Board (Board of Administration) that makes decisions for the growth of the network of churches and a Ministerial Education and Guidance that processes ministerial candidates. Local churches begin to tithe their local income to the district to support their common ministry. Local pastors and leaders have an annual training, inspiration and commission meeting. At the time of this writing, the mission districts in Africa are: Cameroon and Ivory Coast.

## Provisional Annual Conference

When a mission district reaches a sufficient level of maturity that includes a minimum of 300 members in five organized churches and five elders (ordained pastors), it can be recognized as a “Provisional Annual Conference.” In addition to the Board of Administration, a new provisional annual conference also has a Board of Ministerial Education and Guidance (MEG) to develop and train new



## The Term “Conference”

The Free Methodist Church uses the word “conference” in several different ways. It comes from the Methodist heritage term and identifies a basic unit of organization. “Conference” can mean several things:

- **A geographic region** under the responsibility or mission of a network of churches.
- **A network of churches.** All Free Methodist churches found in that geographic region.
- **A cooperative ministry organizational system** of that network of churches in that geographic region. This system seeks to organize administration, finances, church multiplication strategies and leadership development, training, ordination and assignment of pastors.
- **The annual meeting** of all pastors and lay delegates elected to represent each church. These pastors and lay delegates are members of the conference.

As we will see, conferences can be: Provisional Annual Conference, an Annual Conference, a Provisional General Conference, or a General Conference. The term “conference” is so central to Methodist vocabulary that in a missionary district someone who is officially entering the ministerial formation process for ordination is called a Conference Ministerial Candidate or CMC.

ministerial candidates, and a Ministerial Appointments Committee (MAC). The provisional conference must have a plan to multiply leaders and churches and to become financially self-sufficient. The pastors and lay delegates elect, by ballot, one of the ordained pastors as superintendent under the direction of the area director. At the time of this writing there are five provisional annual conferences in Africa: Middle Belt (Nigeria), Northern Mission (Nigeria), Ghana, Liberia and Togo.

## Annual Conference

A Provisional Annual Conference typically continues “Provisional” through the first term of the elected superintendent. When external leadership recognizes proficiency in national leadership – spiritual and theological soundness, good evangelistic depth, and satisfactory operation under the Book of Discipline (FMCUSA) – the work may be advanced to full annual conference status.

Normally, the minimum for the organization of an annual conference is ten ministers and six hundred lay members (*Book of Discipline*, ¶4570). In Africa, the countries currently organized as annual conferences are Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Malawi.

Annual Conferences, modeled on the Methodist Episcopal Church, have been a basic organizational structure of the Free Methodist Church since its inception. After the first Annual Conference was organized in Pekin, New York, USA on August 23, 1860, twenty-two others were organized in the next twenty-five years. As Bishop Emeritus Leslie Marston said, early Free Methodism “was marching across the nation.” The Annual Conference is the organization at the regional level that links the local churches into a complete network. The Annual Conference ensures that pastors and congregations receive counsel and encouragement, identifies those who are called to ministerial service, and promotes as well as oversees church planting and evangelism (*Book of Discipline*, ¶5000). Every Annual Conference belongs to a General Conference.

## Provisional General Conferences

One or more annual conferences may apply to the general conference to which they belong to change their status to “provisional general conference.” In this stage of development, the Provisional General Conference remains under the leadership of their sponsoring General Conference while learning the nature of independent administration and accountability. At first, a Provisional General Conference is given a measure of authority to develop unique mission and vision statements, and to interpret and apply the *Book of Discipline* within their culture under the leadership of their elected bishop, while carrying out the mission of the church. This status is defined by requirements in paragraph 4580 of the *Book of Discipline*.

In 2015 Uganda became a provisional general conference.



The general conference has the widest jurisdiction within the Free Methodist structure. In addition to all the standards for a provisional general conference, it is also required to meet all the requirements listed for General Conferences in the *Book of Discipline*. In Africa, Burundi, the DRC, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are general conferences.

The “World Conference” maintains a vital connection between General Conferences. The World Conference meets every four years with the purpose of facilitating communications between the different general conferences. They have the responsibility to resolve any constitutional issues that arise, and is dedicated to:

### **Work Toward Camaraderie and Unity**

Stimulate the expansion of the kingdom of God by guiding general conferences toward carrying out evangelistic activities in harmony with Wesleyan doctrine and practices.

Assume legislative and judicial authority in matters related to the Free Methodist Constitution.

Verify that each general conference and the different institutions that make up the Free Methodist Church in the world are loyal to the Free Methodist Constitution.

Manage an international scholarship fund to contribute to the development of Free Methodist leaders (*Book of Discipline*, ¶230). The bishops of general conferences and provisional general conferences constitute a Council of Bishops for purposes of fellowship, mutual counsel, accountability, and the extension of the kingdom of God through Free Methodist ministries. The Council normally meets every four years, holding its meetings in the middle of the period that is left between sessions where the world conference is held (*Book of Discipline*, ¶240).

## **Free Methodist World Missions (<https://fmwm.org>)**

The Free Methodist Church USA (FMCUSA) has a long history of mission engagement, with the first missionaries sent in 1885. The offices through which its mission efforts have been done have gone through a few name changes, but today is known as Free Methodist World Missions (FMWM). Its task is helping the US general conference to fulfill the Great Commission at a global level. This is accomplished by sending missionaries, raising money to support missionary work, and cooperating with global partners in various ways. The area director (AD) is assigned by the US bishops to oversee churches-in-formation, mission districts and provisional annual conferences, and often assists the bishop to lead annual conferences. The AD coordinates the relationship between the FMCUSA and areas where the church is in formation. The AD and FMWM work to develop healthy leaders, multiply disciples, equip transformational churches, and facilitate strategic alliances between the US church and developing Free Methodist work on the continent of Africa. The goal of this work is to see the Free Methodist Church in Africa fully developed, strong, and healthily interdependent.



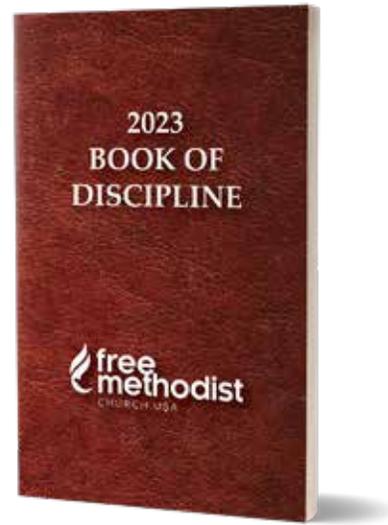
The maturity of a church is not measured by the formation of an institution or the implementation of all the committees and structures found in the *Book of Discipline*. The goal is not to reach a certain level of organizational maturity within the worldwide Free Methodist Church. Those secondary activities will naturally develop as the church pursues the primary mission of reaching each country in Africa for Christ. As the church in Africa focuses on multiplying committed disciples, developing healthy leaders and empowering transformational churches, administrative structures will develop in due course to support or respond to church growth. The objective of FMWM-Africa is to see a healthy, interdependent, indigenous and multiplying Free Methodist Church in Africa. We explain these terms:

- **Church.** The primary goal of FMWM-Africa is to establish local groups of believers committed to following Jesus and fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Those churches are all part of the greater Body of Christ, and along with all churches constitute the Church universal.
- **Free Methodist.** Although ecumenical and cooperative with others, Free Methodists have a unique theology, heritage, and connection. Free Methodists agree to work with, through, and in collaboration with other communions. Free Methodists recognize that the kingdom of God is much larger than any single church or denominational expression. While Free Methodists appreciate and use appropriate materials from other groups, a particular theology, doctrine and organization distinguishes Free Methodist identity from many other groups.
- **Healthy.** Healthy churches and conferences do not foster dependence on external resources or perpetuate dysfunctional relationship patterns. Healthy churches do not become disconnected from their heritage or the relationships that helped build and shape them. The goal is to see churches and networks that are spiritually and emotionally healthy and vibrant, whole and holy.
- **Interdependent.** Free Methodists teach that decision making should be moved as close as possible to the local church so that church leadership comes from within. With the proper training, coaching, and guidance, local leaders need to determine their own ministry patterns and practices.
- **Indigenous.** The communication of the gospel and the way the church functions must be contextualized in order to fit and take root in the local culture. The gospel message and church ministry structures must be translated to each country and to the different ethnic groups, social classes and geographic regions that make up each country.
- **Multiplying.** The Free Methodist Church multiplies disciples, leaders, groups and churches. Each “mission field” shares the responsibility of sending missionaries and reaching other people groups or regions with the gospel. Reproduction is part of the essential reality of the Kingdom of God.

