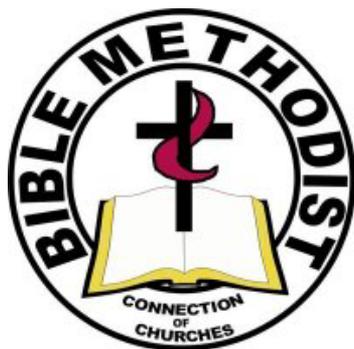


DISCIPLINE OF THE BIBLE METHODIST CONNECTION OF CHURCHES



Published by
The General Conference
2014

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LETTER OF PURPOSE

from the Discipline Revision Committee
in the Year of Our Lord 2014

To the current membership and future generations of Bible Methodists: Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

The defining document of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, known as The Discipline, was first published in 1970. In the providence of God, the 11th General Conference of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, meeting in open session, determined that the *Discipline* required revision. To that end, the General Conference chose a committee to undertake the task of reviewing and revising the *Discipline*.

Recognizing the enormity of our task and the dangers inherent in it, we, the Discipline Revision Committee, approached this task with godly fear and trepidation. Yet, we also engaged this task with prayer, confidence in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and a determination to revise the valuable work we inherited so that it meets the needs of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches to organize and function within the 21st century and to fulfill the Great Commission to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). Specifically, we sought to revise the *Discipline* so that it:

- States clearly and concisely the doctrine of scriptural holiness and the principles of a holy and righteous lifestyle that are found in Holy Scripture. To that end, statements on doctrine and lifestyle issues have footnotes which cite the scriptural texts from which they were drawn.
- Offers both vision and guidance for the growth of the Connection and the Church at large in the spirit and context of the Great Commission.
- Encourages and supports evangelism, revival, and discipleship by all means that are available to the Bible Methodists.
- Is easier to use, both for the ministry and for the laity. Specifically, we sought to improve the internal organization of the *Discipline*. Where deemed appropriate, we sought to rewrite those areas where the language was archaic, while preserving its original meaning and intent.
- Supplies clear statements of the organizational philosophy and policies of the Connection. This includes a governmental framework and organization for efficient, united action within the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches for the spread of the Gospel.

- Defines clearly the concept of local autonomy as well as the rights and responsibilities of the local churches, the Regional Conferences, and the General Connection.
- Has the organizational flexibility necessary to meet the immediate needs of the Connection as well as the needs of future generations, for as long as God permits us to remain.
- Codifies government practices that have been supported by tradition but have not been recorded.
- Outlines the qualifications and processes, as well as the rights and the responsibilities of membership, lay leadership, and ministerial leadership.
- Provides rituals as ministerial resources that are appropriate to the Bible Methodists and which are relevant and usable in the contexts of the 21st century.

We recognize that a perfect *Discipline* is no substitute for the empowering, renewing presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst. However, a poorly revised *Discipline* could hinder God's work for years to come. Therefore, we, the Bible Methodist Discipline Revision Committee, have endeavored to work with all due diligence to revise our *Discipline* so that it will support all aspects of the work of the Kingdom for the glory of God.

For the very precious spirit of unity and common purpose that we have consistently experienced in this process, we give God glory and thanks.

The Members of the Bible Methodist Discipline Revision Committee

PART I

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

SECTION I INTRODUCTION

I. Name

1. The name of this communion is The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.

II. Statement of Mission

2. The mission of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches is to glorify God by spreading scriptural holiness around the world through loving God with all our hearts and our neighbor as ourselves, through evangelism and discipleship, and through exemplifying the pattern of holy living taught in the Scriptures.

III. Preamble

3. In order that we may preserve and pass on to future generations the biblical doctrine and practice of Christian living transmitted to us as evangelicals in the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition, especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification; and to provide organizational structure through sound principles of church government; and to prepare the way for effective cooperation with other branches of the Church of Jesus Christ in advancing God's kingdom, we, the ministers and lay leaders of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, meeting in official assemblies, do hereby ordain, adopt, and establish this *Discipline* as our governing document.

IV. Constitutional and Statutory Law

4. The constitution defines the doctrine and foundational principles upon which The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches exists. Because these are our guiding principles, changes to the constitution require careful deliberation and a lengthy process that must be finalized by a two-thirds, connection-wide vote (see para. 175-177).

5. Statutory law outlines the manner in which constitutional principles are practiced and must be consistent with the guiding principles of the constitution. Though changing these practices does not require the review and adoption standards required to change the constitution, since they define the character of who we are, they should be changed only with careful deliberation (see para. 178-179).

SECTION II STATEMENT OF FAITH

Historical Connection to Articles of Religion

6. When the Methodist movement in America officially became a church in 1784, John Wesley provided the American Methodists with doctrinal statements, which contained twenty-four “Articles of Religion” or basic statements of belief. These Articles of Religion were taken from the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England in which the Methodist movement had begun, and they were the standard for instruction within the Methodist movement. When these articles were voted on by the American conference, an additional article was added regarding the American context, bringing the total number of articles to twenty-five. These articles became the basic standards for Christian belief in the Methodist Episcopal Church in North America. First published in the Methodist Book of Discipline in 1790, the Articles of Religion have continued to be part of official Methodist statements of belief. Fully embracing our Methodist heritage, the following statements of faith find their origin in these Articles of Religion, which are ultimately rooted in God’s unchanging word.

I. The Holy Trinity

7. We believe in the one¹ triune² God, self-existent³ and everlasting,⁴ both holy⁵

¹ **Deuteronomy 6:4** “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD”; cf. 2 Sam. 7:22; Isa. 45:21-22; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; Eph. 4:5-6.

² **Matthew 28:19-20** “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen”; cf. Matt. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 13:14; John 14:6-27; 15:26; Eph. 2:13-18; 1 Pet. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:4-6.

³ **John 5:26** “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself”; cf. Psa. 90:1-4.

⁴ **Exodus 3:14-15** “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations.”

⁵ **Leviticus 19:2** “Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy”; cf. Psa. 99:9.

and loving¹ in nature, of infinite power,² wisdom,³ and goodness;⁴ the Creator,⁵ Sustainer,⁶ and Ruler⁷ of all things. God exists in three persons—the Father, the Son,⁸ and the Holy Spirit⁹—each eternal in being, equal in power and glory, and identical in essence.

II. God The Father

8. We believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth—from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things.¹⁰ He intentionally seeks to relate to all people as Father,¹¹ thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives sinners, adopting¹² as His children all who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

III. The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

9. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal¹³ and only begotten Son of

¹ **1 John 4:8** “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

² **Psalms 147:5** “Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite.”

³ **1 Timothy 1:17** “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen”; cf. **Psa. 104:24**.

⁴ **Psalms 119:68** “Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes”; cf. **Psa. 25:8**.

⁵ **Genesis 1:1** “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”; cf. **Psa. 90:2**; **John 1:3**; **Col. 1:16**; **Heb. 11:3**.

⁶ **Colossians 1:17** “And he is before all things, and by him all things consist”; cf. **Heb. 1:3**.

⁷ **Psalms 115:3** “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased”; cf. **Psa. 24:8**; **1 Chron. 29:11-12**.

⁸ **John 1:1** “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”; cf. **John 10:30**; **20:28**; **Phil. 2:6**; **1 Tim. 3:16**.

⁹ **Hebrews 9:14** “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”; cf. **1 Pet. 3:18**; **2 Pet. 1:21**.

¹⁰ **Romans 11:36** “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen”; cf. **1 Cor. 8:6**; **Eph. 4:6**.

¹¹ **Isaiah 64:8** “But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand”; cf. **Psa. 68:5**; **Matt. 6:9**, **7:11**, **23:9**.

¹² **Romans 8:14-15** “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.”

¹³ **Hebrews 13:8** “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever”; cf. **Rev. 1:8**.

God,¹ became man without ever ceasing to be God;² He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,³ and lived a sinless life.⁴ He died on the cross to be the one sufficient sacrifice for sin⁵ and to reconcile all mankind to God.⁶ Then He rose bodily the third day from the grave⁷ and ascended into Heaven,⁸ where He is enthroned at God's right hand as our intercessor.⁹ He will return¹⁰ to judge all humanity at the last day.

IV. The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

10. We believe the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. As the third Person of the Trinity,¹¹ he continually glorifies Jesus

¹ **1 John 4:9** "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him"; cf. Matt. 3:16-17; John 1:14, 3:16-17.

² **Mark 10:45** "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many"; cf. John 1:1, 14; Eph. 2:6-8.

³ Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 1:27-35.

⁴ **1 Peter 2:22** "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth"; cf. Heb. 7:26; 1 John 3:5.

⁵ **1 Corinthians 15:3** "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures"; cf. 1 Pet. 2:24; Rom. 5:15-19.

⁶ **Romans 5:10** "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life"; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:5.

⁷ **Mark 16:6** "And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him"; cf. Matt. 28:5-9; Mark 16:12; Luke 24:39; John 20:26-29; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:4.

⁸ **Acts 1:9** "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

⁹ **Romans 8:34** "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us"; cf. Acts 2:33; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 1:3; 10:12.

¹⁰ **Acts 1:11** "Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

¹¹ **John 14:26** "But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you"; cf. Matt. 28:19.

Christ,¹ convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment to come,² regenerates all who repent and trust in Christ for salvation,³ sanctifies and indwells believers,⁴ and guides into all truth.⁵ He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and empowering the believer for godly living and service.⁶

V. The Holy Scriptures

11. We believe that the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures and are the written Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit⁷ and therefore inerrant in the original writings,⁸ and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. They contain all that is necessary for our salvation⁹ and are the supreme authority for faith and

¹ **John 16:13-15** “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew *it* unto you.”

² **John 16:7-8** “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

³ **Titus 3:5** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”; cf. John 3:5; Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6.

⁴ **John 14:17** “*Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you”; cf. 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

⁵ **John 16:13** “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come”; cf. 1 John 2:20, 27; 1 Cor. 2:10-12.

⁶ **2 Corinthians 3:17-18** “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord”; cf. Gal. 5:22-25; John 14:16-17.

⁷ **2 Peter 1:20-21** “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16.

⁸ **1 Peter 1:25** “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you”; cf. John 10:35; Tit. 1:2.

⁹ **2 Timothy 3:15** “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”; cf. 2 Tim. 3:17; James 1:21.

practice.¹ The Old Testament is not contrary to the New;² for both in the Old and New Testaments everlasting life is offered to mankind³ by grace through faith in Christ,⁴ who is the only Mediator between God and man.⁵ The Holy Scriptures have been given for our comfort in order that we may have hope,⁶ and for our correction and instruction in order that we may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.⁷

VI. Sin: Original Sin and Acts of Sin

12. We believe that sin and death came into the world through the disobedience of Adam.⁸ We believe that sin is of two kinds: original and actual.

13. Original Sin. We believe that original sin, or inherited depravity, is the corruption of the nature of all the offspring of Adam⁹; therefore, by nature we are fallen from original righteousness,¹⁰ hostile to God and His Law,¹¹ and utterly

¹ **1 Thessalonians 2:13** “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe”; cf. Isa. 8:20; 2 Pet. 3:2.

² **Galatians 3:21** “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law”; cf. Rom. 3:31; 7:12; 1 Tim. 1:8.

³ **1 John 5:13** “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”; cf. Gen. 15:6; Psa. 32:1; Rom. 4:1-9.

⁴ **John 5:39** “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me”; cf. Rom. 4:1-11; Eph. 2:8; Acts 10:43.

⁵ **1 Timothy 2:5** “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

⁶ **Romans 15:4** “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope”; cf. 1 Cor. 10:11.

⁷ **2 Timothy 3:16-17** “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good work.”

⁸ **Romans 5:12** “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

⁹ **1 Corinthians 15:22** “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”; cf. Gen. 8:21; Psa. 51:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-12.

¹⁰ Rom. 1:18-25; Mark 7:21-23.

¹¹ **Psalms 53:3** “Every one of them is gone back: they are altogether become filthy; *there is none that doeth good, no, not one*”; cf. Rom 8:7.

unable to remedy our lost condition¹ apart from grace.² We further believe that, though its control over the believer is broken,³ inherited depravity continues to exist in the nature of the regenerate until the heart is fully cleansed by the filling with the Holy Spirit in entire sanctification.⁴

14. Acts of Sin. We believe that acts of sin are committed by morally responsible persons choosing to do what they know is wrong⁵ or choosing not to do what they know is required.⁶ These acts of sin are therefore not to be confused with shortcomings, infirmities, faults, mistakes, failures, or other such deviations from a standard of perfect conduct which are the residual effects of the Fall.⁷

¹ **Ephesians 2:1-3** “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others”; cf. Rom 8:3.

² **Romans 5:18-21** “Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift* came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord”; cf. Eph. 2:8.

³ **Romans 6:6-7** “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin”; cf. Rom. 7:1-5; 1 Cor. 10:13.

⁴ **1 Corinthians 3:1-3** “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even as unto babes* in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to *bear it*, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”; cf. Rom. 8:6-7; Acts 15:9; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:23.

⁵ **1 John 3:4** “Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law”; cf. John 8:34-36; Rom. 3:23; 6:15-23; 14:23; 1 John 1:9-10; 3:4-10; 5:17.

⁶ **James 4:17** “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.”

⁷ **Romans 8:26** “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered”; cf. Rom. 15:1; Gal. 4:13.

VII. Free Will

15. We believe God created humanity in His image with the ability to choose between right and wrong.¹ As a result of Adam's fall and the consequent corruption of human nature,² mankind is unable to choose right apart from God's grace.³ But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what human effort cannot do.⁴ Therefore, individuals who reach and retain moral awareness⁵ are responsible for their choices and actions. Prevenient grace is bestowed freely upon all mankind, enabling all who will to be saved.⁶ Only as a result of the enabling grace of God working in us are we able to perform works that are pleasing and acceptable to God.⁷

VIII. Salvation

16. We believe that salvation is the gift of God⁸ brought to man by grace⁹ and freely received through faith¹⁰ and not by our own works.¹¹ God graciously

¹ **Genesis 1:27** "So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them"; cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:11-13.

² **Romans 5:18-19** "Therefore as by the offence of one *judgment came* upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift* came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous"; cf. Gen. 8:21; Matt. 15:19.

³ **Romans 3:12** "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one"; cf. Rom. 3:10-18; Psa. 53:3; Eph. 2:1-3; Rom. 8:3.

⁴ **1 Corinthians 4:7** "For who maketh thee to differ *from another?* and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive *it*, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received *it?*"; cf. Tit. 2:11-12; 1 Cor. 15:10; Acts 16:14.

⁵ **Isaiah 7:16** "For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings"; cf. Rom. 2:5-6.

⁶ **Titus 2:11** "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men"; cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:9; Rom. 1:20-21.

⁷ **Philippians 2:13** "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure"; cf. 1 Cor. 15:10; Heb. 13:21.

⁸ **Romans 6:23** "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

⁹ **Acts 15:11** "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."

¹⁰ **Romans 5:1-2** "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God"; cf. Heb. 11:6.

¹¹ **Ephesians 2:8-9** "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"; cf. Rom. 4:2-5.

justifies,¹ regenerates all who repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior,² and seals them as His own with the Holy Spirit.³ As the children of God⁴ they are restored to fellowship with Him,⁵ delivered from the penalty of sin⁶ as well as from its willful practice,⁷ are initially sanctified,⁸ and given assurance of salvation by the Holy Spirit who dwells in them.⁹

IX. Entire Sanctification

17. We believe that entire sanctification¹⁰ is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is cleansed from inherited depravity¹¹ and empowered

¹ **Romans 3:28** “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law”; cf. Rom. 5:9; 8:33; Phil. 3:9.

² **Titus 3:5** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”; cf. Acts 13:38-39; 1 Pet. 1:18-19.

³ **Ephesians 1:13-14** “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

⁴ **Galatians 3:26** “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”; cf. John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:5-7.

⁵ **1 John 1:7** “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”; cf. 2 Cor. 5:18.

⁶ **Romans 5:9** “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

⁷ **1 John 3:9**, “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot sin, because he is born of God”; cf. 1 Cor. 15:34; Rom. 6:20-22.

⁸ **1 Corinthians 6:11** “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God”; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:2.

⁹ **Romans 8:16** “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God”; cf. 1 John 3:24; 4:13.

¹⁰ **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

¹¹ **Acts 15:8-9** “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith”; cf. Ps. 51:5-8, 10; Isa. 6:5-7.

for more effective service¹ through faith in Jesus Christ.² It is subsequent to regeneration and is accomplished in a moment of time when the believer presents himself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God.³ The Spirit-filled believer is thus enabled to love God with an undivided heart.⁴

18. We believe entire sanctification is both preceded⁵ and followed by growth in grace,⁶ expressed in advancing Christlikeness.⁷ After entire sanctification, we grow in grace by responding to the Holy Spirit as He guides⁸ us to apply the principles of holiness in all areas of life.⁹

X. Sin after Salvation

19. We believe that after we have experienced salvation, it is possible to commit sin and depart from saving faith,¹⁰ for in this life there is no such height of

¹ **Acts 1:8** “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth;” cf. Acts 4:33; Eph. 5:18-21.

² Eph. 3:16-17; Rom. 6:9-11.

³ **Romans 12:1-2** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”; cf. Rom. 1:8; 6:11-13; Eph. 2:1-3; 3:16-17.

⁴ **James 4:8** “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded”; cf. Psa. 86:11.

⁵ **2 Peter 1:6-8** “And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

⁶ **2 Corinthians 7:1** “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”; cf. 2 Pet. 3:18.

⁷ **2 Corinthians 3:18** “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

⁸ **Galatians 5:16** “*This* I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”; cf. Gal. 5:17-18, 25; Rom. 8:14.

⁹ **Titus 2:12** “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.”

¹⁰ Rom. 11:17-24; Heb. 6:4-6; 2 Pet. 2:18-22; Gal. 5:4.

holiness from which it is impossible to fall.¹ But by the grace of God, one who as fallen into sin may by repentance and faith find forgiveness and restoration.²

XI. Good Works

20. We believe good works are the necessary fruit of faith³ and follow salvation⁴ but cannot save us from our sins or prevent divine judgment.⁵ They are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ,⁶ adorn the doctrine of God,⁷ and by them a living faith may be evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.⁸

XII. The Church

21. We believe that the Church universal is composed of the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ,⁹ who is its founder and only Head,¹⁰ in whom it is being built into a holy dwelling place of God by the Spirit.¹¹ The mission of the

¹ **1 Timothy 4:1** “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils”; cf. Ezek. 18:24; John 15:4-6, 1 Tim. 1:18-19; 4:16; Heb. 10:26-29; Rev. 2:5.

² **1 John 2:1** “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”; cf. 1 John 1:9; 2:12; Matt. 18:21-22.

³ Jam. 2:20-26.

⁴ **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”; cf. Tit. 2:14.

⁵ **Galatians 2:16** “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified”; cf. Gal. 5:6; Rom. 3:20.

⁶ **Matthew 5:16** “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven”; cf. John 15:8, 1 Pet. 2:12; Tit. 3:8, 14.

⁷ **1 Timothy 2:10** “But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works”; cf. Tit. 2:10.

⁸ **Colossians 1:10** “that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”; cf. Matt. 7:16-20, Phil. 1:11; 2 Tim. 3:17; Heb. 10:24.

⁹ **Romans 12:5** “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another”; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1.

¹⁰ **Ephesians 1:22-23** “And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”; cf. Matt 16:18; Eph. 5:23-24; Heb. 12:2.

¹¹ **Ephesians 2:19-22** “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the

Church is to make Christlike¹ disciples of all nations² through the proclamation of the Word of God,³ the administration of the sacraments,⁴ the exercise of the Spirit's gifts,⁵ and obedience to all that Christ commands.⁶

22. A local church is a body of believers who agree to be governed by Scripture and to meet together regularly⁷ for the purposes of worship,⁸ mutual edification,⁹ discipleship,¹⁰ fellowship,¹¹ evangelism,¹² and good works.¹³

foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

¹ **Ephesians 4:11-13** "And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ"; cf. 1 Cor 14:26; Titus 2:14.

² **Matthew 28:18-20** "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*' Amen."

³ **2 Timothy 4:2** "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."; cf. 1 Tim 4:16.

⁴ Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:20-34.

⁵ **1 Corinthians 12:7** "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*"; cf. Eph. 4:13-16.

⁶ **Matthew 28:20** "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even to the end of the age.*' Amen."

⁷ **Hebrews 10:25** "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

⁸ **Acts 13:2** "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

⁹ **Hebrews 10:24** "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"; cf. 1 Cor. 14:23-26.

¹⁰ Acts 15:35; Eph. 5:21; Matt. 18:15-17.

¹¹ Acts 2:41-47.

¹² **1 Corinthians 14:24-25** "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or *one* unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on *his* face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth."

¹³ **Galatians 6:10** "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

XIII. The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

23. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ¹ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are signs of our profession of faith and of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us, refreshing, strengthening, and confirming our faith in Him.

24. *Baptism.* We believe that water baptism serves as a symbol of regeneration or the new birth.² It signifies acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ,³ rejection of one's former life of sin,⁴ and identification with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection.⁵ By means of this sacrament, believers declare their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.⁶ Baptism is for those who have consciously renounced their sins, accepted Christ as Savior, and are committed to following Him.

25. *The Lord's Supper:* We believe that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption through Christ's death⁷ and of our hope in His vic-

¹ **Matthew 28:19** "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"; cf. 1 Cor. 11:25.

² **Romans 6:3-5** "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

³ **Acts 2:38** "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost."

⁴ **Colossians 2:11-12** "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."

⁵ Rom. 6:3-5.

⁶ **Acts 2:41** "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls"; cf. Acts 8:12; 18:8.

⁷ **1 Corinthians 11:23-25** "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me"; cf. Matt. 26:26-29.

torious return,¹ as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other.² To such as receive it in a worthy manner, with humility and faith,³ the Lord's Supper becomes a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.

XIV. The Second Coming of Christ

26. We believe that the imminent and bodily return⁴ of Jesus Christ⁵ is that blessed hope⁶ of believers, providing a powerful incentive to holy living⁷ and inspiring a zeal for world evangelism.⁸ Upon His return, Jesus Christ will fulfill

¹ **1 Corinthians 11:26** "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

² **1 Corinthians 10:16-17** "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

³ **1 Corinthians 11:27-29** "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

⁴ **Acts 1:11** "Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"; cf. Job 19:25-27; Acts 1:6-11; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Jam. 5:7-8.

⁵ **John 14:1-3** "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"; cf. Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 17:22-37.

⁶ **Titus 2:13** "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ."

⁷ **1 Thessalonians 3:13** "To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints"; cf. Tit. 2:11-14; Jam. 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 3:11-12; 1 John 3:2-3.

⁸ **Matthew 28:19-20** "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age." Amen."

all Scripture concerning the final triumph of good over evil,¹ consummate His kingdom, and judge the world in righteousness.²

XV. The Resurrection of the Dead

27. We believe in the resurrection of all mankind³ at which time the body and soul will be reunited. The resurrection of the just is unto eternal life⁴; the resurrection of the wicked is unto eternal punishment.⁵ The bodily resurrection of Jesus is a miracle of supreme importance and foundational to our faith.⁶

XVI. The Judgment of Mankind

28. We believe that God is the Judge⁷ of all and the acts of His judgment are based on His omniscience and eternal justice.⁸ His administration of judgment

¹ **Revelation 22:12-14** “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city”; cf. Phil. 3:20-21; Heb. 1:8-12; 1 John 3:2-3.

² **Acts 17:31** “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead”; cf. Zech. 14:1-4; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-16; 22:6-7.

³ **John 5:28-29** “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

⁴ **Romans 8:11** “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you”; cf. 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:50-58; 2 Cor. 4:14; 1 Thess. 4:14-17; 1 John 3:2; Rev. 20:6.

⁵ **John 5:28-29** “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation”; cf. Matt. 25:46; Rev. 20:11-13.

⁶ Matt. 28:1-20, Luke 24:1-53, John 20-21, 1 Cor. 15:12-22.

⁷ **Ecclesiastes 12:14** “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil”; cf. Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1.

⁸ **Acts 17:31** “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead”; cf. Rom. 2:16.

will culminate before His throne¹ of great majesty and power, where records will be examined² and final rewards and punishments³ will be administered.

XVII. Eternal Destiny

29. We believe that there is conscious, personal existence after death.⁴ The final destiny of each person is decided by his response to God's grace⁵ and not by any arbitrary decree of God. The new heavens and new earth with their eternal glory⁶ and the blessedness of Christ's presence is the final abode of those who choose the salvation which God provides through Jesus Christ.⁷ The Lake of Fire with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who neglect this great salvation.⁸

¹ **Revelation 20:11-13** "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book* of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."

² **Romans 14:10-12** "But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, *As I live*, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

³ Matt. 25:31-46.

⁴ **Daniel 12:2** "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

⁵ **Hebrews 2:1-3** "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him"; cf. 2 Cor. 5:10.

⁶ **2 Peter 3:13** "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"; cf. Isa. 65:17, 22; Rev. 21:1.

⁷ **John 14:3** "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

⁸ **Matthew 25:41** "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"; cf. Matt. 9:43-48; 25:34-46; Rev. 20:11-15.

The Authority of the Statement of Faith

30. The Statement of Faith is not intended to include every detail of our beliefs. The Bible is our final authority, but we do believe that the Statement of Faith is an accurate scriptural summary of these doctrines. It should serve as a tool for instruction and discipleship. Adherence to the Statement of Faith is necessary for our unity and is, therefore, a qualification for lay and ministerial leadership.

SECTION III PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

I. Chief Principles

31. The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches purposes to relate timeless biblical principles to contemporary society. We hold that the Scriptures make up the foundation for Christian living. We further believe that the historic ethical standards of the church serve as guidelines to holy living. In listing certain practices to avoid, we recognize that no listing can encompass all forms of evil in the world. Therefore, it is vital that our people study God's Word and earnestly seek the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we can cultivate sensitivity to evil that transcends the mere letter of the law by remembering this admonition: "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess. 5:21-22). The admonition given to John Wesley by his mother is a good basis for building such sensitivity to the sinfulness of this world: "Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of body over mind, that thing for you is sin."

32. In harmony with the historic expectations for Methodists, those who are admitted to membership in our churches are expected to evidence their desire of salvation: first, by doing no harm—by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced; second, by doing good of every possible sort and as far as possible to all men; and third, by attending upon all the ordinances of God.

33. We believe that the two great commandments which require us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves contain the sum of the divine law as it is revealed in Scripture.

34. We believe that we should demonstrate love for others, not only toward fellow believers, but also toward both those who are not believers, those who oppose us, and those who engage in sinful actions. We are to deal with those who oppose us graciously, gently, patiently, and humbly. God forbids the stirring up of strife, the taking of revenge, or the threat or the use of violence as a means of resolving personal conflict or obtaining personal justice. Although God commands us to abhor sinful actions, we are to love and pray for any person who engages in such behavior.

35. The church joyfully proclaims the good news that we may be delivered from all sin and begin to live a new life in Christ. Christlike living means that by God's grace we put away old patterns of sinful conduct and strive to live a new and holy life. Christian living should embrace the admonition of 1 Corinthians 10:31 to "do all to the glory of God."

II. Creation

36. We believe that for His own glory and by His own decree the Triune God created heaven and earth and all things visible and invisible, animate and inanimate. Recognizing the deplorable implications of evolutionary teaching for human life, sexuality, dignity, and thus for society, we affirm our belief that "in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is" (Exod. 20:11).¹

III. Human Life²

37. All human life is created by God in His image and is, therefore, sacred, possessing dignity, and to be nurtured, supported, and protected. The sanctity and dignity of human life demands respect for all human life, especially in its most vulnerable stages and conditions.

38. We believe that human life begins at conception and that the unborn child is a living human being. We, therefore, believe that any research that threatens the life of a human embryo is contrary to the sanctity of life and is not to be supported or pursued. Induced abortion³ is murder and constitutes an unjustified, inexcusable taking of unborn human life.

¹ Rom. 11:36; Rev. 4:11; Col. 1:16-17; Gen. 1-2.

² Job 3:16; Psa. 51:5; 139:14-16; Isa. 44:24; 49:1, 5; Jer. 1:5; 20:15-18; Luke 1:44.

³ By "induced abortion" we refer to any attempt to terminate a known pregnancy.

39. We reject any teaching that abortions of pregnancies due to rape, incest, birth defects, gender selection, birth or population control, or mental well-being of the mother are acceptable. However, we recognize that there may be rare pregnancies where there are grave medical conditions threatening the life of the mother, which could raise a serious question about the life of the unborn child. In such a case, a decision should be made only after prayerful consideration following medical and spiritual counseling.

40. We further believe that the killing of the weak, the physically challenged, the mentally ill, or the aged, whether by a deliberate act or by coercing or assisting a person to commit suicide is immoral. However, when human death is imminent, we believe that either withdrawing or not originating artificial life-support systems is permissible and consistent with Christian faith and practice.

41. Because we believe that every life is sacred and treasured by God, we reject the concept and pursuit of human cloning.

IV. Human Sexuality¹

42. We believe that God has given to us the gift of sexuality which may be exercised only within the boundaries of covenanted, monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. Thus, we condemn homosexuality, lesbianism, pederasty, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, fornication, adultery, pornography, and other forms of licentiousness as sinful perversions of the divine gift of sexuality. We believe that God disapproves of and forbids any attempt to alter one's gender by surgery or appearance.

43. We believe that the only legitimate marriage is the joining of one man and one woman and that any polygamist relationship is sin (see further para. 85).

44. No practicing homosexual/lesbian shall be ordained as a minister or missionary or shall be used as a teacher, office holder or other employee in any of our ministries. They shall not be eligible to be members, lay leaders, or ministerial leaders in our churches. If any of the aforementioned persons or office holders practice this lifestyle, they forfeit their right to any office or membership in our churches. Practicing this lifestyle shall constitute automatic removal from membership or office.

¹ Gen. 2:24; 19:5, 13; 26:8-9; Lev. 18:1-30; Rom. 1:26-29; 7:2; 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9; 7:10; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4; Eph. 5:22-23.

45. None of our ministers shall solemnize any “same-sex” marriage/union.

V. Pornography

46. We deplore the ready availability of sexually explicit programs and images, even to young minds and eyes, through a multitude of media venues. We vigorously oppose involvement in producing, distributing, selling, or viewing of pornographic material. We not only oppose what is evil, we embrace Christian modesty, holy character, noble standards, and Christ-honoring carefulness in attire, conversation, entertainment, and every area of life.¹

VI. Dancing

47. We believe all dancing that detracts from spiritual growth, incites lust, and breaks down proper moral inhibitions and discretion should be opposed.²

VII. Substance Abuse and Addiction³

48. The Bible teaches the sanctity of the human body. It is the temple of the Holy Spirit and belongs to God. Therefore, we are to care for it properly as good stewards.

49. We believe that drunkenness is devastating to one’s relationship to God and the family unit and is destructive to the moral fiber of individuals and nations. Therefore, drunkenness or the manufacture, purchase, sale, or use of intoxicating beverages, unless for mechanical, chemical, or medicinal purposes is to be avoided. We oppose social drinking due to its addictive nature and our obligation not to cause others to stumble.⁴

50. Recognizing tobacco’s detrimental effects on the body, we oppose its use in any form. The growth of tobacco or illegal drugs as well as the trafficking and sale of the same is to be avoided.

51. We are grateful for medical advances, however chemical dependencies that involve either non-prescription or “over-the-counter” drugs or the misuse of regularly prescribed drugs are opposed. We also oppose the abuse of and addic-

¹ Psa. 101:3; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:17-24; Phil. 1:27.

² 1 Cor. 10:31, Col. 3:1-7, 1 Pet. 1:13-16.

³ Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Hos. 4:10-11; Hab. 2:5; Rom. 12:1-2; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:9-12, 19-20; Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 5:18.