The Free Methodist Church participates with God’s redemptive purposes in Africa by developing healthy leaders, multiplying committed disciples, empowering transformative churches, and nurturing effective partnerships. This approach will result in a healthy, interdependent, multiplying church in each country of Africa. This means that every action taken, including sending VISA missionaries or groups, sponsoring ICCM (International Child Care Ministries) children, and donating to Extra Mile Projects, must contribute to the mission.

## Book of Discipline

Some of the sections in this lesson come directly from a publication called the *Book of Discipline*. Often, the word “discipline” suggests punishment or training. However, in this case it simply means “order” or “methodology.” A later Lesson outlines the “method” in Methodist. Since the days of John Wesley and the beginnings of the Free Methodist Church, the *Book of Discipline* has been the organizational manual. The *Book of Discipline* is the basic, foundational and authoritative document explaining Free Methodist doctrine, official relationships, and how a church or conference should function. It is not an inspired book like the Bible. It is not infallible or eternal. There is a process to review and amend the *Book of Discipline*. Every four years, annual conferences elect ministers and lay members to represent them at the general conference meeting. There they discuss proposed changes to the book. They make amendments and vote to approve, or not, these proposals. A new edition of the book is published after each general conference (every four years). You will find a digital copy of the *Book of Discipline* on the FMCUSA website at <https://fmcusa.org/resources/2023bod>.



The *Book of Discipline* is organized in the following sections:

- **Constitution**, chapters 1 and 2. This foundational section of the book contains the Articles of Religion that define Free Methodist theology and doctrine. It explains the general organization of the FMC, that is, the general conferences and the world conference. A change in the constitution must be ratified by a vote of a majority of the delegates to all general conferences.
- **Christian Journey**, chapter 3. This is an explanation of the conversion and discipleship process from a Wesleyan perspective.
- **General administration**, chapter 4. Presents the organization of the Free Methodist Church USA general conference. This affects the missionary districts, provisional, and annual conferences of Africa. FMWM facilitates and coordinates the relationship between Free Methodist work in Africa and the FMCUSA.
- **Annual conferences**, chapter 5. Chapter 5 describes how an annual conference should function; although it is written from the perspective of the United States, there is some flexibility so that conferences in other parts of the world can have systems appropriate to their context.
- **Local church**, chapter 6. Like chapter 5, this description of how a local church should function is written from the perspective of the United States. The church in Africa has flexibility within those structures, to innovate with permission, and multiply networks of new churches through the CDN model and other missionary pursuits not specifically listed in chapter 6. This chapter contains material about the characteristics of a church, membership, boards and committees, and local ministerial candidates.

- **Order of the church**, chapter 7. Chapter 7 explains how we respond to issues or accusations against leaders. It describes the redemptive and restorative heart of the Free Methodist Church when faced with leaders or members who transgress the boundaries of their covenant promises. Without ignoring sin and without harsh condemnation the goal is always restoration of the broken along with maintenance of holiness and church order. This chapter offers a process for dealing with difficult cases and doing everything possible to restore persons who have fallen into sin or dysfunction.
- **Ritual**, chapter 8. If you want to know what to do and what to say at a wedding, funeral, baptism, communion, or other ceremony, this will help. At important moments such as the presentation of a baby or when receiving new members in the church a minister needs agreed-upon words that reflect our theology and our understanding of these special occasions. These rituals have a long history; some have their roots in the Anglican Church from which John Wesley came.

The purpose of all this is so that the Free Methodist Church, as part of the Church universal, may be healthy and holy, effective and fruitful.

## Reflection Questions

1. Create an organizational chart with the names of the leaders of your local church and district or conference. Pray for each one regularly over the next month.
2. Explore the Book of Discipline on the FMCUSA website <https://fmcusa.org/resources/2023bod> Look at its structure and read chapter 3 titled “Christian Journey.” Write two paragraphs of what caught your attention. Write one question you have about chapter 3 to ask during class.
3. The student will make a scheme, graph or organization chart in which he/she presents the structure of the Free Methodist Church from the perspective of the local church to which the student belongs. Include local, district, regional, and General Conference levels.

Appropriate modifications:

- This could be done as a group project.
- This could be an in-class presentation.
- This could be done in a local context with approval of a mentoring pastor.
- This could be expressed using symbols/props instead of written labels.



## Lesson Six

# The Broad Methods of the Free Methodist Church

### **Purpose of the Lesson**

Help students understand and implement ministry practices consistent with Free Methodist theology and heritage.

### **Lesson Results**

At the end of the lesson the student should be able to:

- Trace FM methodology to its historic roots.
- Understand and reflect on mission, method, flexibility, freedom and limits.
- Defend an appropriate methodology to carry out ministry in a student's context.

### **Content**

Introduction: A Methodical and Free Movement

The original methods of the Early Methodists

Freedom within limits: A Note about Methods and Organization

The Methodology of the Free Methodist Church in Africa

Reaching Cities Requires New Methods

Reflection Questions

## Introduction: A Methodical and Free Movement

“Methodist!”

Originally, an insult shouted at John Wesley or one of his fellow Holy Club members; and if not shouted, maybe whispered behind their backs. The name stuck to them like glue, but even so it came to identify an entire movement that has lasted for approximately three hundred years. Free Methodists are heirs to that movement...and that name.

This nickname was born because John Wesley and his companions intentionally pursued holiness, using specific methods through a structured plan for discipleship and organization to spread scriptural holiness across their land. The new leaders preached and inspired others that led to conversions and discipleship, and many people became passionately and sacrificially involved in the movement. This 18th century Wesleyan revival in England illustrates the signs of a renewal movement within the church. (More about this in the Church History course.)

A movement happens when some people have a deep experience with God and this prompts them to rediscover and live biblical truths and principles in a vibrant and contagious way. They commit themselves to the cause of Christ with everything they have and strive to recruit others, mobilizing and improvising methods and structures to spread the gospel to as many people as possible, in as many places as possible, as quickly as possible.

To last more than a moment in history and to produce maximum fruit, a movement must have a certain infrastructure. There must be clear, contextualized, and flexible methods to sustain the rapid multiplication of churches. But, without a doubt, the methods are at the service of the mission. When the methods become more important than the mission, the movement loses focus and goes off course or, in the worst case, dies.

Methods and structures of the church can become idols. If leaders and members begin to value methods over mission, the church becomes an institution or a stagnant bureaucracy. The church loses its first love,



the outward momentum wanes and buildings are overvalued, and profits, wages and politics more important than the growth and expansion of the gospel.

By the 19th century, that had happened to the Methodist Episcopal Church, as the Wesleyan movement in the United States was known. Benjamin Titus Roberts and other pastors tried to call the Methodist Episcopal Church back to its roots. Their intention was to revive and renew the church, but they were expelled. So, they chose to form a new denomination. That network of pastors and lay leaders formed a renewal movement.

They chose the name “Free Methodist.” “Methodist” because they considered themselves true heirs of John Wesley and his Methodist movement. “Free” related to the pertinent issues in the renewal they desired within the church: freedom for slaves, free pews for the poor to sit in churches, freedom from materialism and extravagance that would exclude the poor, freedom of the Spirit in praise, and freedom to preach and practice the doctrine of holiness. The foundational freedoms of the Free Methodist Church also included freedom to have open and transparent fellowship between believers, unobstructed by allegiances to secret societies. For that reason, Free Methodist members in Africa do not belong to groups which have secret initiation rites or exclusive meetings or rituals, especially those with religious content (For example: voodoo practices, yearly family rituals, veneration of and sacrifices to ancestors, etc.).