⁴ Rom. 14:21; 15:1; 1 Cor. 10:23-24.

tion to substances that are mind-altering and physically or emotionally addicting, except as legally prescribed by a physician.

VIII. Family Relationships

52. We believe that God has instituted the family as the foundational unit of human society and it begins with the legitimate marriage of one man and one woman. Within its structure, as He has ordained, parents are responsible to instruct their children in Christian faith and conduct, to set before them godly and consistent examples of the same, and in every way to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” In the ordering of family life, Scripture requires: “Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord... husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right.”¹

IX. Education

53. Recognizing the dangers inherent in secular education as a culture moves farther and farther from biblical principles, we urge parents to seriously embrace the responsibility for their children’s education and environment. We believe our families have the right to choose Christian schools, home schooling, Bible Colleges, and other institutions that honor Christian values and promote a biblical worldview. For those that choose public education, we maintain the right for our members to seek exemption from participation by their children in all matters that are contrary to biblical principles and the *Discipline*.²

X. Conversation

54. God has blessed us with the privilege of mutual edification, instruction, and encouragement through the medium of words. A Christian’s words are to be marked by graciousness and charity. Recognizably, any powerful tool for good can also be corrupted into an instrument for evil. Thus James warns that the tongue, though a little member, can ignite great fires. We believe that the Scripture not only prohibits lying and the taking of God’s name in vain, but also uncharitable conversation, gossip, backbiting, and malicious speech.³

¹ Gen. 1:26-28; Exod. 20:12; Deut. 6:4-9; Psa. 127:3-5; Prov. 19:18; 22:6, 15; 23:13-14; Mark 10:6-12; 1 Cor. 7:1-16; Eph. 5:21-33; 6:1-4; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 12; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

² Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-19; Prov. 22:6; 29:15; Eph. 6:4.

³ Exod. 20:7, 16; 22:28; Psa. 15:3; Matt. 5:37; Acts 23:5; Eph. 4:29; 5:4; Col 3:16; 4:6; Jam. 3:5-6.

XI. Stewardship

55. The Scriptures teach that God is the Owner of all persons and all things. We, therefore, are His stewards of both life and possessions. We will be held accountable to God for the exercise of our stewardship. God has established a system of giving that acknowledges His ownership and supports the work of His Church. We, therefore, admonish our people to faithfully tithe and give other offerings sacrificially and cheerfully for the support of the church, relief of those in need, and the spread of the Gospel. As is consistent with honesty and love for others, we admonish our people never to borrow or purchase goods on credit without the probability of paying for them or, when making loans, to charge exorbitant interest.¹

XII. Gambling

56. We believe that lotteries, casinos, and gambling in general lead to the exploitation of the poor, addictive behaviors, greed, and the weakening of one's character and society's strength; therefore, we deplore all forms of gambling even when legalized by state or local governments. We also believe that gambling is a violation of biblical stewardship.²

XIII. Social Ministry

57. The Gospel of Jesus Christ always has social implications in a hurting world. God's people are to do good to all men, and especially to the household of faith. But the love of Christ compels us to reach out to the broken and impoverished, the poor and the downcast, just as Jesus did while on earth. We challenge our people to engage in ministering to the social concerns of their communities.³

XIV. Civil Governments

58. We believe that God has ordained and created all authority consisting of three basic institutions: 1) the home, 2) the church, and 3) the state. Every person is subject to these authorities, but all are ultimately answerable to God and governed by His Word. God has given each institution specific biblical responsibilities and balanced those responsibilities with the understanding that no institu-

¹ Mal. 3:8-12; Prov. 3:9-10; Acts 4:34-37; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7; Gal. 6:6; Eph. 4:28; 1 John 3:17.

² Prov. 28:20; 1 Tim. 6:6-11; Heb. 13:5.

³ Deut. 10:18-19; Prov. 22:9; Is 58:6-7; Luke 4:18; Rom 12:13, Gal 6:10; 1 John 3:17-18.

tion has the right to infringe upon the other; all three institutions are equal and sovereign in their respective biblically assigned spheres of responsibility under God.¹

XV. Military

59. We encourage our members to have respect for properly constituted civil authority and the proper loyalty to one's country. We recognize the responsibility of the individual to answer the call of government and to enter military service. However, there may be those within the membership of our churches that believe military service is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures and that their consciences are violated by being compelled to take part in such. We will, therefore, lend moral support to any member who asks and claims exemption by legal processes from military service as a sincere conscientious objector or who asks to serve one's country as a noncombatant. We hold this to be a right of our members.²

XVI. Lawsuits Within the Church

60. We believe that Christians are prohibited from resolving personal disputes by bringing civil lawsuits against other Christians or Christian organizations. Therefore, members of our churches shall not sue fellow members. We believe the Christian community possesses all the resources necessary to resolve personal disputes between parties. However, we do believe that a Christian may seek compensation for injuries from another Christian's insurance company as long as the claim is pursued without malice or slander.³

XVII. The Lord's Day

61. We believe that the Lord's Day, celebrated on Sunday, the first day of the week, throughout the Christian church, is the Christian sabbath, which we reverently observe as a day of rest and worship and as the continuing memorial of our Savior's resurrection. For this reason, we abstain from secular work and from all merchandising on this holy day, except that required by mercy or necessity.⁴

¹ Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-24; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 2:13-14; Tit. 3:1.

² Rom. 13:1, 4; 14:12.

³ 1 Cor. 6:1-8; Eph. 4:31-32; 1 Pet. 2:1.

⁴ Gen. 2:2-3; Neh. 13:15-22; Isa. 58:13-14; Matt. 12:5, 10-13; Mark 2:23-28; John 20:1; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10.

XVIII. Secret Societies

62. We believe that membership in a secret society is inconsistent with Christian example, testimony, and philosophy. No Bible Methodist member, lay leader, or ministerial leader shall join a secret society requiring oath of initiation or secret proceedings. Affiliation with unions where Christian principles are not violated is not forbidden.¹

XIX. Conclusion

63. It is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus for every believer to embrace Christlikeness in all his conduct. Following our Savior who endured the hostility of sinners, we admonish our people to take up their cross daily, embrace the reproach of Christ, and live joyfully in light of Christ's return. If any should fail to manifest a desire to live godly in this present world, we will admonish them in love, pray for them, and bear with them for a season. However, if unscriptural practices are habitually and willfully continued, we will seek such wise and prudent discipline as will restore them to relationship with God and His Body.²

SECTION IV SPECIAL DIRECTIONS

I. Necessity of Union Among Ourselves

64. Let us be keenly aware, as experience has taught us, of the evil of division whether in principle, spirit, or practice, and the dreadful consequences to ourselves and others. If we are united, what can stand before us? If we divide, we shall destroy ourselves, the work of God, and the souls of our people. In order to achieve a closer union with each other, let us be deeply convinced of its absolute necessity.³ Let us, therefore, as much as is within us:

¹ Lev. 5:4-5; Isa. 29:15; Matt. 5:34-36; John 18:20; 2 Cor. 4:1-2; 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11-12; Jam. 5:12.

² Rom. 8:29; Mark 8:34-38; Heb. 11:26; 12:3; Tit. 2:12-13; Jude 1:21; 1 John 5:16; Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1.

³ **Ephesians 4:1-3** "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"; cf. Rom. 15:5-7; Phil. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 4:8; 2 Cor. 10:12.

- Speak freely to each other.¹
- Pray earnestly for one another, and when we meet, regularly part company with prayer.²
- Take great care not to despise each other's gifts.³
- Avoid speaking disrespectfully of each other.⁴
- Defend each other's character in everything, so far as is consistent with truth.
- Labor in honor, each to prefer the other before himself.⁵

II. Adornment

65. Historically Methodists have, for two reasons, adorned themselves with good works and the simplicity inherent in modest, discreet, and inexpensive clothing, and they have opposed personal adornment with extravagant hairstyles, jewelry, and expensive clothing.

66. First, as stewards entrusted with resources to be used for God's glory and the good of His people,⁶ we cannot in good conscience spend on ourselves what should be given to rescue those perishing without the Word of Life⁷ and to alle-

¹ **Ephesians 4:15-16** "but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"; cf. Heb. 3:12-13; Mal. 3:16.

² **Hebrews 13:18** "Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably"; cf. Jam. 5:16.

³ 1 Thess. 5:20; 1 Tim. 4:12.

⁴ **Ephesians 4:29** "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

⁵ **Romans 12:9-10** "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another."

⁶ **1 Peter 4:10-11** "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen"; cf. 1 Tim. 6:17-19; Gal. 6:10.

⁷ **Luke 12:21, 33-34** "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. ... Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that

viate the suffering of those without food and clothing.¹ In contrast to the world's self-centered materialism, God calls believers to prioritize His kingdom above personal comfort,² to be "rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come,"³ and to lay down their lives for the brethren in supplying their tangible needs.⁴

67. Second, we understand the New Testament to expressly prohibit believers from adorning themselves with extravagant hairstyles, precious metals and stones, and expensive clothing.⁵ Whereas the world encourages pride⁶ and judges beauty by physical appearance, God calls Christian women to foster humility and to beautify themselves with modest clothing,⁷ good works,⁸ chastity,⁹ submission to their husbands,¹⁰ and the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet

does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

¹ **1 John 3:16-18** "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth"; cf. 2 Cor. 8:1-9; 9:9-12.

² **Matthew 6:33** "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

³ 1 Tim. 6:18-19.

⁴ **1 John 3:16-17** "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

⁵ **1 Timothy 2:9** "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing." **1 Peter 3:3** "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel."

⁶ **1 John 2:15** "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world-- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-- is not of the Father but is of the world."

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:9.

⁸ **1 Timothy 2:10** "but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works."

⁹ **1 Peter 3:2** "when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear."

¹⁰ **1 Peter 3:5-6** "For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror."

spirit, which is very precious in His sight.¹ In application of this principle, we call upon Bible Methodists to persist in reflecting their love for God through joyously adorning themselves in this biblical fashion and in abstaining from the wearing of extravagant hairstyles, jewelry—to include rings, and expensive clothing for any reason.

III. Modesty

68. Love for God compels Christians to adorn the doctrine of God in all their behavior² and to glorify God in all they do.³ Paul admonishes us to adorn ourselves with proper clothing, with modesty and discreetness, and with good works, as is fitting for those who profess godliness.⁴

69. Modesty is first and foremost a heart attitude—a sense of godly honor that keeps one from acting in an unworthy or shameful manner. Secondly, modesty is an expression of that attitude in one’s conduct and dress.

70. Scripture uniformly regards the exposure of one’s nakedness to other persons, except in the context of marriage, to be shameful and requires that it be covered.⁵ One of God’s first actions on behalf of fallen man was to clothe his nakedness.⁶ We understand the biblical term “nakedness” to refer at the least to the area of the body from the knees to the neck.⁷

71. However, Scripture’s expectation that nakedness be covered is not all that God has to say on the matter of modesty in clothing. In addition to covering of

¹ **1 Peter 3:4** “rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”

² **Titus 2:10** “not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.”

³ **1 Corinthians 10:31** “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

⁴ **1 Timothy 2:9-10** “Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness.” (NASB)

⁵ **Hosea 2:9** “Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time And My new wine in its season, And will take back My wool and My linen, *Given* to cover her nakedness”; cf. Isa. 47:3; Rev. 3:18.

⁶ **Genesis 3:21** “Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made coats of skin, and clothed them”; cf. Gen. 3:7, 11.

⁷ Exod. 20:26; 28:42; Job 30:18; Ezek. 16:7.

nakedness, Scripture also requires our clothing to be discreet and appropriate.¹ Discreetness is the use of moderation, good judgment, and self-control which would avoid calling unholy attention to oneself and one's body. Appropriateness involves an awareness of one's context and a choice of clothing that fits.

72. When a culture expects a greater degree of modesty than that required by Scripture, believers will be sensitive to matters of testimony, association, and avoidance of creating stumbling blocks for the Gospel.² When a culture has a standard of modesty and discreetness below the bar of God's Word, then God's people must resist such cultural norms and remain faithful to biblical principles.³

73. Historically, the biblical principles of covered nakedness, discreetness, and appropriateness in clothing have been applied in a variety of ways. The chief concerns in such applications have been to establish a direction that moves people along the path of growth in grace, to guard others from undue temptation, and to exercise care so that the biblical principles are maintained.

74. Since Bible Methodists are to be marked by the avoidance of sensuality and the cultivation of modesty, discreetness, and propriety, we urge all our members to wear clothing whose design in terms of style, length, thickness, fullness, and looseness avoids being suggestive or calling ungodly attention to oneself and one's body. Both lay leaders and ministerial leaders are expected to model a careful application of the biblical principles outlined above. Such application should include but not be limited to clothing whose neckline is close enough to the neck to avoid view of the upper body; clothing whose length extends below the knees whether standing or sitting; sleeves that are modest and discreet in length and style; therefore, we recommend that sleeves be closer to the elbow than the shoulder.

IV. Gender Distinctions

75. God created men and women to be distinct yet complementary reflections of His image.⁴ God's concern for gender-distinction is evident throughout Scripture

¹ 1 Tim. 2:9.

² 1 Cor. 10:32-33.

³ **Ephesians 5:11** "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them."

⁴ **Genesis 1:26-27** "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

in the gender-distinctions He requires in the church,¹ marriage,² and men's and women's clothing.³ We understand Scripture to teach that men should not wear women's clothing and women should not wear men's clothing; therefore, our people should avoid wearing clothing that confuses the sexes.⁴ Recognizing the call of Scripture for men's hair to be short and women's hair to be long, we admonish our men to cut their hair short enough to be distinctly masculine and our ladies to abstain from cutting the hair as taught in 1 Corinthians 11.⁵

V. Media and Entertainment

76. Media and communication technologies afford us the opportunity to be very selective in our use of electronic materials, but unless carefully guarded, they can expose us to dangerous temptations and ungodly influences which can lead to the grossest of evils. A wide array of defensive technologies is available. Therefore, we urge our people to employ whatever forms of protection are needed (e.g., filters, firewalls, accountability programs).⁶

77. Bible Methodists have historically taken a proper stand against the use of television programming for various reasons, among these are its:

- promotion of values and philosophies which are hostile to biblical values.
- pervasive sensuality.
- addictive nature that results in the consumption of vast amounts of time which could be used for more wholesome purposes.
- destructive impact on family life.

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"; cf. 1 Cor. 11:7-9.

¹ 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:29-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-15.

² Eph. 5:22-33.

³ **Deuteronomy 22:5** "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God."

⁴ Deut. 22:5.

⁵ 1 Cor. 11:5-6, 14-15.

⁶ **Matthew 18:8-9** "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire."

78. Such programming is now possible in many formats and devices. Since the same concerns are present no matter what the medium of reception, our opposition to ungodly programming remains unchanged. We ask our people to abstain from all forms of media which do not allow them to control the programming content in such a way that it conforms to biblical principles.

79. These problems exist not only in media programming but in all forms of entertainment. Therefore, we urge our people to avoid carefully any form of entertainment which is inconsistent with biblical principles and promotes the philosophies, values, and ideals of this present world.¹ For example, we should avoid all reading, movies, games, or musical entertainment which includes profanity, vulgarity, immodesty, sensuality, occult elements, or senseless violence.

80. As we attempt to navigate the many choices which confront us, we expect our people to follow the admonitions of the Apostle Paul to seek for entertainment that is beneficial,² edifying,³ and God-glorifying.⁴ Such entertainment will help us implement Scripture's guidelines for holiness.⁵

VI. Recreational Pursuits

81. Historically, Bible Methodists have rightly opposed recreational pursuits that promote worldliness—desires, attitudes, or actions that are self-centered,⁶ con-

¹ **Romans 12:2** “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”; cf. Tit. 2:11-12.

² **1 Corinthians 6:12** “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

³ **1 Corinthians 10:23** “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

⁴ **1 Corinthians 10:31** “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

⁵ **Philippians 4:8** “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:22; Eph. 5:1-5.

⁶ **James 4:1-4** “Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires* for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

trary to God’s Word,¹ or not in harmony with loving God and others.² Key concerns in this area have been:

- settings where the atmosphere or influence is ungodly.
- venues that would reflect poorly on one’s Christian testimony.
- unwise stewardship of financial resources, as is the case in all forms of gambling.
- immodesty, such as typically occurs in mixed swimming and sporting attire.
- sensuality, as is common in dancing.
- dangers associated with sporting activities, including stewardship of our time and money, temptation to idolatry and addiction, desecration of the Lord’s Day, and ungodly influences.

82. As Bible Methodists our passion is to pursue holiness.³ For this reason our people are to avoid recreational pursuits that involve the violation of scriptural principles and to seek out pursuits that fill our lives with wholesome activities that promote godliness,⁴ strengthen our walk with God,⁵ build up the entire person,⁶ and strengthen family and fellow believers.⁷

83. While encouraging the appropriate use of recreation and exercise, Scripture balances expressions of Christian liberty with love for others. We are instructed

¹ **1 John 2:17** “And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

² **1 John 2:15-16** “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”

³ **Hebrews 12:14** “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” **2 Corinthians 7:1** “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

⁴ **2 Peter 3:11** “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness.”

⁵ **1 Timothy 6:11** “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”

⁶ **1 Timothy 4:8** “For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” **1**

Corinthians 6:20 “For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

⁷ **1 Corinthians 10:23-24** “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.”

to limit our liberty in cases where its exercise brings spiritual damage,¹ creates unnecessary division within the body of Christ,² or creates temptation for others.³ As in all things, rather than using our liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, we should serve one another by love.⁴

VII. Marriage and Divorce

A. Pre-marital Purity

84. Scripture admonishes us to flee youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who serve God with a pure heart.⁵ All interaction with persons of the opposite sex should be above reproach⁶ and transparently seek to respect their conscience and guard their purity.⁷ Love for God and others compels us to use our bodies, which are the temples of the Holy Spirit,⁸ not for self-gratification but for God's glory⁹ and the good of others.¹⁰

B. Marriage

¹ **1 Corinthians 8:12-13** "But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

² **Romans 14:1, 19** "Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things. ... Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another."

³ **1 Thessalonians 4:6** "that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified."

⁴ **Galatians 5:13** "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another."

⁵ **2 Timothy 2:22** "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

⁶ **Colossians 1:21-22** "And you ... He has reconciled to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—if indeed you continue in the faith."

⁷ **Romans 14:21** "*It is* good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor *do anything* by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak"; cf. 1 Cor. 8:12; 10:32-33; 1 Thess. 4:3-8.

⁸ **1 Corinthians 6:19** "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?"

⁹ **1 Corinthians 6:20** "For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's"; cf. 1 Cor. 6:12-18.

¹⁰ **1 Corinthians 10:24** "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's *well-being*"; cf. Rom. 15:1-2.

85. Marriage is a life-long,¹ sacred covenant made before God between one man and one woman, and not to be entered into lightly.² We urge that our people prayerfully seek pastoral counsel and guidance before committing themselves to marriage vows. Many professing Christians have, contrary to Scripture, married unconverted persons.³ Finding themselves unequally yoked together, they have either been hindered for life or have fallen from grace. Therefore, our people shall refrain from marrying persons who are not living in right relationship with God.

C. Marital Separation

86. Scripture commands married persons not to separate from their spouses.⁴ Scripture addresses cases where separation does occur and directs such persons to remain unmarried, not to divorce their spouse, and to seek to be reconciled.⁵

D. Divorce and Remarriage

87. Since its inception, Bible Methodism has purposefully chosen not to allow divorce and remarriage to be a divisive issue. We recognize that scholars have varied widely in their understanding of this subject. We urge a spirit of humility and charity in the expression of one's opinion toward others of differing opinion.

88. We deplore the evils of unscriptural divorce and remarriage as contrary to God's plan for mankind and destructive to society. We regard adultery⁶ as clear

¹ **Romans 7:2** "For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to *her* husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of *her* husband."

² **Genesis 2:24** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." **Proverbs 2:16-17** "To deliver you from the immoral woman, From the seductress *who* flatters with her words, Who forsakes the companion of her youth, And forgets the covenant of her God."

³ **1 Corinthians 7:39** "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord"; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18.

⁴ **1 Corinthians 7:10** "Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from *her* husband."

⁵ **1 Corinthians 7:11** "But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to *her* husband. And a husband is not to divorce *his* wife."

⁶ For the purposes of this statement, "adultery" refers to physical sexual intimacy with any person other than one's spouse. **Matthew 5:32** "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery"; cf. Matt. 19:4-9; 1 Cor. 5:1; 10:8; Hos. 2:4; 3:3; Amos 7:17.

scriptural grounds for divorce. In keeping with God's pattern of seeking to reconcile his adulterous people to himself, when a person commits adultery against his or her spouse, the wronged spouse should make every reasonable effort to effect reconciliation.¹ Where such efforts fail, divorce is a last, undesirable option. Even after divorce, as long as the previous spouse is unmarried, reconciliation is the biblical goal.²

E. Adultery and Adulterous Divorce by a Church Member

89. In the case of members who commit adultery, their church membership is suspended, they are automatically placed under church discipline, and they will cease functioning in any leadership or ministry capacity within the church (see para. 309-310).³ Given genuine repentance and accountability, their membership may be restored, and they may be given opportunity to serve in leadership or ministry capacities upon the recommendation of the pastoral leadership and, if appropriate, by a vote of the lay leadership.⁴ If genuine repentance and accountability to pastoral leadership are not evidenced, their membership will terminate⁵ through the processes outlined in the *Discipline* (see para. 101 and 399).

90. Persons who persist in pursuit of an unscriptural divorce, by their unrepentant continuance in sin, forfeit their membership in the church. Should such persons repent and be restored to a right relationship with God, they may, upon approval by the ministerial and lay leadership, be restored to membership.

¹ Hosea, Jer. 3:8-12; 7:9-12.

² **Jeremiah 3:8, 12** "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; ... Then the LORD said to me, "Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the LORD; 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I *am* merciful,' says the LORD; 'I will not remain angry forever.'"

³ **Matthew 18:16-17** "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church ..."; cf. 1 Cor. 5:1-13.

⁴ **2 Corinthians 2:6-7** "This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow."

⁵ **Matthew 18:17** "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector."

91. The membership of a spouse who is wrongfully divorced shall not be jeopardized.
92. Those whose spouse has wrongfully divorced them and has remarried are urged to seek God's will and pastoral counsel in this matter.¹
93. We hold the right of our ministers to decline to participate in marriages which would compromise their convictions on this issue.

F. Concerning Those Divorced and Remarried Prior to Salvation

94. We recognize that, in today's society, many have divorced and remarried while yet unsaved or unenlightened to the Scripture's teaching. When they are born from above, they become new creatures in Christ Jesus;² they are justified, sanctified, and washed from the guilt of their former sins.³ We encourage them, therefore, to raise their current families to live for God.
95. For those who come to the Lord divorced for reasons other than adultery but who have not remarried, we recommend that they carefully seek God's will and pastoral counsel regarding how to proceed in this matter.⁴

¹ **1 Corinthians 7:15** "But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace."

² **2 Corinthians 5:17** "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

³ **1 Corinthians 6:9-11** "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

⁴ **1 Corinthians. 7:39** "A wife is bound by law as long as her husband lives; but if her husband dies, she is at liberty to be married to whom she wishes, only in the Lord."

SECTION V

MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

96. Our membership and leadership framework seeks to reflect the biblical distinctions between being a member of Christ’s body, growing into spiritual maturity, and meeting the biblical criteria for the spiritual oversight and leadership of believers found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

97. At each stage of commitment, instruction is required prior to assuming the responsibilities of the prospective role. The purpose for requiring instruction in membership, the *Discipline*, or leadership prior to assuming the privileges and responsibility of these respective roles is to give those considering such commitment the ability to make an informed decision, to add value to belonging, to make participation meaningful, to nurture personal growth in grace, and to shape or give direction to the theology and practice of the Church.

I. Membership

98. The purposes of membership are belonging to a local body of believers,¹ pursuit of discipleship for growth in Christlikeness,² discovery and use of spiritual gifts for ministry service,³ participation in the edification of the body of Christ,⁴ submission to spiritual accountability,⁵ and enjoyment of Christian fellowship.⁶

¹ **Philemon 1:2** “To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house”; cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1.

² **Ephesians 4:16** “From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.”

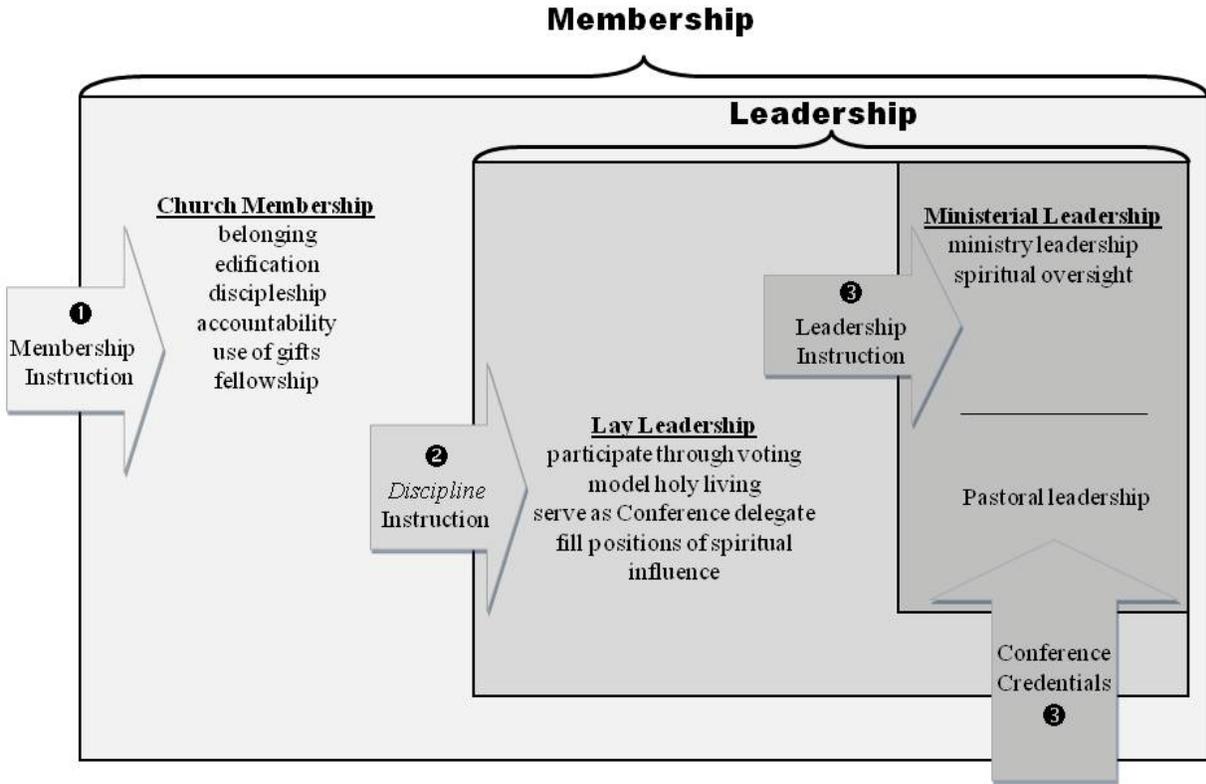
³ **Ephesians 4:12-13** “For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”; cf. 1 Cor. 12-14.

⁴ **1 Corinthians 14:12** “Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual *gifts*, let it be for the edification of the church *that* you seek to excel”; cf. 1 Cor. 14:26.

⁵ **Hebrews 13:17** “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you”; cf. 1 Cor. 16:16.

⁶ **Acts 2:42** “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers”; cf. Gal. 2:9.

MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP DIAGRAM



Membership

Leadership

Church Membership

belonging
edification
discipleship
accountability
use of gifts
fellowship

1
Membership
Instruction

Lay Leadership

participate through voting
model holy living
serve as Conference delegate
fill positions of spiritual
influence

2
Discipline
Instruction

Ministerial Leadership

ministry leadership
spiritual oversight

3
Leadership
Instruction

Pastoral leadership

3
Conference
Credentials

- 99.** The conditions of membership are as follows:
- a. profession of a personal relationship with Christ through saving faith.
 - b. a pledge to pursue diligently Scripture's call to entire sanctification (see para. 17-18).
 - c. Christian baptism.
 - d. successful completion of membership instruction, whether given formally or informally as determined by the church's ministerial leadership.
 - e. commitment to support the church, to live in fellowship with its members, and to seek God's glory in all things.
 - f. approval based upon the recommendation of the pastor and the church board (see para. 219e) and a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership.

100. The responsibilities of membership are regular attendance, participation in the means of grace, use of personal gifts for ministry service, support of the church through tithes and offerings, involvement in discipleship, submission to church discipline, commitment to pursuing holiness, and annual affirmation of the membership covenant (see page 167).

101. Church membership may be terminated only by one or more of the following: voluntary withdrawal, joining another religious body, joining a secret society or any fraternal order that requires its members to violate Scripture, expulsion after proper trial and conviction (see para. 399), or persistent neglect of membership responsibilities as defined by paragraph 100 upon a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership.

102. Nothing shall be included in the membership covenant that is contrary to the conditions of membership listed above.

II. Lay Leadership

103. To vote is to participate in leading the local church. Such leadership should be exercised by persons who are in harmony with the *Discipline*. The following guidelines for lay leadership are in addition to the guidelines for church membership.

104. The purposes of lay leadership are to participate in church governance through attending, speaking to the issue, and voting at business meetings, to model holy living for the congregation, to represent the church as conference delegates, and to provide leaders to fill positions of spiritual influence.

105. The conditions for lay leadership are to be at least 18 years of age, membership in the local church, successful completion of *Discipline* instruction, recommendation by the pastor and the church board (see para. 219e), and approval by a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership.

106. The responsibilities of lay leadership are to model submission to the authority of God's Word, cooperation with pastoral leadership, faithful participation in the ministries, functions, and fellowship of the church, and accountability through annual lay leadership covenant affirmation (see page 169).

107. Ministerial leadership, church board members, trustees, and lay delegates to Annual and General Conference shall be lay leaders. We strongly encourage our churches to fill other spiritual or philosophical direction-setting positions with lay leaders, though we recognize that circumstances may require some exceptions to this.

108. Termination of lay leadership may occur due to voluntary withdrawal, reassignment to church membership when under church discipline, expulsion after proper trial and conviction (see para. 399), or persistent neglect of lay leadership responsibilities as defined by paragraph 106 upon a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership.

III. Ministerial Leadership

109. The ministerial leadership of a local church includes the pastor and may include any ordained elders, conference preachers, or other persons who are approved to exercise spiritual oversight within the local church. The following guidelines for ministerial leadership are in addition to the guidelines for lay leadership.

110. The purposes of ministerial leadership are to provide ministry leadership, spiritual oversight and guidance to the congregation, and in the case of the pastor, pastoral leadership.

111. The conditions for ministerial leadership are lay leadership in the local church, successful completion of leadership training in the biblical qualifications for spiritual overseers as found in 1 Timothy 3:1-8 and Titus 1:5-9, recommendation by the pastor and the church board (see para. 219e), and a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership.

112. The responsibilities of ministerial leadership are an annual ministry leadership covenant affirmation (see page 171) ; and in general, to oversee the spiritual well-being of the congregation. Responsibilities and authority will differ depending on the position held.

113. Ministerial leaders may serve as lay delegates to annual and general conference sessions unless they are ordained elders or hold a conference preacher's license (see para. 241).

114. Termination of Ministerial Leadership may occur due to voluntary withdrawal, reassignment to church membership when under church discipline, expulsion after proper trial and conviction (see para. 399), or persistent neglect of ministerial leadership responsibilities as defined by paragraph 112 and 136 upon a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership.

SECTION VI ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNMENT

I. Elementary Principles

115. Christ is the only Head of the Church and the Word of God the final authority of faith and conduct.

116. A local church is an autonomous¹ body of believers in Jesus Christ who agree to be governed by Scripture and to meet together regularly (see para. 22, 137).