**Secret societies in Africa** take different forms. Some are based on Western secret societies which act as fraternal clubs. Others are based on African culture of ancestral or animistic religion and rites. Different African traditional religious groups with various rites and initiation practices exist in many parts of Africa. These groups may require allegiances which compromise the spirit of openness, freedom, and surrender to Christ that Free Methodism promotes. These societies have been a part of African culture for hundreds of years. Their proposed intent is to help guide the people in their communities, however they create allegiances that are incompatible with membership in the Free Methodist Church.

Members of these societies are often elders or leaders in the community. They claim to pass down knowledge about the community's history, values, and spiritual beliefs. While some of these societies present themselves as focusing on training the next generation, there are required allegiances and religious rites that compromise Christian integrity.

The practices of African secret societies can vary, but they often involve rituals, ceremonies, and initiation rites. When young people reach a certain age, they may go through a special process to join the society. These initiation rites often include religious components that do not honor Christ or the pursuit of holy living.

Many of these societies also have roles in spiritual life, serving as a link between the people and their gods or ancestors. They play a part in important events, like weddings, funerals, and harvest festivals, using rituals that are not compatible with Scripture or freedom in Jesus Christ. These important community events should have the Church's involvement instead of secret societies for people who are Christian.

Free Methodist pastors and church leaders should walk with their members as they navigate life without relying on previous rituals. This provides the believer with an opportunity to share the light and freedom of Jesus Christ with their community.



## Free Methodist Church **AFRICA**

John Wesley and the early Free Methodists, was to raise up a holy people, and preach the truth, proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

### **Free Methodist**

The name seems like a contradiction in terms, like it must be one or the other. If one is very methodical, how can one be free; and if one is free, how can one be methodical? It is a creative tension. The balance between method and freedom is precisely what keeps a movement alive and going forward.

Free Methodists are heirs to that movement and that name, and have dedicated themselves to participating with God in His redemptive purposes in the world. The mission of the first century Christians, which was revived by

### **The Original Methods of the Early Methodists**

Methods are always related to a specific time and place. Methods serve and further the mission in a particular context. So one cannot simply import methods from another time or region and hope that they will give the same results here and now. Having said this, some basic principles emerge from the historical methods of the Methodist movement.

#### **1. Lay Ministry**

Although John Wesley was an ordained minister in the Anglican Church of England, he very soon saw the need and opportunity to involve lay people (non-ordained) in ministry. In his day, only those with academic training and church ordination were allowed to preach or teach the Word. However, the Methodist movement grew rapidly, and there were not enough clergy or ministers available and willing to follow up on all the new converts. Wesley used a system of gatherings where followers were encouraged to seek spiritual transformation together. The largest gathering, which today may simply be called a local church, Wesley called a “Society.” The Free Methodist Church maintains this naming feature, and once a year local churches hold a “Society meeting,” to deal with the business of the church. Then, weekly, Methodists were expected to be part of a “Class Meeting,” a group of 10-12 people gathered for spiritual accountability and growth in holiness. Finally, for people who sought deeper transformation, Wesley suggested triads, called “Bands.” He called the gatherings “bands, classes, and societies.” Lay people were given access to one another with the expectation that they share their spiritual struggles and victories in community. Those who demonstrated leadership abilities and desire were given the opportunity to lead in the “Class Meetings.” Many of the new preachers of the Methodist movement were trained and equipped in those meetings to use their Spirit-given gifts to participate in ministering to one another.

Many were assigned to lead a class and were commissioned as lay preachers. Wesley developed a whole system for training these lay workers as they ministered, without going away to receive formal education at a university. There was a list of books they had to read and a learning process. In this way, hundreds and even thousands of men and women without formal education and without credentials participated in the growth of that movement and wave of advancement of the kingdom of God.

Teaching, training, and commissioning lay workers was a method unheard of in the church since New Testament times. Wesley rediscovered the important message of Ephesians 4:11-12 for the Church: “So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” This was key in the Methodist movement, which gave very good results in the development and expansion of the church in England and other parts of the world.

Although the Reverend Benjamin Titus Roberts receives credit as the founder of the Free Methodist Church, many have described its beginning as a lay movement. For many years it was lay workers who evangelized and started new churches throughout the United States. Following the Methodist model, they provided training and a path to ordination for lay workers.

Today in Africa many church leaders join the clergy after being active lay workers in the church. They are men and women without much preparation who have started new churches, family ministries, schools and many other ministries. Following the model of John Wesley, there is a ministerial formation process for all believers who want to love God with all their mind, soul and strength and form their character to better serve their communities. The Introduction to Pastoral Ministry course will clarify and amplify this process for those interested.

## 2. Preaching outside church buildings

Anglican pastors and leaders opposed John Wesley for his radical teaching and his unusual methods. They closed the doors of their churches so that he could not preach. Wesley eventually tried and fell in love with preaching in the open air. At first, he resisted this, thinking that it was wrong to carry out the preaching and teaching ministry outside of a building consecrated for that purpose. But he soon saw that outside church buildings the message could reach many more people, including people who would never enter a church building because they feel so poor or very sinful.



Wesley preached to thousands of people in the open air: to miners going on or off their shift, people in public places, to farm laborers in the fields. As mentioned in the earlier lessons, he organized the new converts into small groups he called “classes” that met in homes or public places. There came to be thousands of these classes, which did not even have their own building. Networks of classes came together to form a society, which was basically a congregation that functioned like a church. Some of the societies came to build simple buildings where people could gather, but the vast majority of congregations of

the new Free Methodist Church in the United States in the 19th century began in borrowed places: houses, barns, schools, community halls, fire stations, etc. The impulse was to go out; the idea was not to attract people to the church building, but to bring the gospel to the people.

Currently in Africa the Free Methodist Church is rediscovering how to adapt and implement this method. For example, the Church Development Network (CDN) model is a contemporary way of following the historic Methodist practice of starting classes and societies. With this model in mind, new churches are established in homes and other temporary or borrowed places. Evangelism and discipleship happen in neighborhoods and in homes, and various places in cities. When the group grows large enough to need a new place to meet, creativity is used: they meet under a tree; in a school, a community hall or a soccer field. In today's Free Methodist movement, a building is a tool, but not a requirement for ministry.

### **3. A group structure**

George Whitefield was a famous preacher and evangelist contemporary with John Wesley. He preached to tens of thousands of people and many were converted under his ministry. But at the end of his life there was almost nothing left because there was no discipleship system to train those who responded to the call and thus be able to incorporate them into the church. When Wesley died, he left over a hundred thousand members in a multiplying network of classes and societies. Wesley concentrated not only on the efforts leading up to a person's decision to follow Jesus, but also planned for the care of the soul after the decision. Group structures were the life force of the Methodist movement.

For many years after its inception, the Free Methodist Church used the same method of multiplying classes and societies. One key word has been "connectionalism," which indicates how members, groups, and churches are related through a common vision and leadership. We believe that God speaks to the individual, but also works through our personal relationships in a whole group. And we see that these groups are interconnected with the same mission.

Several Free Methodist mission districts and conferences in Africa have adopted the Church Development Network model as their official church planting model. It is attractive because it is fundamentally biblical and because its methods of multiplying groups are in line with historical Methodist methods. This doesn't mean that everyone has to use this model. But it is the model for which Free Methodist World Missions is offering collaboration in coaching and training.

### **4. A practical discipleship, focused on integral transformation**

Wesley's small group focus was not on biblical instruction, which was reserved for large group gatherings in a society, but on personal growth and transformation. He prioritized true scriptural holiness, a change of mind, heart, and behavior, effected by the Holy Spirit. In practice, it was reflected in the transformation of attitudes and behaviors of the person, coming to generate broad changes in society. All members voluntarily gave an account of themselves through a set of questions written by Wesley. Other members of the group offered words of encouragement and admonition. Each one wanted to live a holy life, and for this reason they sought to align their attitudes, emotions, feelings and intentions with the heart of Jesus. This mutual responsibility reflects Wesley's understanding of Christian fellowship, the care of the whole person.