117. The local church has a right to form and enforce such rules and regulations as are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures and in harmony with the *Discipline*, and such as may be necessary or helpful in carrying into effect the great system of practical Christianity.

118. Whatever authority may be necessary to form organizational structure within the local church is inherent in the lay and ministerial leadership of the church. When judged necessary and proper, that authority may be delegated through a plan of representation.

¹ See paragraph 138 for the definition of autonomous.

119. Any person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and is careful to obey the Scriptures as the Holy Spirit enlightens, is eligible to pursue church membership.

120. We firmly believe that it is impossible to produce righteous character through legislation. Those who attempt to do so make patterns of conduct the ground of salvation rather than its results.

121. Every person has an inalienable right to private judgments in matters of religion and an equal right to express personal opinions in any way which will not violate the laws of God or the rights of others.

122. All church trials should be conducted on scriptural principles (see para. 170); therefore, no minister or member should be removed from membership except for unrepentant sin, the propagation of unscriptural doctrines, or for persistent neglect of duties enjoined by the Word of God or the *Discipline*.

123. It is the duty of all ministers and members of the church to maintain godliness and oppose all moral evil.

124. All elders share equally in the rights of eldership.

125. The office and duties of ministers are of divine appointment.¹ It is the obligation of ministers of the Gospel to be faithful to fulfill their ministerial responsibilities. However, ministers are forbidden to be lords over God's heritage.²

126. It is the obligation of members to hold ministers in a place of high esteem for their works' sake and provide an appropriate compensation package for their labors.³

¹ **Acts 20:28** "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

² **1 Peter 5:2-3** "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."

³ **1 Timothy 5:17-18** "Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer is worthy of his wages'; cf. 1 Thess. 5:12.

127. As much as is possible, all representative bodies, such as Annual and General Conference Sessions, shall maintain an equal representation of lay and ministerial delegates.

II. The Ministry

A. Definition

128. A minister is called, not by the will of man, but by the will of God, to serve God's purposes, in accordance with His time, place, and method.

B. Categories of Licensed Ministers

129. Local Preachers shall be those lay or ministerial leaders of a local church who have gone through the process of obtaining a Local Preacher's License and been approved by their local church leadership (see para. 231-234).

130. Conference Preachers shall be those lay or ministerial leaders of a local church who have gone through a Regional Conference's process of obtaining a Conference Preacher's license (see para. 282).

131. Elders shall be those lay or ministerial leaders of a local church who have gone through a Regional Conference's process of ordination (see para. 269c, 290, 305-306).

C. Rights

132. All ministers shall have the right to:

- a. Proclaim the Gospel.
- b. Serve as chairman of the committees of the local church to which they are called to pastor, with authority to designate another chairman in their absence or to relinquish the chairmanship of their own volition.
- c. Have recourse to the appropriate level of the Judiciary in any matters involving complaint against their character or ministerial conduct.

133. All ordained elders and conference preachers shall have the right to transfer in the manner prescribed by the *Discipline* from one Regional Conference to another (see para. 299), subject to reception by the conference to which they transfer.

134. Ordained elders and conference preachers serving as a pastor shall have the right to:

- a. Enjoy the use of the facilities of the local church for its ministries.
- b. Serve his local church without interference by unauthorized activities of another minister of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.
- c. Perform all parts of divine worship, including the administration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the solemnization of marriages.

135. All ordained elders shall also have the right to be considered for election to any office in the local church, the Regional Conference, or General Connection for which elders are eligible.

D. Responsibilities

136. A minister in The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches shall be responsible to:

- a. Live his life in such a way as to bring honor to God, to live in harmony with the *Discipline*, and to demonstrate a godly example by his conduct.
- b. Preach and teach the whole counsel of God without fear or favor, in humility and love.
- c. Provide leadership and work in cooperation with the lay and ministerial leadership of the local church to equip them to do the work of the ministry, thus fulfilling the Great Commission.
- d. Maintain membership in a local Bible Methodist church, participate to the best of his ability in Regional Conference activities and ministries, and be accountable to the Regional Conference leadership (see para. 284-288 and 293).

III. The Local Church

A. Definitions

137. A local church is an autonomous body of believers in fellowship with Jesus Christ assembling in any one place for religious worship, bound by a covenant of love and mutual faith into a community of believers dedicated to the Word of God and the nurturing of disciples (see para. 21-22, 116).

138. By autonomy, we understand that:

- a. Each local church will own and be responsible for its own property. At no time may a Regional Conference make any claim to property or facilities owned by a local church, unless that church gives such authorization or disbands.

- b. Each local church is a self-governing body and as such is unique in its composition and character (see para. 117-118). Therefore, it is free to organize its internal government according to the desires of the lay and ministerial leadership (see para. 143).

139. A local church voluntarily enters into a covenant with a Regional Conference, just as a member voluntarily enters into a covenant with a local church. This relationship remains in place as long as it is agreeable to both the local church and the Regional Conference.

B. Membership and Leadership

140. A local church is comprised of members (see para. 98-102), lay leaders (see para. 103-108), and ministerial leaders (see para. 109-114), each serving specific roles within the organization.

C. Rights

141. Each local church shall have the right to:

- a. Receive and remove members, lay leaders, and ministerial leaders subject to the provisions of the *Discipline* (see para. 98-114).
- b. Call its own pastor, working in cooperation with the Regional Conference.
- c. Grant, renew, or discontinue local preacher's licenses.
- d. Recommend local preachers and special workers to the Regional Conference.
- e. Elect its officers and remove them if necessary. No pastor, church officer, or conference official has the authority to remove an elected officer without the approval of the body which elected them.
- f. Elect trustees and through such trustees to work in cooperation with the church board to acquire, hold, lease, or sell its property for the use and benefit of the local church as they determine and is legally permissible. A local church may request help from the Executive Committee of its Regional Conference in determining the best arrangement for property settlement.
- g. Be represented in the voting membership of its Annual Conference Sessions.
- h. Have recourse to the appropriate level of the Judiciary in any matters of controversy between itself and other local churches, Regional Conferences, or the General Connection or its departments.

D. Responsibilities

142. The local church shall be responsible to:

- a. Organize itself in such a way as to bring honor to God, to live in harmony with the *Discipline*, and to maintain proper respect from the community.
- b. Respect the leadership of the pastor, express affirmation for his labors, and provide appropriate financial compensation.
- c. Participate to the best of its ability in Regional Conference and Connectional activities and ministries, with both physical presence and financial support.

E. Officers and Committees

143. The local church may elect such officers and committees as are outlined in Statutory Law, paragraphs 209-210 and 217-218.

IV. The Regional Conference

A. Definitions

144. The General Connection shall organize the work at large into Regional Conferences which shall operate under its jurisdiction and promote the interests of the Connection. A Regional Conference is an organization that provides encouragement, nurturing guidance, and leadership to the local Bible Methodist churches within a specified geographical area who have chosen to connect together for greater effectiveness.

145. The Annual Conference Session is the legislative body of each Regional Conference which gathers at least once a year to conduct its necessary business.

146. Each Regional Conference voluntarily enters into a covenant with the Connection, just as a local church voluntarily enters into a covenant with a Regional Conference. This relationship remains in place as long as it is agreeable to both the Regional Conference and the Connection.

B. Delegates to Annual Conference

147. The membership of the Annual Conference Session shall be based on the principle of equal representation and shall include lay and ministerial delegates as follows:

- a. all elders on the stationed, reserve, and superannuated lists;
- b. all conference preachers elected to elders' orders;
- c. all conference preachers serving as pastors of organized Bible Methodist churches;
- d. lay delegates elected by organized Bible Methodist churches as provided in the *Discipline* (see para. 107 and 113);
- e. such non-voting members as the *Discipline* shall provide and as each Regional Conference deems appropriate.

C. Annual Conference Sessions

148. Each Regional Conference shall have the right to set the requirements for a quorum during its conference sessions.

149. In transacting the business of the Annual Conference Session, the ministers and lay members shall deliberate as one body; but on the final vote on any question, at the call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide, and the ministers and lay members shall vote separately; and it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

D. Special Sessions of Regional Conference

150. A special session of a Regional Conference may be initiated by a two-thirds vote of an Annual Conference Session, two-thirds vote of the Executive Committee, or petition of two thirds of the delegates from the previous Annual Conference Session. Special sessions shall be for a specific agenda which shall be published and delivered to the delegates prior to the beginning of the session.

E. Rights

151. Each Regional Conference shall have the right to:

- a. Provide oversight to all the ministers and local churches within its bounds.
- b. Review the agreement entered into by its pastors and local churches, and where circumstances exist which make such arrangements seem harmful for the work of God, to endeavor to make such adjustments as will better promote the work of God.
- c. Make such rules or by-laws as will best serve their interest and are in harmony with the *Discipline*.

- d. Elect and ordain elders, and to receive the transfer of elders from other denominations subject to the requirements of the *Discipline* (see para. 299-300).
- e. Receive or decline local preachers and special workers recommended to it by the churches within its bounds.
- f. Organize and receive churches.
- g. Take such actions and adopt such rules as it shall judge necessary to promote the interests and prosperity of the churches within its bounds, and to amend or rescind the same, provided it shall not contravene any provision of the *Discipline* and provided further that if three members of an Annual Conference Session shall take exception to its action on the ground that it violates this restriction, they may make an appeal through the channels prescribed by the *Discipline* (see para. 255).
- h. Elect its own officers and to remove them if necessary, as outlined in the *Discipline* (see para. 256-265).
- i. Elect, in the manner prescribed by the *Discipline*, its own Board of Trustees and through them acquire, hold, lease, encumber, or sell all conference property, all property transferred to them by action of any local church, as well as any property that has been abandoned by the disbandment of a local church. The trustees will handle all church property according to the provisions of the *Discipline* and the laws of the land. All properties held by the Regional Conferences shall be held in trust for the use and benefit of its ministry and churches (see para. 275).
- j. Be represented in the voting membership of all General Conference sessions.
- k. Have recourse to the appropriate level of the Judiciary in any matters of controversy between itself and other Regional Conferences, local churches, the General Connection or its departments.

F. Responsibilities

152. Each Regional Conference shall be responsible to:

- a. Organize and govern itself in such a way as to bring honor to God, to live in harmony with the *Discipline*, and to set a proper direction for the local churches within its bounds.
- b. Respect the autonomy of each local church, yet provide encouragement, leadership, guidance, and accountability to each church, under the guidelines of the *Discipline*.
- c. Nurture the development and examine the character of its licensed ministers on an annual basis.

- d. Seek opportunities to strengthen and expand its ministries.
- e. Promote communication between the Connection and the local church membership and leadership, and to participate and support to the best of its ability the ministry endeavors of the Connection.

G. Officers and Committees

153. The Annual Conference Session shall elect such officers and committees and establish such departments as outlined in Statutory Law (see para. 256-279).

V. The General Connection

A. Definitions

154. The General Connection is the organization that provides structure and continuity for all entities that bear the name of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.

155. The General Conference is the legislative body of the General Connection which gathers at least once a quadrennium to conduct its necessary business.

156. By design, the General Connection avoids a centralized form of government, respecting the autonomy of the local churches and Regional Conferences.¹ Business is conducted at General Conference by delegates elected by each Regional Conference.

B. General Conference Delegates

157. The membership of General Conference shall include:

- a. Any Connectional officials determined by the *Discipline* (see para. 331).
- b. An equal number of elders and lay delegates representing each Regional Conference (see para. 335).
- c. Such non-voting members as the *Discipline* shall provide (see para. 331e-333) and as the General Conference deems appropriate.

¹ See paragraph 138 for the definition of autonomy.

C. General Conference Sessions

158. At all times when the General Conference is in session, it shall require a majority of all the delegates elected by the Regional Conferences to form a quorum to do business. If the number of delegates becomes less than a quorum, they may only approve any remaining minutes, and adjourn until a quorum is once again obtained.

159. In transacting the business of General Conference, the elders and lay delegates shall deliberate as one body, but on the final vote on any question, except proposed amendments to the constitution, at the call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide, and the elders and the lay delegates shall vote separately; and it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

D. Special Sessions of General Conference

160. A special session of General Conference may be initiated by a two-thirds vote of the Connectional Committee, a two-thirds vote of a sitting General Conference, or a request of a Regional Conference which receives two thirds of the Regional Conferences' approval. Special Sessions shall be for a specific agenda, which shall be published and delivered to the delegates prior to the beginning of the session.

E. Rights and Restrictions

161. The General Conference shall have full authority to elect its officers and committees, to define their duties and responsibilities, and to make and administer rules and regulations for The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, subject to the constitution and the following rights and restrictions.

162. The General Conference shall have the right and authority to:

- a. Establish the best methods of conducting the business of General Conference.
- b. Determine a standard for parliamentary procedure for its sessions and recommend the same for the other bodies of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.
- c. Establish statutory law detailing the membership of Annual Conference Sessions, provided the principle of equal representation of lay and licensed ministerial delegates is maintained (see para. 239-242), and that no local church is deprived of representation.

- d. Establish statutory law detailing the membership of General Conference, provided the principle of equal representation of elders and laymen is maintained (see para. 331), and that no conference is deprived of representation.
 - e. Establish statutory law detailing the best methods of carrying on the work of the Connectional officers, committees, and departments.
- 163.** The General Conference shall not have the right and authority to:
- a. Establish any standards of doctrine contrary to our present Statement of Faith.
 - b. Revoke, alter, or change any part of the constitution of this *Discipline*, except in accordance with the provision of making such changes (see para. 176-177).
 - c. Deny any local church the right to any of the following: (1) receive, discontinue, or expel its own members, subject to their right of trial; (2) elect and remove its own officers; or (3) initiate negotiations with ministers concerning pastoral arrangements.
 - d. Deny any Annual Conference Session the final confirmation of all pastoral arrangements.
 - e. Discriminate on the basis of race, color, nationality, or ethnic origin for membership, offices, or privileges.
 - f. Make any rule which interferes with established Regional Conferences' supervision of the ministers and churches within their bounds, except those ministers who hold an office within the General Connection.
 - g. Deprive any Regional Conference, local church, member, or minister of the right of recourse to the appropriate level of the Judiciary.

F. Responsibilities

- 164.** The General Connection shall be responsible to:
- a. Organize and govern itself in such a way as to bring honor to God, and to provide vision for all entities that bear the name The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.
 - b. Respect the autonomy of each local church and conference, while providing guidance and continuity under the guidelines of the *Discipline*.
 - c. Promote the work of its departments to the Regional Conferences and local churches to help advance the Statement of Mission (see para. 2).

G. Connectional Officers and Committees

165. The General Conference shall elect the following officers and committees, as well as those outlined in Statutory Law, paragraphs 349-371.

a. **Chairman of the General Connection**

- i. The General Conference shall elect for the Quadrennial term by ballot, from among the elders of the Connection, a General Connectional Chairman who shall preside at the General Conference and make decisions on points of law; all such decisions are to be ratified by both the Connectional Judiciary Committee and the next General Conference.
- ii. The General Connectional Chairman shall not be elected to more than two consecutive terms.

b. **General Connectional Committee.**

- i. The General Conference at its quadrennial session shall elect a Connectional Committee to carry out the will of the General Conference during the quadrennium, consisting of the following Connectional members: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Editor, Missions Director, Treasurer, Discipleship Director as well as the Regional Conference Presidents, and one elder and two laymen from each Regional Conference who shall be nominated in caucus by the Regional Conference of which they are members.
- ii. The term of office of the members of the Connectional Committee shall begin with the rise of the General Conference at which they are elected and shall continue through the next General Conference.

VI. The Judiciary

A. Definitions

166. Church discipline is a proper exercise of the authority which Christ has vested in His Church for the prevention and correction of sin and the removal of scandal.¹

167. The purpose of church discipline is the vindication of the truth, the preservation of the Church's integrity, the restoration and salvation of the guilty, and the warning of the careless.

¹ Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20.

168. The Statutory Judiciary Section (see para. 388-399) shall define the organization and procedures of the Judiciary.

B. Judiciary Committee Membership

169. A Judiciary Committee, which shall be established at each level of government, is our chosen method of implementing church discipline. Individuals comprising these Judiciary Committees should be lay or ministerial leaders who are known for their wisdom, maturity, and godly character.

C. Principles

170. The following principles shall guide the administration of church discipline for The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches:

- a. A prayerful and Christlike spirit shall be maintained at all times by all parties.¹
- b. The restoration and salvation of erring persons who, while under the Church's care, have wandered from Christ shall be constantly kept in view.²
- c. A sincere and reasonable effort shall be made to resolve an accusation or to deal with an offending person without the formality of a church trial, in keeping with scriptural admonitions.³
- d. Each charge and all judicial proceedings shall receive prompt and careful attention by the proper authorities.
- e. The doctrines and standards of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches shall be maintained without respect of persons. Any person against whom charges are brought shall be dealt with kindly, yet faithfully, according to the seriousness of the charge and as provided for in the *Discipline*.
- f. Legal technicalities shall not be permitted to obstruct the sincere search for truth, while at the same time the fundamental principles and procedures of justice shall be upheld. There shall be no attempt to confuse or entangle anyone in the process of an investigation or a trial.

D. Rights and Authority

171. Process and guarantee of rights for an accused person or organization:

¹ 1 Cor. 13:4-7; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2.

² 1 Thess. 5:14; Jude 22-23.

³ Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1-2; James 5:16, 19-20; 1 Tim. 5:19-20.

- a. The Judiciary may act only when a matter is formally presented in writing.
- b. All charges against a member shall be presented in writing and signed by at least two persons who have firsthand knowledge of the matter.
- c. All charges against a church or a Conference shall be presented in writing and signed by at least two Bible Methodist members who have firsthand knowledge of the matter.
- d. The person or organization against whom charges have been brought shall be informed of the charges in a timely manner.
- e. The person or organization against whom charges have been brought shall be assumed innocent unless they confess to the charges or the charges are proven in a trial.
- f. No person or organization may be dismissed without an investigation and a trial, except where the *Discipline* states that dismissal is automatic (see para. 44, 90, 101, 108, 114).

172. The Connectional Judiciary Committee acting as a Board of Review shall have the authority to:

- a. Determine the constitutionality of any act of the General Conference upon appeal of the Connectional Chairman or one-fifth of the members of the General Conference.
- b. Hear and determine the constitutionality of an action by a Regional Conference or a ruling of the Connectional Chairman concerning a point of the *Discipline*.
- c. Hear and determine the legality of any action by the Connectional Committee upon appeal of one-third of its members, or by request of the Connectional Chairman.
- d. Settle questions in dispute between Regional Conferences upon appeal by a two-thirds vote of a Conference that claims it has a grievance against another Conference.
- e. Determine the validity of any complaints against books used in the Course of Study.

173. A decision of the Connectional Judiciary Committee shall be final unless the General Conference votes to overrule the same by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting.

E. Responsibilities

174. It shall be the responsibility of Judiciary Committees to:

- a. Function with fairness and integrity in all matters so as to bring glory to God.
- b. Seek restoration of the fallen and reconciliation between opposing parties when possible. When such efforts are unsuccessful, to conduct investigations, hearings, and church trials in matters where members, churches, or conferences have been charged.
- c. Exercise church discipline among Bible Methodists with careful deliberation and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

SECTION VII AMENDING THE DISCIPLINE

I. Constitutional Changes

175. We define constitutional law to be that part of the polity of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches that can only be changed by a vote of the General Conference, a vote of the Regional Conferences, and a vote of the lay and ministerial leaders of the churches. Changes ratified through the proper channels shall take effect upon the publishing of the *Discipline* (or an insert) unless otherwise specified.

176. The adoption of a constitutional amendment that originates in and is recommended at General Conference level shall require this sequence of steps:

- a. A two-thirds majority vote of approval in General Conference.
- b. A two-thirds majority vote of approval in two thirds of the Regional Conferences.
- c. A two-thirds majority vote of approval of the lay and ministerial leaders present and voting in two thirds of the local churches in two thirds of the Regional Conferences. This vote shall be taken within sixty days of the adjournment of the Annual Conference Session of the Regional Conferences.
- d. The certification of the final results of the voting by the Connectional Committee.

177. If the recommendation for a constitutional amendment originates between General Conference Sessions and is first recommended at the Regional Conference level, it shall require this sequence for adoption:

- a. A two-thirds majority vote of approval in two thirds of the Regional Conferences.
- b. A two-thirds majority vote of approval of the lay and ministerial leaders present and voting in two thirds of the local churches in two thirds of the Regional Conferences. This vote shall be taken within sixty days of the adjournment of the Annual Conference Session of the Regional Conferences.
- c. The certification of the results of the voting by the Connectional Committee,
- d. The presentation of the amendment to the General Conference by the Connectional Committee,
- e. And a two-thirds majority ratifying vote in the next General Conference.

II. Statutory Changes

178. We define statutory law to be that part of the polity of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches that can be changed by a vote of the General Conference. Changes to statutory laws shall take effect upon the publishing of the *Discipline* (or an insert) unless otherwise specified.

179. When the recommendation for a change in statutory law arises, a majority vote by the General Conference shall ratify the proposed change.

SECTION VIII CONSTITUTIONAL GLOSSARY

Adoption: that gracious act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer is constituted a child of God.

Essence: in reference to God, refers to his character, nature, and being. God is a trinity of persons consisting of one substance and one essence. The essence, that is character, nature, and being, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is identical and shared, so that there is only one essence in God.

Immodesty: we understand immodesty to include the exposure of what Scripture calls nakedness as well as dress and deportment that is indiscreet and/or inappropriate.

Justification: the gracious and judicial act of God by which He grants full pardon of all guilt, complete release from the penalty of sins committed, and acceptance as righteous to all who, believing on Jesus and receiving Him as Lord and Savior, are united with Christ.

Pederasty: sexual activity between an adult male and a boy.

Pedophilia: adult sexual activity with children.

Prevenient grace: grace that precedes sinners' salvation, restraining their sinfulness, providing them blessings common to all men, and enabling them to respond to the Gospel.

Regeneration: that gracious work of God whereby the moral nature of the repentant believer is spiritually quickened and given a distinctively spiritual life, capable of faith, love, and obedience.

Repentance: a willful change of mind that renounces sin and longs for righteousness, a godly sorrow for and a confession of past sins, proper restitution for wrongdoings, and a resolution to reform the life.

Sacrament: a practice commanded by Christ which symbolizes physically a spiritual reality and in which we receive grace from God.

PART II
STATUTORY LAW

SECTION I

ORGANIZATION OF OFFICIAL BODIES

I. THE LOCAL CHURCH

I. General Information

180. A local church is an autonomous body of believers in fellowship with Jesus Christ assembling in any one place for religious worship, bound by a covenant of love and mutual faith into a community of believers dedicated to the Word of God and the nurturing of disciples (see para. 21-22, 116, 137).¹

II. Membership

181. The local church has the right to receive members, lay leaders, and ministerial leaders who have met the qualifications for their respective positions (see para. 99, 105, 111) upon a vote of the lay and ministerial leadership. No church shall be compelled to receive members on certificate from any source.

182. When members, lay leaders, or ministerial leaders are to be received in a local church, the church is directed to use the appropriate form of reception (see pp. 167-171).

183. When objections are raised against the reception of a member, lay leader, or ministerial leader, it shall require a vote of three-fourths of the lay and ministerial leadership present to effect the reception.

184. No person ever becomes a member, lay leader, or ministerial leader of a Bible Methodist church except by a vote of the lay and ministerial leadership of the church where he seeks admission and by affirming the appropriate covenant (see pp. 167-171). No church shall remove a member without his consent except by due process of disciplinary laws, unless a person has moved from the community and cannot be contacted. In such a case, he may by a vote of the lay and ministerial leadership be declared removed due to loss of contact.

¹ See paragraph 138 for the definition of autonomy.

185. It shall be the duty of all our churches to hear and try complaints¹ and to expel members, lay leaders, or ministerial leaders who persistently neglect their respective responsibilities (see para. 101, 108, 114). A majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership shall be required to expel, except where the *Discipline* states that removal is automatic (see para. 44, 90, 101, 108, 114).

186. When any member, lay leader, or ministerial leader shall request a Certificate of Transfer to another Bible Methodist church (see page 125), it shall be the duty of the church through its church board to ascertain the reasons for the request, and if no reasonable impediment is found, the certificate shall be granted. No Certificate of Transfer, as provided for in the *Discipline*, shall be granted if the requestor is living in acknowledged open violation of the requirements of the *Discipline* as agreed to in the questions of the membership or leadership covenant taken when received (see pp. 167 and 169).

187. When a Certificate of Recommendation (see page 126) is requested in writing, it must be granted if charges have not previously been brought against the requestor. Upon request by a member, lay leader, or ministerial leader against whom charges have been presented a church may grant a Certificate of Withdrawal (see page 126).

188. Lay or ministerial leaders who acknowledge that they are living in violation of the *Discipline* thereby forfeit their right to vote in any business connected with the church until such acknowledged violations have been corrected.

189. When any lay or ministerial leader without a reason deemed justifiable by his local church shall absent himself from all the religious services of his church for three successive months, he forfeits his right to vote in the transaction of any business of the church; at the end of six successive months of absence, he forfeits his membership and his name may be dropped from the church roll by a vote of the lay and ministerial leadership without his consent. This provision does not apply to one serving under Annual Conference appointment.

190. When any member, lay leader, or ministerial leader severs his relationship with the local church by joining another church, a religious body exercising the functions of a church, or a secret society, the chairman of the church meeting, after stating the facts, shall authorize the name to be marked on the church roll as “Withdrawn by reason of having joined another body.” In all cases of removal, the reason for the removal must be recorded.

¹ For trials, see the Judiciary sections on pages 45 and 85.

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191. Each church shall have a book of records kept by a clerk/secretary elected by the church. All the names of the members, lay leaders, and ministerial leaders shall be recorded along with the time when received, and whether by certificate or on profession of faith. Also, all baptisms, withdrawals, dismissals, expulsions, transfers, and deaths occurring during each conference year shall be recorded.

III. Business Meetings

192. The church may hold quarterly or an annual business meeting for the purpose of reviewing and approving its ministries and treasuries.

193. Recommended order of business for quarterly meetings:

- a. Open with prayer.
- b. Take the roll.
- c. Read the minutes of the last session.
- d. Read the written reports submitted to the quarterly business meeting by each pastor, treasurer, and department leader.
- e. Hear and act upon reports and recommendations of the pastor(s), committees, and departments.
- f. Hear proposed budgets and make adjustments as necessary.
- g. Grant licenses to local preachers.
- h. Recommend suitable local preachers and lay missionaries to the Annual Conference to study and minister under its direction.
- i. Determine the time and place of the next business meeting.

194. Treasurers of the various departments of church work shall report in full concerning receipts and disbursements of funds connected with their respective departments at each business meeting. Churches may direct that full reports be made at its regular meetings, when they deem it for the best interest of the church.

195. By request, the Conference President may hold a local church business meeting.

IV. Annual Business Meeting

196. The purpose of the Annual Business Meeting is to receive annual reports from the various departments and treasurers, to elect officers for the coming conference year, and to set the general direction of the church.

197. Members being considered for these offices may be nominated previous to the meeting, either by the church board or by a nominating committee selected by the church. There will be an opportunity for nominations. from the floor according to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

198. Recommended order of business for the Annual Business Meeting:

- a. Open with prayer.
- b. Take the roll.
- c. Read the minutes of the last session.
- d. Read the written reports submitted to the quarterly business meeting by each pastor, treasurer, and department leader.
- e. Hear reports from the pastor, local preachers, and committee and department chairpersons.
- f. Hear proposed budgets and make adjustments as necessary.
- g. Grant licenses to local preachers.
- h. Recommend suitable local preachers and lay missionaries to the Annual Conference to study and minister under its direction.
- i. Receive members and review the membership roll.
- j. Elect officers (see para. 209).
- k. Elect committees (see para. 217).
- l. Determine the time and place of the next business meeting.

V. Procedures and Authority

199. The pastor is, under the authority of Christ, the leader of the church and shepherd of the flock. Church and pastor are bound together in a covenant of mutual love, common essential beliefs, and desire to see the church grow for the glory of God.

200. The church should look to the pastor for guidance, counsel, and wisdom. In turn, the pastor is wise to seek the counsel and wisdom of the church leadership.

201. The church shall have the authority to elect its own officers and to remove them for cause. No pastor or other official has the authority to appoint officers or declare an office vacant without the approval of the body which elected them.

VI. The Pastor

202. The pastor shall preach the Gospel regularly and shall endeavor to preach the whole counsel of the Word of God as the Lord leads him. He shall oversee the administration of the ordinances of the church, act as chairman at meetings

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for the transaction of church matters, supervise the teaching ministries of the church, and tenderly watch over the spiritual interests of the congregation.

203. The pastor shall be the *ex officio* chairman of all committees, except the Pulpit Supply and Judiciary Committees, and shall chair the church board and any public business meetings. In his absence, a designated chairman shall lead the business.

204. The pastor shall extend the right hand of fellowship on behalf of the church to all new members and leaders (see pp. 167-171), and perform such other duties as generally appertain to such a position.

205. The pastor shall be free to choose the means and methods by which he exercises the ministry that God has given him. All arrangements for public worship, Bible study, and other services, including times and places, as well as the use of the property belonging to the church for purposes other than its normal uses, shall be under the control of the pastor with the concurrence of the church board.

206. The pastor shall have the authority to perform the following duties:

- a. Call a meeting of the church, at a time established by the Annual Conference, for the election of church officers and committees. The term of office of these church officers shall begin and expire at dates corresponding to the dates of the Annual Conference year, or at dates otherwise determined by the Annual Conference.
- b. Take an exact account of the members, lay leaders, ministerial leaders, and local preachers of his church in cooperation with the clerk/secretary; and to report the same to the Annual Conference Session that their number may be printed in its minutes.
- c. Inform the church board of the Conference Asking as recommended by the Annual Conference and encourage full payment of the same.
- d. Oversee the preparation of the church statistical report for the Annual Conference (see page 113).
- e. Keep an up-to-date file of contact information on the members and attendees and pass on such to his successor.
- f. Oversee the administration of the *Discipline* for the operation of the church and consistently teach and conscientiously enact its guidelines.
- g. Grant letters of standing, as approved by the church board, to those members desiring to transfer to another church.

207. The pastor may not unilaterally commit or obligate the local church to significant responsibilities, financial or otherwise, without the approval of its leadership. Such major obligations must receive the approval of the lay and ministerial leadership.

208. A local church may make provision for assistant pastors or ministers and such ministerial leaders as the local body desires in order to meet the needs of the congregation.

VII. Local Church Officers

209. The organization and duties of church officers may be combined to suit the local church so long as the intended functions of each office are met. These officers may be elected at the Annual Business Meeting.

210. Officers may include but need not be limited to:

- a. Class Leader
- b. Clerk/Secretary
- c. Education and Outreach Director/Sunday School Superintendent
- d. Treasurer

211. The terms of service for leaders, with the exception of pastor(s), are for one year, and in the case of a mid-year change, shall continue until the next Annual Business meeting.

212. All church staff shall be under the authority of the pastor and the local church board.

213. Class Leader

- a. A church may elect or appoint a class leader. It is recommended that the class leader be a ministerial leader, when possible.¹
- b. The duties of this officer may be assigned by the local church.

214. The **Clerk/Secretary** shall

- a. Manage a complete record of church membership (see para. 191).
- b. Record and store the minutes of all official business meetings.
- c. Record baptisms, dedications and weddings performed in the church.

¹ See paragraphs 109-114 for the description of ministerial leaders.

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215. The Education and Outreach Director/Sunday School Superintendent shall

- a. Work in conjunction with the pastor(s) and church board for the biblical literacy of the church.
- b. Manage the teachers, classes, attendance and curriculum of the Sunday School.
- c. Promote and provide for training and development of teachers.
- d. Offer, when appropriate, direction in discipleship.
- e. Encourage and promote outreach efforts and other events such as VBS.