In the small groups they not only discussed the means of grace and mercy, but also practiced them. They did not simply teach the Scriptures as a concept, doctrine, or theory, but also implemented and obeyed biblical principles. The Wesleyan movement understood that the Christian faith is not just something one learns and understands, but rather something one experiences and lives. The goal was and is to transform the way of thinking, the heart, the attitudes and actions that are reflected in being more like Jesus.

A few years ago, the Free Methodist Church began to emphasize the importance of integral discipleship focused on “head,” “heart,” and “hands.” The head represents what we know from the Bible. The heart has to do with our attitudes and living relationship with God. “Hands” represent our actions and the abilities we use to serve God. Although Wesley never wrote specifically using the images of “head, heart, and hands,” these are very Wesleyan concepts.

To summarize, then, we can say that currently our training methodology is related to the CDN model and the pastoral formation training of the Free Methodist Church. In an integrated manner, new leaders are trained through the passing on of the knowledge and skills they develop by participating in the Church Development Network, houses of peace, and reaching communities that need the love of God. Our method of teaching, discipleship and preaching is aiming for the development and spiritual growth of the believer through the basic human capacities that we refer to as head (academic formation), heart (spiritual formation) and hands (formation of practical skills).

## 5. Work with the poor and society

This fifth method has already been explained in Lesson 2. Every time they met, the original Methodists donated a coin to help care for the poor. With these simple contributions, schools and health centers were built. Since our beginning, Free Methodists have been a people burdened for the plight of the poor.

## Freedom Within Limits: A Note About Methods and Organization

Sometimes the methods a church uses can become stale and rigid over time. Structure becomes more important than the fresh wind of the Spirit and the life that Jesus offers His people. To avoid the rigidity of overly structured systems, in 2006 the Board of Bishops adopted and communicated a framework that frees the church to use any method that contributes to the fulfillment of the vision, without compromising the principles of the Free Methodist Church. The framework begins with clear definitions of the mission, vision, practices, and results of the movement. Adapted specifically to the Africa context:

**The mission of FMCUSA:** *what God has called the Church to do.*

**The mission of FMWM-Africa:** *who God has called FMWM-Africa to be.*

**Creative ministry freedom:** *freedom to create and shape unique ministries in alignment with FM identity.*

**The expected results:** *Every community aims for the same objectives.*



### The mission of Free Methodist Church USA

*The Free Methodist Church exists to bring wholeness to the world by loving God, loving people, and multiplying followers of Jesus.*

### The mission of Free Methodist World Missions-Africa

*The Free Methodist Church participates with God in His redemptive purposes in Africa. It develops healthy leaders, multiplies committed disciples, empowers transformative churches, and nurtures effective partnerships.*

It seeks to build healthy biblical communities of holy people that multiply disciples, leaders, groups and churches. In order to fulfill this vision, each local church must be a healthy church, with leaders filled with the Spirit, who continually work on a plan to achieve the expected results: Africa transformed by the grace of God.



### Missional Freedom

*When the church's mission comes first, pastors and churches are free to make plans and ministries that help reach church goals. They can do this as long as they align with:*

- *The Bible*
- *The FMC Articles of Religion*
- *The FMC Constitution*
- *The Membership Covenant*
- *The Area Mission*

*Pastors may guide their churches freely in step with the conference leaders, as long as they keep their ordination promises and do not lead the church away from its mission.*



### The results expected by the church:

Luke 15 reminds us that the Father's heart passionately seeks those outside the kingdom. God draws them toward Himself and pursues them in love. In light of God's loving heart, pastoral and lay leaders should seek to develop in every Free Methodist church strategies that achieve the following results:

*Being an evangelistic congregation.*

*To be a congregation that makes committed disciples.*

*To be a multiplying congregation.*

*Being a congregation mobilized for world mission.*

These emphases have been a high priority throughout our history and should continue to be so, as they are essential to the evangelistic imperative of the Bible. Benjamin Titus Roberts, the most influential person in the founding of the Free Methodist Church, wrote about the evangelistic impulse in his book *Fishers of Men*. Scan the QR code to read *Fishers of Men*.



In addition to these four expected outcomes, which focus the church in an outward-looking mode, there are four others, which provide the basis for community life. Leaders, pastors and laity are expected to seek the development of these results in each church:

### Being a prayer-saturated congregation:

Speaking to God on behalf of our lost world; gathering to pray and intercede for individuals, governments and nations to yield to the final victory of Christ and listening to the Holy Spirit and obeying him.

### **Being a worshipping congregation:**

Celebrating God's saving grace by singing; meeting God in prayers; reading and obeying the Word; preaching the Word and observing the sacraments.

### **Being a congregation that counters sin within the culture:**

Seek justice for all, showing mercy to the poor and empowering the dispossessed.

### **Being a purpose-driven congregation:**

Being on mission with Christ, focused with structures to strengthen the essentials, focusing on mission and vision to shape all ministries, and fulfilling the Great Commandment and the Great Commission commanded by Christ.

In short, churches and conferences have full freedom to strategize for growth and practice ministry within the limits provided by the mission, vision and values of the Free Methodist Church. The mission and vision are ahead, that is where we are going. On the one hand, we have what is not negotiable, on the other hand we have the expected results. Those two sides are like traffic barriers on both sides of the road so we don't drive in the wrong lane or go on the shoulder. As long as we don't violate the non-negotiables and as long as we are realizing the expected results, we can use whatever method best suits our gifts and personality, fits the context, and brings the most fruit.

## **The Methodology of the Free Methodist Church In Africa**

We believe that God has called us to experience and live all the signs of a restoration movement that we explained at the beginning of this lesson. Although we celebrate each new believer and church, a movement does not exist by the addition of a few here and a few there. A movement is defined by multiplication. In a multiplying enterprise, leaders and groups consistently and quickly reproduce themselves. In doing so, disciples make disciples who make disciples, and churches start churches that start churches, up to the fourth, fifth, and sixth generations.

Mission districts and provisional conferences associated with Free Methodist World Missions embrace the vision of furthering a biblical movement that partners with God in His redemptive purposes in Africa. Free Methodist World Missions develops healthy leaders who multiply committed disciples and plant transformative churches. This movement is shaped and strengthened by:

- Pastors trained to encourage multiplication.
- Lay people discipling others.
- Spiritually mature disciples empowered to plant transforming churches.
- Churches reproducing to plant multiplying and transforming daughter churches
- Churches in each community committed to the transformation of their communities.

CDN gives us a biblical system for this. It is the preferred method of Free Methodist World Missions for multiplying FM churches in Africa. CDN seeks the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit to remind the Church of her responsibility in fulfilling the Great Commission and awaken her desire to plant daughter



churches and to develop healthy leaders. The goal of CDN is to recruit and train church planters in different communities.

As churches are planted using CDN, new leaders will be incorporated into the life of the church. Working alongside CDN is a process called “Developing Healthy Leaders,” which trains church leaders in Bible, theology and practical ministry. Those sensing a call to ministry through CDN participate in the Developing Healthy Leaders process as they mature in ministry. Some of these leaders will be ordained as elders.

In 2 Timothy 2:2 disciples are required to be obedient, to invest their resources in training others, to be able to instruct others. This means that in the relationship with future students, it must be discerned early if they are willing to invest in others and if they are competent to transmit the knowledge that has been entrusted to them. Ultimately this is the principle that gives rise to both new disciples and a new church. The CDN materials, which can be read or downloaded on the website <https://churchdevelopment.network/> explains how to implement this Biblical and Wesleyan method.

Other courses in the Developing Healthy Leaders curriculum will present biblical, theological and practical training consistent with CDN principles. God desires that the Free Methodist Church of Africa participates in reaching countries for Christ and seeing His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

## Reaching Cities Requires New Methods

Reaching whole countries and bringing God’s redemptive purposes to bear in Africa requires talking strategically about the role cities play in evangelism, training and church development. Today, in the African context, Free Methodist methodology has to include urban mission. In 2015 the Free Methodist Church (USA) General Conference made the following commitment, “We believe that God has called us to engage, equip, and empower the church to win the hearts of the world by growing and multiplying sustainable churches and ministries in urban communities.”