216. The Treasurer shall

- a. Report in full concerning receipts and disbursements of church funds at each business meeting of the church (see para. 194).
- b. Receive and secure church funds, keeping them safe in cooperation with the pastor and church board.
- c. Distribute receipts for all donations, contributions, and gifts.
- d. Keep accurate records and give regular written reports to the church board and written annual reports to the membership.
- e. Cooperate with an annual review/audit of all the financial records.
- f. Manage the financial records for the church.
- g. Distribute funds in cooperation with the instructions of the pastor and church board regarding the budget.
- h. Assist the pastor in completing and mailing the financial section of the church's statistical report (see page 113).
- i. Forward funds that are collected for missions, conference, or other ministry projects.
- j. Send Conference Asking to the Regional Conference treasurer.

VIII. Local Church Committees

217. The organization and duties of the following committees may be combined in one church board as it suits the local church, so long as the intended functions of the committees are met. Committees may be elected at the Annual Business Meeting.

218. Committees may include but need not be limited to:

- a. Church Board
- b. Auditing/Financial Review Committee
- c. Communion Stewards Committee
- d. Education and Outreach/Sunday School Committee

- e. Judiciary Committee
- f. Pulpit Supply Committee
- g. Stewardship Committee
- h. Trustee Committee

219. The Church Board shall

- a. Consist of not less than three persons.
- b. Work in cooperation with the pastor(s).
- c. Model spiritual leadership including but not limited to, comforting, counseling, correcting, and strengthening all the departments of the local church.
- d. Hold regular meetings for the transaction of business, but meetings may be called at any time by the pastor or any three board members, due notice being given thereof. In the absence of a pastor, the board may select by ballot a temporary chairman to lead the business meetings.
- e. Consider each application for church membership, lay leadership, or ministerial leadership, examine all candidates, and report its recommendation in each case to the church within thirty days. No church shall by vote receive a person into lay or ministerial leadership until that person has been examined by this committee and a report has been made to the church.
- f. Consult with the pastor regarding the work of the church. When requested, it shall assist the pastor in filling the pulpit in cases when he will be away. All regular official action of this committee shall be reported either to regular or special meetings of the church for approval or disapproval.
- g. Review annually all legal documents to insure they are current.
- h. Transfer to the authority of the Judiciary Committee any charges against a member that cannot be quickly resolved in an amicable manner.
- i. Hear the reports and examine the character of local preachers and renew licenses as appropriate.
- j. Report all its actions at the quarterly or annual business meetings.

220. Auditing/Financial Review Committee

- a. Each local church may either elect a committee or hire someone to review/audit the work of each treasurer.
- b. The purpose shall be to annually review the accounts of each treasurer of the church.

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- c. After conducting the review, the committee is to give a written report to the church board and the Annual Business Meeting. The report shall record any commendations, instructions, or counsel the church may need to receive.

221. Communion Stewards Committee

- a. A church may select a committee to assist with communion.
- b. The purpose of this committee is to assist with preparations for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.
- c. From among the members of the committee one may be selected as acting chairman.

222. Education and Outreach/Sunday School Committee

- a. The church may choose to elect or appoint a committee to oversee education and outreach. The purpose of this committee would be to strengthen biblical education and literacy.
- b. The Education and Outreach Director/Sunday School Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and at least two other members may be elected at the Annual Business Meeting to comprise this committee.
- c. This committee would provide oversight and supervision for the Sunday School operations, including:
 1. Insuring that every class has a prepared teacher present for Sunday School.
 2. Providing training for the Sunday School teachers.
 3. Working with the teachers to select materials most suitable for each class.
 4. Reviewing for doctrinal correctness and orthodoxy the lessons of teachers who prefer to prepare their own materials.
 5. Promoting Sunday School/Education and Outreach.
 6. Organizing activities that foster fellowship among those who attend Sunday School.
 7. Discussing progress and plans. It is recommended that the Sunday School Committee and teachers meet once a quarter for such discussions
 8. Functioning, when feasible, in conjunction with the class leader and/or discipleship department.

223. Judiciary Committee. A Judiciary Committee consisting of at least three lay or ministerial leaders shall be elected and function as laid out in the section on The Judiciary (see para. 390-399).

224. Pulpit Supply Committee

- a. The pulpit supply committee operates under the supervision of the church board. Its purpose is to interview candidates for pastor, to present their recommendation to the church board, and to arrange for the pastoral vote.
- b. A pulpit supply committee shall be elected, each member of which shall continue in office until his successor is elected. In case of the resignation or death of the pastor, this committee, with the aid and consent of the Conference President and/or his Executive Committee, shall secure a supply pastor for the remainder of the year.
 1. If the supply pastor desires to serve the church as pastor longer than the present year, he shall communicate the same to the Pulpit Supply Committee not less than sixty days before the next session of the Annual Conference.
 2. In case the supply pastor does not wish to serve the church for another year, no vote shall be taken as to retaining him.
- c. It shall be the duty of the Pulpit Supply Committee, not less than forty-five days before the next session of the Annual Conference, to ascertain by ballot the desire of the church regarding retaining the present pastor, provided he has not given notice as above. Notice of the meeting at which the vote is to be taken shall be given at least two weeks before the vote is taken. A majority vote of those who are present and voting shall constitute a call.
- d. The committee at its earliest opportunity shall communicate the result of the ballot to the pastor who, if called, shall reply in writing within one week stating definitely whether the call is accepted or declined, unless the committee agrees to an extension which shall not exceed one extra week. If the call is accepted, the pastor shall notify the president of the Regional Conference in writing, and the Pulpit Supply Committee shall so notify the members of the church. A failure to definitely accept the call, unless the conditions be acceptable to the church, shall justify the Pulpit Supply Committee in considering another name.
- e. After a pastor has completed one year of service, he may be offered an extended call as follows:
 1. The first vote shall always be a one-year call, by simple majority vote.
 2. After the call for one year has been accepted by the pastor, the Pulpit Supply Committee, with the consent of the pastor, may take a ballot vote on a call for a second year. By simple majority vote the pastor may be extended a call for a second year. Such a call

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shall be binding on both pastor and church; provided, however, that by mutual agreement between pastor and church the arrangements may be discontinued at the close of the first year.

3. An extended call for a definite period of more than two years may be offered. Such a call requires a two-thirds majority vote for approval. By mutual agreement between pastor and church, the arrangement may be discontinued any time after the close of the first year, provided they are preceded by a three month notice.
- f. When a church shall find it necessary to call a new pastor, the Pulpit Supply Committee shall confer with the Conference President, who shall furnish it with the names of all known available persons. The Pulpit Supply Committee may present the name of any member of the conference, whether it was on the list submitted by the president or not. However, the Pulpit Supply Committee shall not propose to the church the name of any elder or conference preacher who is not a member of the Regional Conference in which the church is located, except by the consent of the Conference President and his Executive Committee.
 - g. When consideration is given to calling a new pastor, the Pulpit Supply Committee shall so announce at a regular public gathering of the church, giving the time, place, and purpose of this meeting, at which it shall ascertain, by ballot, the wishes of the church concerning the name it presents. The vote may be taken in the next regular meeting of the church.
 1. The Pulpit Supply Committee shall present only one name for consideration on each ballot, but as many ballots may be taken in any one duly announced meeting as may be necessary to determine to whom the committee in behalf of the church shall extend the call.
 2. When extending the call, the Pulpit Supply Committee shall present the amount of salary or plan of remuneration, as determined by the church board or, if elected separately, the Stewardship Committee (see para. 225f). The committee shall report whether the call is accepted or declined as soon as is possible.
 3. If the call is accepted, the delegate to the next session of the Annual Conference shall convey this information to the committee on Pastoral Relations.
 - h. If the balloting fails to produce a call or if the call is declined, the Pulpit Supply Committee shall proceed again as outlined above.
 - i. Where a church waives its rights in selecting a pastor, it shall submit to the counsel of the conference leadership in securing a pastor. When

a pastor has been secured by such means, he shall be received by the church the same as if they had voted for him.

- j. The actions of this committee in all business transacted must be submitted to the church for approval or disapproval before they become binding, unless authority to take final action in any specific matter is given to the committee by the church.

225. Stewardship Committee

- a. Each church may elect a Stewardship Committee who shall elect one of their number as secretary who will keep a record of all proceedings.
- b. This committee shall be a standing Ways and Means Committee. It shall agree with the pastor on the necessary amount for his support at the time of his engagement and annually thereafter.
- c. It shall carefully consider the methods used to raise funds for the support of the Gospel to insure they are in harmony with Scripture.
- d. The Stewardship Committee shall develop an annual budget for the local church. This budget will be presented to the church for approval at the last business meeting of the annual conference year for the upcoming year.
- e. The Stewardship Committee shall meet annually, within 30 days prior to the time of voting on a pastor, for the purpose of fixing the pastor's salary for the ensuing year or arranging a plan of support when a salary is not paid. The pastor, as *ex officio* chairman, may be present and chair this meeting of the committee, if he so chooses.
- f. When calling a new pastor, the Stewardship Committee shall decide on a financial package. This action shall be recorded by their secretary and reported by their chairman to the Pulpit Supply Committee, which in turn shall communicate same to a new pastor at the time he is notified of having been called.
- g. It shall also be the duty of the stewards at each appointment to labor diligently to secure the payment of the pastor's compensation in full.
- h. The actions of the Stewardship Committee shall be read at the quarterly or Annual Business Meeting of the church.
- i. The stewards shall also have charge of all the monies and goods raised for the poor, widows, orphans, and ill and shall disburse the same under the direction of the church board with ratification by the quarterly or Annual Business Meeting.

226. Trustees Committee

- a. The local church may elect a committee of three to five trustees. They serve under the authority of the laws of the state or territory in which

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the church is located. In all cases where the civil law requires a specific mode of election of church trustees, that mode shall be strictly followed. Where no particular mode of election is required the trustees shall be elected by ballot at the annual meeting of the local church or at a special meeting duly called for that purpose. Trustees shall serve a three year term, and shall be elected to serve in alternating years. One member of this committee may serve as the statutory agent and may also serve as the chairman.

- b. Trustees must be selected from among the lay or ministerial leaders of the church.
- c. The members of this committee are to work under the leadership and direction of the pastor and church board. When a trustee refuses to cooperate with the church leadership, he shall be replaced by a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leadership, and his replacement shall serve the remainder of his term.
- d. Their duties may include to:
 1. Purchase, hold, lease, or otherwise acquire real and personal property on behalf of the church, and to take real and personal property by will, gift, or bequest on behalf of the church.
 2. Sell, convey, transfer, lease, assign, exchange, or otherwise dispose of, and to mortgage, pledge, or otherwise encumber the real and personal property of the church, to borrow money and incur indebtedness for the purpose and the use of the church; to cause to be executed, issued, and delivered for the indebtedness, in the name of the church, promissory notes, bonds, debentures, or other evidence of indebtedness; and to secure repayment by deeds of trust, mortgages, or pledges.
 3. Hold the title to church property and manage it as trustees of the local church, where the local church is not incorporated, or where civil law requires it.
 4. Give guidance to the development of the physical facilities and to financial planning, unless the church board has provided otherwise.
 5. Exercise all power necessary for the dissolution of the church when necessary. In the event there are not sufficient lay or ministerial leaders to fill the offices of Trustee, the church leadership may choose to transfer their property to the Regional Conference.
- e. They shall meet at least once a year and report the business of their meeting at the annual meeting of the local church.
- f. Trustees may not forbid the use of church property to any church leader.

IX. Local Church Departments

227. The local church may establish various departments to help in the ministry functions of the church. These departments will function under the authority of the pastor and the church board. Listed are some departments the church may wish to establish.

228. Discipleship Department. To better fulfill the Great Commission,¹ a local church may organize a discipleship department. The purpose of this department would be to facilitate spiritual growth, as well as instruction for membership, lay leadership, and ministerial leadership. A person of spiritual maturity and discernment from among the lay and ministerial leadership may be selected as a Discipleship Coordinator who would oversee, in connection with the church leadership, the discipleship department.

229. Missions Department. It is recommended that the church organize a missionary department for the promotion and support of missions. The church is encouraged to participate in Bible Methodist Missions as well as the church planting efforts of the Regional Conference of which it is a part.

230. Youth Department. It is recommended that the church organize a youth department for the evangelizing, training, and discipling of young people within the church and the community at large. The chairman of this department should be a lay or ministerial leader of the church.

X. Local Preachers

231. The local church shall have power to grant license to preach and exhort; provided that no person shall be licensed without an interview with the church board to examine his gifts, graces, and usefulness, and without a recommendation from the church of which he is a lay or ministerial leader.

232. A request for a local preacher's license to preach shall be referred to the pastor and church board.

233. Whenever candidates are presented for licenses to preach, the following list of questions may be asked of the candidates during the interview:

- a. Do you know clearly that you are saved?

¹ Matthew 28:18-20.

LOCAL CHURCH

- b. Are you entirely sanctified? If not, are you seeking to be entirely sanctified?
- c. Do you fully desire to serve the Lord?
- d. Are you willing to work under the authority of the pastor and church board?
- e. Are you, or are you willing, to pay tithe to your local church?
- f. Are you willing to study to know and understand the Word of God and the work of ministry?

234. A local preacher is a person who is licensed to preach by his church. It shall be his duty to preach as opportunity affords, under the direction of the church and in harmony with the regular work of the pastor. The license of a local preacher may be renewed from year to year, provided the local preacher has participated in the educational expectations set by the church.

235. A local preacher may be recommended to the Annual Conference for conference preacher's license by the local church where his membership is held. If the local church so chooses, it may elect a local preacher to serve as a lay delegate to an Annual Conference Session.

XI. Starting New Churches

236. A local church is encouraged to facilitate new churches in neighboring communities and to start and mentor house churches.¹ Such churches will be under the planting church's direction and management until it chooses to present the work to its Regional Conference to be listed on the conference roll. Church planting should be done in cooperation with the conference.

¹ A church begun and meeting in a home.

II. THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE

I. General Information

237. Local Bible Methodist churches within a specified area shall be grouped together and designated as a Regional Conference with the concurrence of the General Conference.

238. Each Regional Conference shall be composed of the churches listed on its roll.

II. Annual Conference Delegates

239. Lay Delegates. Every organized church shall be entitled to a lay delegate to the Annual Conference Session of its Regional Conference, even when it is without a pastor. For each church there shall be one delegate for the pastor, whether an elder or conference preacher, and one delegate for each elder not on the whose stated intention is to attend the Annual Conference Session.

240. In every case, lay delegates to an Annual Conference must be elected to the Annual Conference of which the church forms a part. Where delegates are elected to an Annual Conference Session on account of elders who are not pastors, such delegates must come from the local church where the elder holds membership. An elder who has transferred out of a Regional Conference between conference sessions shall not have a lay delegate elected to his former Annual Conference Session.

241. All lay delegates to the Annual Conference shall be elected by ballot by a majority vote of the lay and ministerial leaders present and voting. No elder or conference preacher shall be eligible to be elected as a lay delegate.

242. Each church shall elect by ballot sufficient alternate lay delegates to insure proper representation to the Annual Conference. The alternate lay delegates shall fill any vacancies in the order of their election.

243. Delegates shall be elected for a term of one year. The delegates elected for Annual Conference shall make up the delegate body if a special session of the conference is called during the conference year.

244. Each delegate shall be issued a credential (see page 127). When an elected delegate transfers his membership from the local church where he was elected, said credentials are to be surrendered.

245. The election shall be held within the time limit determined by each Regional Conference.

246. Conference preachers are encouraged to attend Annual Conference and sit within the bar with speaking privileges. For the conditions under which conference preachers may or may not vote at Annual Conference, see paragraphs 283-285 and 317.