### Reasons to have a strategic emphasis on cities:

- Because that’s where many of the people are.
- “An estimated number of 609 million people in Africa live in urban areas as of 2021. The urban population on the continent has been growing annually and is forecast to increase further to reach 722 million by 2026” (Statista.com, Sept 25, 2024).

### Due to diversity.

People of different ethnicities and social classes are concentrated in urban areas. Within each large city there are representatives of other African countries and other parts of the world. Big social problems have resulted in internal migration as well. People from distant regions and mixes of indigenous peoples in each country have migrated and have been displaced to the city.

### **Due to cultural influence.**

Many people of influence in business, education, transportation, and media live in cities. Young adults and creative entrepreneurs are drawn to the city. In this era of globalization even small towns are permeated by urban values and linked to urban networks.

### **Because Free Methodists have historically cared about urban centers.**

The first Free Methodist churches were in the cities. The founders had a deep calling and a passion to bring good news to the poor. This concept of evangelism was and continues to be essentially interwoven with compassionate care for the marginalized, especially in urban areas. They worked for free seats, for workers' rights, and against slavery.

### **Due to strategy and missiology.**

Often the transportation and communications networks in a country can be found in the urban centers. To that end, reaching the world requires that cities play a significant role in reaching the world. Cities are linked on a global level like never before. The nations of the world are in the cities of Africa. Urban churches are incubators and training centers to equip leaders and to reach a globalized world.

### **Because of theology.**

The Bible reveals to us a God who shows mercy and love toward foreign cities like Nineveh and Babylon, as well as towards the city of the people of God, Jerusalem. The Apostle Paul intentionally went to the major cities of the Roman Empire on his missionary journeys. The New Testament – and the subsequent history of the church for several hundred years – is the story of an urban transformation movement.

For all these reasons, reaching the cities of Africa becomes strategically important to reach the whole of Africa. While the Free Methodist Church values persons and ministries located in rural areas, church leaders should recognize that traditional methods of ministry found in rural churches may not work well in cities. Urban centers have different practical needs and often display different cultural values. Evangelizing and establishing a network of healthy and multiplying churches in cities requires intentionality, planning, and contextualized methods.

## **Conclusion**

No matter if the church is in a city or in a rural area, the Free Methodist Church is dedicated to ministering to people's needs in a holistic way. The Church emphasizes Jesus' heart of compassion for the poor. The *Book of Discipline* guides the church in both doctrine and in its faith practices. It also directs how the church should be led and organized while offering enough flexibility that each church can strategize what they must do to carry out their mission. Each church, with help from its leaders, decides the best way to serve its community, share the story of Jesus, and start new programs to help others. The Free Methodist Church, with a rich tradition in doctrine and methodology, aims to be a movement marked by freedom and fruitfulness in the Kingdom of God.



## Reflection Questions

Compare the original five methods and the methods used by your church. How are these methods being implemented in your church or district? If you have not implemented them, how would you implement them in your church?

1. Lay Ministry
2. Preaching where the people are
3. Structure of small groups
4. Practical discipleship
5. Work with the poor in the community

How valuable is the multiplying churches vision in cities and rural areas?

**Assessment:** The student will use the membership class outline in Appendix 3 to teach a membership course in their local church or church plant. This should be prepared in such a way that it captures the interest of your audience and effectively conveys the essential doctrines and practices of the Free Methodist Church. Work with a local mentor to create and present a membership class in a local context including key elements of history and organization of the Free Methodist Church. The mentoring pastor should be present to assist (only if necessary) and to evaluate student performance. The pastor should discuss student performance with the course facilitator to assign a grade.

The student will use the following conversation guide to talk with a mentor about key doctrines and practices of the Free Methodist Church.

### 1. History:

- a. Give a brief explanation of social justice as a Free Methodist value.
- b. Which of the original freedoms of the FMC caught your attention? Why?
- c. Explain the beginning of the Free Methodist Church.

### 2. Polity:

- a. How do you feel about itinerancy and the way appointments are made?
- b. What will be hard about submitting to the leadership of the church? What is the value of making decisions as a community?
- c. How can a leader maintain authority while allowing multiple voices and ideas to be expressed?

### 3. Free Methodist Hermeneutics and key issues:

- a. What is your understanding of secret societies in Africa and the Free Methodist response?
- b. Should women be allowed in all areas of Church leadership?
- c. What is an appropriate response when Christian parents ask you to baptize their infant?





## Appendix 1: Women In Ministry

*Adapted with permission*

*Original by David Kendall, Bishop Emeritus FMCUSA*

Most people believe that women can be leaders in the church. Even people who don't totally agree with my position still think women should be in ministry. They know it's not just a good thing — it's something women should do.

Just think: where would the church be if women hadn't helped in so many ways throughout history?



Now, here are two important questions to think about:

- What rules have been made about what women can do as leaders in the church, and why?
- Are these rules meant for everyone, all the time, or just for certain places and situations?

I'll talk more about these questions at the end of this paper.

### How we treat the Bible

I want to start by sharing some things I believe about the Bible. First, I believe the Bible is God's Word, and it helps us know how to live and what to believe. The Bible isn't just one book — it's more like a whole library! It has different kinds of writing, written a long time ago, for different people and situations. But even with all the differences, the Bible still tells one big story about the one true God and His plan for the world and for people.

These beliefs are important for what we're talking about. Let me explain. It's not enough to find just one verse and say that's the only thing that matters. We must think about the whole story the Bible tells, and how God's message builds over time.

That means that when we consider a specific topic, not every verse has the same weight in determining how we act today. For example, in the Old Testament, men were sometimes allowed to have more than one wife. But today, if we're talking about marriage, we probably wouldn't use that as our main example. Instead, we should seek the teaching Jesus gives about marriage in the gospels, or look at what Paul said in the New Testament, like in the book of Ephesians.

We need to understand how each part of the Bible fits with the big picture of God's communication to humanity.

So, when some verses are hard to understand or seem to say something different from other verses, we should look at the ones that are clearer to help us. These clear beliefs can help us as we try to understand more difficult passages.

## **The Story of Creation and Redemption**

Let me talk about women in ministry in the bigger picture of what God did when He created the world and saved it. In Genesis 1, God created humans — both men and women — in His own image. He gave them the job of being fruitful and multiplying, which means they needed each other to do this. He also together gave them the job of ruling the earth and taking care of it. Both men and women had the same responsibility. There was no difference between their roles at the start. Together, they were meant to care for God's creation and fill the earth.

In Genesis 2, we hear more about this creation story. God made man first, but He saw that it wasn't good for him to be alone (Genesis 2:18). He needed a partner, someone to help him. This shows that man alone couldn't do everything God wanted. They needed each other to do God's work. So, God made the woman from the man, to be his partner and help him. Both man and woman were created equally, with the same purpose and responsibility.

It was when people sinned that everything changed. Sin broke the perfect relationship between humans and God, and it messed up how men and women were supposed to live together. In Genesis 3:16, God says to the woman that childbirth will be painful and that she will want her husband, but he will rule over her. After sin, men and women no longer experienced equality in the same way. Before, they worked together as partners, but after sin entered the world, the man ruled over the woman, just like how animals act toward each other. This was a big change from how God created things to be.

So, sin affected the way men and women worked together, but God's original plan was for them to be equal partners in His creation.

### **A Simple Story About God's Plan for Men and Women**

When God first made people, He wanted men and women to be equal partners. But when sin entered the world, it broke that perfect plan. Now, instead of working together, one person became the boss and the other had to follow. This was never what God wanted. The idea that men are always in charge of women comes more from sin than from God's original design.

But God didn't just leave things broken. In Genesis, there's a promise, often called the "first gospel." It says that one day, someone from the woman's family would crush the head of the serpent, even though the serpent would hurt Him (Genesis 3:15). This means that God had a plan to defeat sin and fix what was broken.

God is working to save the world and fix the damage that sin caused. Some of the problems may still be around for now, but God's grace helps to heal and restore what was ruined. The Bible says that Jesus came to save us from sin and all its effects (Galatians 3:13). This includes the broken relationship between men and women.

So, when we think about whether women can be pastors or leaders in church, we need to remember the big story — God's story of creation and saving the world. If we only look at how things were in the beginning, there would be no reason to think women can't lead. Sin brought those limits — not God. And since Jesus came to fix what sin broke, we shouldn't keep those limits if God is restoring things.

And guess what? We do see signs in the Bible that God is helping women step into important roles again. God called strong, wise women to lead. Miriam was a prophetess, and the book of Micah says she helped lead Israel along with Moses and Aaron. Deborah was also a prophetess and a judge. She even led Israel's army to win a battle! Other women like Huldah and Noadiah were prophets too.

All these stories show that God was already starting to undo the damage sin caused even in the Old Testament. And when Jesus came, He treated women in amazing ways. The Samaritan woman at the well told her whole village about Jesus (John 4). Mary sat and learned from Jesus just like a student, while Martha was busy with chores. Jesus praised those who listened to His words as His true family. Women like Joanna helped support Jesus' ministry. And after Jesus rose from the dead, women were the first ones to tell the good news.

All of this shows that God values women just as much as men and that they have an important role in His work. God's story is about making things right again — and that includes making men and women equal partners, just like in the beginning.

### **Women in the Early Church and God's Big Plan**

In the early church, women led and served in the same way men did. The Bible shows us many examples of this. In Galatians 3:28, Paul says that in Jesus, "there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus." This means that things like race, gender, or whether someone is rich or poor don't decide a person's place in God's family. Everyone has a part to play, including women, even those who were slaves.

Paul also teaches that it is God who brings the church together, and God gives different jobs to different people (1 Corinthians 12:11). When we read the New Testament, we see women in many of the same roles as men — some were apostles, like Junia (Romans 16:7); some were prophets (Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 11:5); and some worked closely with Paul, like Priscilla, Evodia, and Syntyche (Romans 16; Philippians 4:2).

But the world was still broken by sin, so not everything changed right away. For example, slavery was still around during Bible times, even in the church. And not long after the Bible was written, many people still believed men should be in charge, and that women should stay quiet or in the background.

But the Bible often shows us that instead of tearing down bad systems all at once, God works in a different way. God works through grace to change people's hearts from the inside. One example is the letter of Philemon. At first, it looks like Paul is okay with slavery. But if Philemon really did what Paul asked, it would have changed the whole idea of slavery in the church.

The same thing happens when Paul talks about husbands and wives in Ephesians and Colossians. At first, it might sound like he's saying the husband is the boss and the wife must obey. That's how families worked in those days. But if you read all of what Paul says, it's clear he means something much deeper. He says husbands should love their wives like Jesus loves the church — by serving and giving up everything, even their own lives. That's not about being the boss. That's about being humble and loving. Jesus gave us a new way to lead. He was the Son of God, but He served others, washed their feet, and died on a cross wearing a crown of thorns. That kind of leadership turns the old way upside down.

So, when we talk about women in ministry, we must remember what Jesus showed us: in His kingdom, leadership means love, service, and equality. That means women can lead too, just like they did in the early church, because in Jesus, we are all one.

## Understanding Hard Parts of the Bible About Women in Church

We've been learning about how God's big plan — from creation to saving the world through Jesus — helps us understand that women are meant to be fully included in church life and ministry. The New Testament supports this big idea. But there are a couple of Bible verses that seem to say the opposite, and that can be confusing.

These two verses are where Paul says women should be quiet in church and not teach or have authority over men (1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–12). If we read these verses by themselves, without looking at the bigger story of the Bible, they might seem to say women shouldn't lead or speak in church at all.

But it's important to remember: these are tricky verses. People have different ideas about what they mean. So instead of making rules based on just two hard-to-understand verses, we should look at the whole story of the Bible. That story shows God's plan to include everyone — men and women — in His work.

Many Bible experts say Paul was writing to fix particular problems in certain churches, not to make forever rules for every church everywhere. When we understand the history and culture of the time, we see that Paul might have been talking about specific issues in those churches, and not trying to say that women should never teach or lead.

Let's go back to the big questions. Where did these limits on women come from? Not from God's original plan when He made people, and not from the new life we have in Jesus. These limits came after sin entered the world. Sadly, over time, churches sometimes followed broken ways of thinking from society, like slavery or racism, and they also believed men should always be above women.

But those things were not part of God's plan. In fact, many leaders in church history helped show a better way. For example, John Wesley, who helped start the movement that led to the Free Methodist Church, gave women a big role in the church. His mother, Susanna Wesley, led a Bible study group that grew to 200 people! Later, Wesley had over 10,000 followers, and he let women lead groups called "bands."

Benjamin Titus Roberts, who started the Free Methodist Church, also believed that women were made in God's image and deserved the same rights as men. He believed this was part of what Jesus came to do — give freedom and new life to everyone (Galatians 3:28). So, even though there are some hard verses, when we look at the big picture of the Bible and church history, the best conclusion seems to be that God wants men and women to work together, lead together, and serve together at all levels of church leadership.



Ellen Stowe Roberts



## Appendix 2: The Baptism and Dedication of Infants

### Why Does the Free Methodist Church Let People Choose Baby Dedication or Baptism?

Some people who join the Free Methodist Church from other Christian groups are surprised to learn that we let parents choose whether to dedicate or baptize their babies. Many churches only allow one or the other. So, why does the Free Methodist Church offer both?

To answer this, one must first understand where baptism comes from and what it means. Some people think of baptism either like a “charm” as viewed in African Traditional Religion or as merely a “symbol,” but the Free Methodist Church understands baptism as a sacrament, neither as magic nor merely symbolic.



### Where Baptism Comes From

Baptism didn't start with the Christian church. Even before Jesus came, there were other groups who used water in religious ways. Here are some examples:

1. In the Old Testament, God gave the Jewish people rules about washing with water. These washings were about more than just getting clean — they showed something spiritual too. For the Jewish people, doing something with their bodies (like washing) also had religious meaning.
2. A group of Jews near the Dead Sea called the Essenes, did a special washing every day. They would go into a pool of water to show they wanted to be clean, good, and live the right way. This showed their deep desire to follow God closely.
3. Gentiles (non-Jews) who wanted to follow the Jewish faith had to go through a water ceremony too. It was part of their way of joining the Jewish faith family. This kind of baptism was a way to say, “I'm part of God's people now.”

## **What the Bible Says About Baptism**

In the New Testament, we meet John the Baptist. He preached in the desert and told people to get baptized to show they were sorry for their sins and wanted to follow God (Mark 1:4). Many people, including some of Jesus' first followers, were first followers of John (John 1:35–37).

The religious leaders didn't like what John was doing. They thought baptism was only for outsiders — not for good, faithful Jews. But John said everyone needed to admit they had sinned and needed God's forgiveness — even the religious leaders.

Still, John told people that his baptism was just a start. He said someone greater was coming — Jesus, the Messiah — who would baptize people with the Holy Spirit (John 1:29–34).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit happened on the day of Pentecost. After Jesus went back to heaven, the Holy Spirit came down to His followers. On that day, the apostle Peter said something very important: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so your sins will be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

So now, in the time of the church, baptism with water enacts outwardly what Jesus does on the inside by the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit. In baptism, God acts to integrate the one baptized in the life of the body of Christ.

### **What does baptism mean?**

In the early church, there were many kinds of baptisms (see Hebrews 6:2), so we need to ask what Christian baptism really means. Here are some key ideas:

Christian baptism has always been a clear way for someone to begin to belong to the Christian family. Long ago, Jewish people used baptism for people who weren't Jewish but wanted to join their faith. It marked entry into a new group. For this reason Paul compares baptism to circumcision (Colossians 2:11-12).

Baptism is an act of obedience to Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). The Free Methodist Church teaches people to be baptized when they become Christians. But it is a very serious choice. Sometimes it may mean that a person loses friends or may even be treated badly by their family. It means putting Jesus first before everything they used to care about. People can go to church and hear about God, but baptism enacts the full choice of following Jesus, no matter what.

### **Baptism also shows death and new life.**

This is something the apostle Paul talked about a lot. He said that baptism connects us to Jesus' death and His rising from the dead. When we are baptized, we are showing that our old life of sin is over and we are starting a brand-new life with Jesus. In Romans 6, Paul explains that when people believe in Jesus, they are joined to His death and His new life. Back then, baptism happened right away when someone came to faith. So, Paul reminded them that they had died to sin and were now alive in Christ. These weren't just events that happened to Jesus — they became real in the lives of people who trusted Him. Paul often used the phrase “in Christ” to show this close connection for those who have been baptized.

Life-transforming baptism means more than water. Water baptism is the visible action, but the Holy Spirit is the one who washes away sin and gives new life.

Some people say “baptism in the Spirit” when they talk about later experiences with the Holy Spirit. Those ideas come from Paul’s conversation about gifts of the Spirit, like in 1 Corinthians 12:7-13 where he says: “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

Christian baptism means joining God’s family, dying to the old self, starting a new life with Jesus, and being made clean and new by the Holy Spirit.

### **How did we end up with more than one way of thinking about baptism?**

Just like there are different views about when Jesus will come back, there are also different views about baptism. Baptism, like the Lord’s Supper, is something that Christians don’t fully understand. Here’s a simplified explanation of what seems to have happened:

In the records we have from the early church, the good news about new life in Jesus was preached mostly to adults. When they believed, they showed their faith by being baptized. Baptism was their way of saying they had turned away from sin and were now living a new life with Jesus. It appears, from the biblical record, that when the head of a household would convert to Christianity, he and his whole family would be baptized (e.g., Acts 16, 1 Corinthians 1).

From the beginning, the Church baptized infants. Because baptism is a sacrament in which God extends His grace to the participant, the Church included babies in the great privilege of belonging to Jesus’ family. However, over the last 500 years, denominations have developed which taught that infant baptism was unbiblical. These denominations claim that baptism should only represent the public commitment of an “adult” conversion to Christianity at the public confession of an individual’s faith. These churches focus on the reality that baptism serves as a sign, and an act of a person in public witness of faith.

Both ideas find support in the Bible. While some people have strongly argued for one side or the other, Free Methodists believe that both views can work together. Each one helps the other stay balanced and true to God’s Word. So, traditionally Free Methodists baptize babies. This view focuses on how God’s grace comes first — even before we have faith. It shows that God is the one who begins the journey of faith. It also says that children of Christian parents belong to the church family from the very beginning.

But, because the idea that baptism serves as a public confession of faith is also true, some Free Methodist parents want to reserve the ritual of baptism as a decision that their child might make upon the confession of their faith at an age when they may choose to follow Jesus for themselves. Babies, in this case, are prayed for and “dedicated” to God instead. This view reminds us that faith is a personal response, and that we all must choose Jesus for ourselves. Both sides tell an important part of the salvation story. To understand how someone becomes a Christian, we need to remember both God’s work (grace) and our response (faith).

The view that baptizes believers only — those who choose to follow Jesus — stresses that people must make their own faith decision to say “yes” to Jesus with the whole mind, heart, and will. The

view that baptizes babies shows that God is already working in people's lives, even before they make a faith decision. It reminds us that we're not saved all by ourselves — we're part of a larger church family, and God's love reaches us early, especially in the lives of children raised in Christian homes.

One thing that helps people think through this issue is that the apostle Paul connects the ideas of baptism and circumcision (Colossians 2:9-16). In the Old Testament, baby boys were circumcised to show they belonged to God's people (Genesis 17:12). In a similar way, some people believe that baptism shows we now belong to Jesus and His people. (Remember the important differences: Circumcision was only for boys, but baptism is for everyone — boys and girls. Also, being part of God's people through circumcision had to do with being part of the Israelite faith, while baptism into Christ is about being part of a new kind of family: the church.

The church should avoid going too far in either direction. One mistake is thinking baptism is just something we do to show our faith, and forgetting that God is the one who helps us believe in the first place. The other mistake is thinking baptism is almost "magical," as if it saves someone all by itself, without faith or trust in Jesus. The Free Methodist Church tries to hold both parts together — God's grace and our faith.

So, when pastors baptize babies, they should clearly pray that God will help that child grow up to personally trust Jesus, even though the child is already part of the church family. And when pastors dedicate babies instead, they should thank God that He is already working in that child's life, and that the child already belongs to God's people.

Here's the most important thing: whether someone is baptized upon confession of faith, or confirms the promises made by their parents when they were baptized as a baby, what really matters is faith in Jesus. Faith means trust. It's more than just knowing facts in your head. Paul even said in Romans 2:25 that without faith and obedience, circumcision means nothing. The same is true for baptism. What matters most is faith and obedience.

### **What do Free Methodists do?**

Free Methodists practice both infant baptism and child dedication ceremonies. Both focus on God's grace and the necessity of faith in the life and salvation of an individual. When Christian parents have a strong preference for one ceremony over the other, our pastors respect their choice.

Infant baptism marks the active grace of God in the life of the baby, incorporating the child into the community of faith. It is a sacrament where, Free Methodists believe, God acts to make His grace real in the life of the infant. Baby dedication, on the other hand, represents a decision on the part of the parents to raise the child in the church, and as best they can, to help the child come to faith at an early age. Baby dedication is not a sacrament of the Christian church but can act as an important and meaningful step in rearing a child in the life of the church and in faith.

To sum it up, all Christian churches, including the Free Methodist Church have their roots in a tradition which practices baby baptism. Over time, churches have developed different ways of understanding Scripture. As the Free Methodist Church welcomes people who believe in both ways of doing things, it gives parents the choice of which ceremony they prefer.



## **APPENDIX 3: Membership Covenant and Constitution**

### **Membership Covenant**

#### **Privilege and Responsibility**

¶154 Membership in the church is a high privilege and responsibility. We believe the Covenant required of members is consistent with the teaching of the written Word of God. Faithfulness to the covenant is evidence of the individual member's desire to sustain a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord, to bring glory to God, to advance the cause of God on earth, to preserve the unity of the Body of Christ, and to cherish the fellowship of the Free Methodist Church.

¶155 When a member does not keep his/her covenant and habitually violates his/her vows, it is the responsibility of the minister and members to point to the failure and to seek in love to restore the member. If, after these steps have been taken, the member does not keep his/her commitments, he/she must be dealt with in accord with the due processes of the Church.

¶156 Members of the Free Methodist Church, trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of the other members of the Church, make the following confession and commitments as a covenant with the Lord and the Church.

#### **The Confession and Commitment**

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

#### **As Regards God**

¶157 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.

## The Constitution of the Free Methodist Church

¶158

### **As Regards Ourselves and Others**

¶158 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**

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

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

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

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

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

### **As Regards the Church**

¶160 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.



## **APPENDIX 4: Essential Membership Instruction**

*The following is an outline for a complete 10-hour membership course developed by Area Director Mike Reynen and used often in Africa. Also available digitally is the FMCUSA membership course. Go to “Recommended Resources” in the sidebar or at the beginning of this booklet to find the link.*

*[Sidebar: URL and QR code for “You are the Church”]*

### **10 lessons, one hour each lesson.**

Instructors should read for themselves all the material of each lesson. Prepare for themselves what they will say to the membership candidates. Materials going with this outline: *Book of Discipline* chapters 1, 2, 3, 6 and Membership Ritual.

#### **Lesson 1 (one hour) Membership privileges and Requirements**

*Instructor Note: Main point in this lesson is to understand Membership Privileges and Requirements. Especially to have a first idea of the various materials they will come to know things they must do.*

*Book of Discipline paragraphs 150-153*

- (15 min) Par. 150 explain no extra things can be required for membership.
- (15 min) Par. 151 explain baptism, personal testimony of salvation, and pledge to seek sanctification.
- (15 min) Par. 152 Articles of Religion can be called statement of faith (we read in detail later),
- Membership Covenant is covered in detail in lessons 2 and 3. But explain basically what it is in this lesson.
- Christian conduct is detailed in Chapter 3, Christian Journey.
- (15 min) Par. 153 each candidate must be approved by Board of Administration and then answer questions during a Sunday morning service and be received into membership.

#### **Lesson 2 (one hour) Membership Covenant**

*Instructor Note: Main point of lessons 2 and 3 is to give membership candidates clear understanding of the Membership Covenant. Give them each a copy of it. Point out how it is stated in terms of commitment. Point out also the four sections of the covenant. Book of Discipline paragraphs 154-157*

- (15 min) Par 154-156 read and give any needed explanation for these paragraphs. Par 157 As Regards God
- (15 min) Habits of devotion
- (15 min) Observing the Lord’s Day
- (15 min) Loyalty to Christ; no compromising (no secret societies)

### **Lesson 3 (one hour) Membership Covenant continued**

Book of Discipline Par 158-160

- (20 min) Par 158 As Regards Ourselves and Others
- (20 min) Par 159 As Regards the Institutions of God
- (20 min) Par 160 As Regards the Church

### **Lesson 4 (one hour) Articles of Religion - God**

Book of Discipline Par 100-107 (supporting Scriptures pages 16-18)

- (10 min) Par 100, 102 The Holy Trinity
- (10 min) Par 103 The Son – His Incarnation
- (10 min) Par 104 The Son – His Resurrection and Exaltation
- (10 min) Par 105 The Holy Spirit – His Person
- (10 min) Par 106 The Holy Spirit – His Work in Salvation
- (10 min) Par 107 The Holy Spirit – His Relation to the Church

### **Lesson 5 (one hour) Articles of Religion – Scripture, Humankind**

Book of Discipline Par 108-113 (supporting Scriptures pages 16-18)

- (10 min) Par 108, 102 The Scriptures – Authority
- (10 min) Par 109 The Scriptures – Authority of the Old Testament
- (10 min) Par 110 The Scriptures – New Testament
- (10 min) Par 111 Humankind – Free Moral Persons
- (10 min) Par 112 Humankind – Law of Life and Love
- (10 min) Par 113 Humankind – Good Works

### **Lesson 6 (one hour) Articles of Religion – Salvation**

Book of Discipline Par 114-120 (supporting Scriptures pages 16-18)

- (20 min) Par 114, 115 Christ's Sacrifice; New Life in Christ
- (20 min) Par 116, 117, 118 Justification, Regeneration, Adoption
- (20 min) Par 119, 120 Sanctification, Restoration

### **Lesson 7 (one hour) Articles of Religion – The Church**

Book of Discipline Par 121-125 (supporting Scriptures pages 16-18)

- (15 min) Par 121 The Church (5 min) Par 122 The Language of Worship
- (10 min) Par 123 The Sacraments
- (15 min) Par 124 Humankind – Free Moral Persons
- (15 min) Par 125 Humankind – Law of Life and Love

### **Lesson 8 (one hour) Articles of Religion – Last Things**

Book of Discipline Par 126-130 (supporting Scriptures pages 16-18)

- (20 min) Par 126 The Kingdom of God
- (10 min) Par 127 The Return of Christ
- (10 min) Par 128 Resurrection

- (15 min) Par 129 Judgment
- (15 min) Par 130 Final Destiny

## **Lesson 9 (one hour) Christian Journey and Local Church**

*Instructor should read par 3000 and 3010 of chapter 3, the Christian Journey. Then, mainly explain about how the Christian life is a spiritual journey. The instruction next explains our basic administrative structures in the Local Church. You as instructor should read all of page 119, 120, 121. This is background for you about Local Church. Book of Discipline Par 3000, 3010, 6000-6060, 6200.E, 6250, 6300, 6310, 6330*

- (10 min) Par 3000, 3010 The Christian Journey
- (10 min) Par 6200.E Selecting Leaders
- (10 min) Par 6250 Membership Meeting (Society Meeting as in *Book of Discipline*)

*Note: FMC historically refers to the annual meeting of all members as “Society Meeting.” In the African context we recommend instead “Membership Meeting” because of the implications of the term “society” in the African context.*

- (10 min) Par 6300 Local Board of Administration
- (10 min) Par 6310 Nominating Committee
- (10 min) Par 6330 Membership Care Committee

*The sections of this Lesson may take longer than one hour, total. You should study each sub-section and determine if you need more time than one hour for this lesson.*

## **Lesson 10 (one hour) Reception of Members**

*In this last lesson you present to the membership candidates the questions they will answer in front of the congregation. By answering the questions in front of the congregation the incoming candidates are making vows and entering a covenant with the church and the Lord.*

Book of Discipline Par 7130 and 8800

- (20 min) Par 7130 Membership Care Committee

*You as instructor should read this paragraph in detail, but no need of reading all to the candidates. You simply explain that our process for dealing with discipline or correction issues is by the Membership Care Committee.*

- (40 min) Par 8800 Membership ritual

*Make sure all candidates are familiar with the questions. In the Sunday service after the Membership instruction is finished, this ritual should be conducted.*



## **APPENDIX 5: Reaching Urban Centers.**

In a presentation at the Lausanne Congress in Cape Town 2010, Pastor Tim Keller gave six keys to reaching cities. These define the methodology that the church should employ in the urban context. Although Keller is not a Wesleyan, what he presented expresses a Wesleyan spirit. This could be used as a church leadership seminar when appropriate.

### **Churches in the city should employ the following methods:**

Be extremely patient with matters of cultural sensitivity. City churches will always have people from different cultures. Cultural, ethnic and social diversity is much more common in cities. Our presentation of the gospel has to include reconciliation between people, groups and races.

Show how faith is related to work. Ninety percent of urban life has to do with work. We cannot ignore that reality. Our presentation of the gospel has to include a theology of work. Help people see work as the context of personal spiritual growth and the context of their ministry. We have to adapt the church schedule to the work schedule (and traffic!) of the people.

Be constantly open to disorder and change. The city is always in transition; people move very easily. You have to be flexible, creative and adaptable. You have to be willing to respond quickly and change methods with social changes.

Be intensely committed to a gospel that includes compassionate care for the needs of people. A simply personal and private gospel will not pass the test. It is necessary to present an integral gospel that affects the person, their interpersonal relationships and the systems of society.

Being committed to the arts. People who live in cities are more connected with music, cinema, theater, painting (formal or on the walls) and with other forms of visual art. Generally, they have expectations of better design, sound or presentation quality. We must present a gospel that includes the beauty and creativity of God.

Find ways to cooperate with churches of other denominations. The urban challenge is bigger than any church or denomination. To be effective in the city, we have to create strategic alliances with others who want to advance God's kingdom more than advance their own kingdom. Cooperating with others shows that the kingdom of God is bigger than just one organization.

### **How can you as an individual be part of this urban commitment?**

What can your church do to cooperate with God's vision of reaching the cities? CDN is a methodology that has borne fruit in large cities around the world and in Africa. It works much better in the urban context as opposed to traditional church methods and models. In that context:

Pray for the cities near you. Ask God to open doors of contact in those cities.

Pray that God will open their eyes to the needs of the place and show them the resources and

people that are available within the community to respond practically and creatively to those needs. Find ways to involve the whole community and make the gospel relevant to generate transformation, loving your neighbor in an integral way. Sow from the beginning the DNA of transformation!

When you are doing the CDN investigation work to identify fields ready for church planting, think about the strategic places due to the means of transport or other factors. Pray that God will show you communities that you can connect to other places that will lead you to concentrations of people.

As you search for people of peace, pray that God will direct you to people who have contacts in the city. Perhaps you do not have contacts in the city, but perhaps the new people you are going to lead to Christ have relatives or friends in the city.

When people from your church or community move to town, don't lose touch. Make an effort to stay connected, especially with young adults moving to the city.

And if you are ministering in the city, in addition to the things mentioned above by Tim Keller, expand your vision to reach all sectors of the city both socially and geographically.



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**The Free Methodist Church participates with God in His redemptive purposes in Africa by developing healthy leaders, multiplying committed disciples, and empowering transformational churches.**





## Resources

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