247. Ministerial Listings. The ministers of an Annual Conference shall be listed as follows:

- a. The stationed list shall be composed of all elders and conference preachers who are working under the approval of the Annual Conference or its president, or who are elected or appointed by the Connection.
- b. The reserve list shall be composed of elders who are ready to take work at the hands of the conference.
- c. The superannuated list shall be composed of all elders who by reason of age or infirmities are incapacitated to take work.
- d. The unstationed list shall be composed of elders who are not currently involved in ministry and for various reasons are no longer planning to engage in ministry. After two years of being assigned to this list, unless the conference chooses to make an extension, the elder shall be an honorary member of Annual Conference with privilege to speak but not to vote.
- e. Ministers under discipline whose credentials are held in trust will be unlisted and will decline ministerial service until the conference under which they are credentialed has authorized their availability.

III. Annual Conference Regular Sessions

248. Each Regional Conference may set the requirements for a quorum during its conference sessions.

249. In transacting the business of the Annual Conference the ministers and lay members shall deliberate as one body; but on the final passage of any bill, rule, or regulation, at the call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide, and the ministers and lay members shall vote separately; and it shall require a

majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

IV. Annual Conference Special Sessions

250. The president of a Regional Conference shall call a special session when a petition to call the same is presented to him. A special session of Regional Conference may be initiated by a two-thirds vote of an Annual Conference Session, a two-thirds vote of the Executive Committee, or petition of two thirds of the delegates from the previous Annual Conference Session. It shall meet at the place selected for the next annual meeting, or at any place selected by the president and the Executive Committee if it is better to do so. A call for a special session must define the business to be transacted, and no business not stated in the call shall be transacted at the special session.

V. Procedures and Authority

251. Constitutional rights and responsibilities of the Regional Conference are listed in the constitution (see para. 151-152).

252. The Annual Conference shall have authority to adopt such standing rules as it shall judge necessary to promote its own interest and prosperity as long as those rules are in harmony with the *Discipline* (see para. 151g).

253. The authority of the Regional Conference includes overseeing the requirements and preparation of those who are seeking to become elders in The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. The Annual Conference shall maintain the rolls of affiliated elders.

254. Each Regional Conference may formulate policy for the purpose of offering restoration to elders or conference preachers who are under discipline.

255. When three or more members of an Regional Conference disagree with an action or rule of the conference on the grounds that it violates the *Discipline*, they may appeal that action. The process for appeal is to submit in writing their argument to the Conference President and the Conference Executive Committee requesting a review and decision by the Conference President (see para. 260). If that ruling is not satisfactory, the same members may appeal to the Conference Judiciary Committee by submitting their arguments in writing. The ruling of the Judiciary Committee shall be final unless the Annual Conference Session votes to overrule the same by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting.

VI. Regional Conference Officers

A. President

256. The conference shall elect by ballot a president from among the elders, by a majority vote, who shall perform the duties outlined in the *Discipline* and such other duties as the conference may assign. The first term of office shall be one year.

257. When a Conference President is being voted upon to serve a second term, the first electing ballot shall be for a one year term, by simple majority. However, by consent of the President, the Annual Conference may take a ballot vote on the call to extend it, at which time a two-thirds majority vote is necessary. This extension may not exceed a four-year term.

258. It is his duty to:

- a. Preside in the sessions of the Annual Conference as chairman and chair the Conference Executive Committee.
- b. Preside in the meetings of the Pastoral Relations Committee; recommend and facilitate pastoral change when necessary, with the consent of the churches and ministers.
- c. Receive ministers from other religious bodies during the interval of the sessions of the Annual Conference, subject to the action of the ensuing session of the Annual Conference, at which he shall refer the names of all such ministers to the Education and Elders' Orders Committee for examination and recommendation.
- d. Grant letters of standing for ministers transferring to other conferences or organizations, after sufficient research to merit the transfer.
- e. Travel within its bounds when it is deemed necessary by his Annual Conference.
- f. Report all his official acts to the Annual Conference at its first full business meeting.
- g. Perform such other duties as the Annual Conference shall define.

259. The president shall be accountable to the Annual Conference for his official conduct.

260. A request to the Conference President for a ruling on any point of the *Discipline* of the Connection or any standing rule of the conference shall be made in writing, and his ruling shall be in writing. The president of the conference may take sixty days in which to give his ruling provided that period of time does not make the date of his decision come after the first business meeting of the next

conference session. In such a case he shall give his decision by the first business meeting of that session and report it to the first business meeting of the Annual Conference. When there is a challenge to the Conference President's ruling, the Annual Conference shall consider the matter and the decision of the conference shall stand.

261. In anticipation of a vacancy in the office of Conference President, each Regional Conference may develop a policy of transition.

B. Vice President

262. The conference shall elect by ballot from among the elders one Vice President. The term of office shall be for one year. If the office of president becomes vacant by death, resignation, or for other reason, the Vice President shall thereupon become president and shall perform the duties of the president for the remainder of the conference year. The Conference President, with the counsel of the Executive Committee, may assign to the Vice President such duties and tasks as seem appropriate for efficient operation.

C. Secretary

263. The Annual Conference shall elect by ballot one of its members, either a ministerial or lay delegate, as secretary. The term of office shall be for one year. The secretary shall faithfully record all the proceedings of the Annual Conference including reports. All records are to be prepared and kept for the use of the Annual Conference in the form of printed minutes.

D. Treasurer

264. The Annual Conference shall elect by ballot one of its members, either a ministerial or lay delegate, as treasurer. The term of office shall be for one year. The treasurer shall receive, hold, and pay out funds as directed by the conference. The conference shall provide proper authorization for the disbursing of funds. In the event a conference treasurer is considered or may be considered for re-election, such election shall not be held until his audited annual report has been approved by the conference.

E. Education and Outreach Coordinator

265. The Annual Conference may elect by ballot one of its members, either a ministerial or lay delegate, as Education and Outreach Coordinator. The term of office shall be for one year. The Coordinator shall promote biblical education

through Sunday School, outreach, discipleship, and stewardship. This officer may chair the Education and Outreach Committee, when a conference deems it necessary to organize such a committee.

VII. Regional Conference Committees

266. Each Regional Conference has the authority to organize committees as best suits its needs, provided the functions of the following committees are included (para. 268-276). The list of committees should be regarded as a recommendation and not as exhaustive.

267. Each conference committee is to prepare and deliver a report to Annual Conference.

268. Auditing/Financial Review Committee. Each conference shall elect an Auditing/Financial Review Committee of three persons to audit/review all conference treasurers' books.

269. Education and Elders' Orders Committee. The Annual Conference shall elect an Education and Elders' Orders Committee composed of elders, the chairman of which shall be elected by the committee. The election of the first member shall be chosen for one year, the second member for two years, the third member for three years, and the fourth member for four years. Thereafter, their successors to be elected yearly for the full term of four years. The function of this committee is to:

- a. Recommend suitable candidates to be received to study for or to participate in ministry.
- b. Examine the candidates who may appear before it from year to year regarding the studies prescribed in the *Discipline* as well as their ministry and report such examinations to the conference.
- c. Recommend for ordination such persons as have satisfactorily completed the Course of Study required by the *Discipline*, or have completed equivalent studies, and who have submitted a request for ordination. No candidate shall be recommended for Elders' Orders until he has first been carefully and specifically questioned by the Education and Elders' Orders Committee, shall have been recommended by the Conference President and the Executive Committee, and shall have fully satisfied the Education and Elders Orders committee as to his Christian testimony and his full personal commitment, without reservations, to the Statement of Faith of The Bible Methodist Con-

nection of Churches. All such candidates must successfully pass an examination of the *Discipline*.

- d. Oversee the ongoing ministerial education and ministry of conference preachers. The chairman of this committee should encourage each committee member to offer leadership and encouragement to the conference preachers who have been appointed to his oversight.
- e. Maintain a record that details the studies and ministries of the conference preachers who are preparing for ordination.
- f. Receive, examine, and offer recommendations regarding the character of those ministers who submit Ministerial Responsibility forms (see page 118).

270. Education and Outreach Committee. An Education and Outreach Committee may be established for the purpose of encouraging the promotion of biblical education, outreach, discipleship, and stewardship. This committee shall be chaired by the Education and Outreach Coordinator.

271. Executive Committee. Each Annual Conference shall elect an Executive Committee. The Executive Committee executes the business of the Conference between Annual Conference Sessions. This committee shall consist of Conference President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and as many additional elders and lay members as each Conference shall deem necessary.

272. Judiciary Committee. Each Annual Conference shall elect a standing committee consisting of not less than three members, at least two of which shall be elders, which shall function as the Conference Judiciary Committee (see para. 393). The responsibilities of this committee are outlined in paragraph 399.

273. Pastoral Relations Committee. Each Annual Conference shall appoint a Pastoral Relations Committee of three ministerial and three lay members, of which the president shall be *ex officio* chairman.

- a. This committee shall maintain a record of each church and minister, ensuring that each minister is listed in the proper stationing category. The committee may also list those local and conference preachers who are students in approved educational institutions.
- b. In taking care of the work committed to it, the Pastoral Relations Committee shall proceed in the following manner: It shall give the name of each church. If any church ceases to exist during the year, this committee shall report that fact in order to preserve the record of the disbanding of the church.

274. Statistical Committee. Each conference shall elect a Statistical Committee and the first member elected will be chairman. They shall compile the data submitted in the Statistical Report Form required by the *Discipline* (see pp. 113-117).

275. Board of Trustees. The conference shall elect by ballot a Board of Trustees of not less than five, two of whom shall be laymen, whose duty it shall be to receive, hold, and dispose of all conference property within the bounds of the Regional Conference, according to the provisions of the constitution (see para. 151i) and the directions of the conference unless otherwise provided for by state law. They shall serve for three years, one or more being elected annually (so that the term of all shall not expire at the same time), or until their successors are elected. When any trustee shall cease to be a member of a Bible Methodist church, or in case of an elder when he ceases to be a member of the Regional Conference electing him, he shall cease to be a trustee, and the vacancy shall be filled according to the provisions in paragraph 276. Their duties may include to:

- a. Purchase, hold, lease, or otherwise acquire real and personal property on behalf of the conference, and to take real and personal property by will, gift, or bequest on behalf of the conference.
- b. Sell, convey, transfer, lease, assign, exchange, or otherwise dispose of, and to mortgage, pledge, or otherwise encumber the real and personal property of the conference, to borrow money and incur indebtedness for the purpose and the use of the conference; to cause to be executed, issued, and delivered for the indebtedness, in the name of the conference, promissory notes, bonds, debentures, or other evidence of indebtedness; and to secure repayment by deeds of trust, mortgages, or pledges.
- c. Hold the title to conference property and manage it as trustees of the Regional Conference, where the conference is not incorporated, or where civil law requires it.
- d. Give guidance to the development of the physical facilities and to financial planning, unless the Conference Executive Committee has provided otherwise.

276. Vacancies Committee. The Annual Conference shall elect a committee of five persons, three ministers and two lay members, whose duty it shall be to fill vacancies in Conference committees or offices. In the event of the vacancy of both Conference President and Conference Vice President, for whatever reason, this committee, with counsel from the Executive Committee, would fill the vacancies until the next session of Annual Conference. This committee shall also fill vacancies, as provided in the *Discipline*, in any Regional Conference office,

standing committee, or the Board of Trustees, where the state laws permit. Any person appointed by this committee to fill a vacancy shall serve through the next session of the Annual Conference. This committee shall report all its appointments to the Annual Conference.

VIII. Regional Conference Departments

277. Conference Extension. Each Regional Conference may develop a department to facilitate the establishment of churches in the general areas of the Conference which sponsors those activities. This department is encouraged to help plant new congregations and to establish churches.

278. Missions Department. Each Regional Conference shall organize a missions department and may adopt such organizational guidelines as it may judge necessary to encourage and support the work of missions as recommended by the Connectional Missions Committee.

279. Youth Department. Each Regional Conference may organize a department whose focus is youth. This department shall encourage young people to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

IX. The Ministry

A. Ministerial Character

280. All ministers are to live lives of biblical integrity.¹ Credentialed persons in particular are to live humbly,² contentedly,³ free from deceit,⁴ greed,⁵ sexual

¹ **1 Timothy 6:11** “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.”

² **1 Peter 5:5-6** “Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to *your* elders. Yes, all of *you* be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.”

³ **1 Timothy 6:6-8** “Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into *this* world, and *it is* certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”

⁴ **1 Timothy 4:12** “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

⁵ **Titus 1:7** “For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain.” **1 Peter 5:2** “Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under

immorality,¹ and false doctrine.² Paul wrote to Timothy, “If a man desires the position of an overseer, he desires a good work. An overseer then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”³

B. Local Preachers under appointment

281. The Annual Conference shall have authority to recommend local preachers to serve as pastor of a local church, provided that he is first recommended by the church of which he is a member (see para. 235). When a local preacher is so recommended, his name shall be entered upon the stationed list.

C. Conference Preachers

282. A conference preacher is a person who has been accepted by the Regional Conference as a suitable person to minister under its direction and who may be appointed to pastoral or evangelistic work (see para. 130). It is recommended, but not required, that this person be first approved for and receive a local preachers license from the church where he holds membership, and that he hold that license for one year before applying for conference preacher’s license. Upon application for conference preacher’s license, he should have also read the *Discipline* and one book in the first year’s Course of Study or be studying at a Bible College or seminary. He shall also have met with the Conference President and Conference Executive Committee and have been recommended to the Education and Elders’ Orders Committee.

compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.”

¹ **2 Timothy 2:22** “Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”

² **Titus 2:7** “in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works; in doctrine *showing* integrity, reverence, incorruptibility”; cf. 1 Tim. 1:10.

³ 1 Tim. 3:1-7 (NASB); cf. Titus 1:5-9.

283. Each conference preacher is encouraged to attend Annual Conference Sessions and sit within the bar with speaking privileges. A conference preacher will not, however, have voting privileges at Annual Conference, unless he is serving as the pastor of an organized conference church.

284. When a conference preacher is ministering as a pastor of an organized Bible Methodist church, he shall have the right to vote in the Annual Conference Session in the election of all Regional Conference officers and delegates to the General Conference and in other business, except in the election to Elders' Orders, the passing of the character of elders where a vote is required, and in the election of committees affected by the same. The Regional Conference President may authorize him to administer the sacraments, and if, at the end of one year he is still ministering in the same position and has met the requirements of the Education and Elders' Orders Committee, the authorization shall be renewed. Where the law of the state permits, any person in ministry and authorized as described above shall be permitted to solemnize matrimony while so employed and authorized.

285. When a conference preacher is appointed by a Regional Conference as pastor of a mission or a work not yet organized as a Bible Methodist church, he shall not have the right to vote during Annual Conference Session. The conference at its discretion may grant him full authorization to administer the sacraments and solemnize marriage where the laws of the state permit. Such authorization shall cease at any time the holder thereof shall fail to meet the requirements of the Education and Elders' Orders Committee.

286. When a conference preacher is employed as a co-pastor or an assistant pastor, he shall not have the right to vote during Annual Conference Session. He shall be authorized to assist in the celebration of sacraments or the ceremony of marriage, when he has the approval of the Education and Elders' Orders Committee.

287. The Education and Elders' Orders Committee of each conference shall report to the conference and its president each year giving the names of those conference preachers who have met the prescribed conditions and are eligible to receive the authorization described above.

288. Each conference preacher shall be required to complete the annual Ministerial Responsibility form. The form shall be provided by the conference in preparation for its annual session. The Ministerial Responsibility forms shall be

returned at the appropriate time to the person each conference selects to receive them (see page 118).

D. Elders

289. An elder is an ordained minister of the Gospel, fully vested with all the functions of the Christian ministry.

290. An elder is constituted such by election to ordination by a Regional Conference, the laying on of the hands of some of the elders, and prayer (see pp. 158-163). The Conference President shall lead the service unless the Annual Conference orders otherwise and appoints some other person in his stead.

291. It is the privilege and responsibility of an elder to preach the Gospel. The elder may also administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, perform all parts of divine worship, and solemnize marriages. It is also his responsibility to maintain his life in Christ and be an example to his family, friends, and the community where he ministers.

292. Every Bible Methodist elder must be a lay or ministerial leader of a Bible Methodist church and Regional Conference.

293. Each elder shall be required to complete the annual Ministerial Responsibility form. The form shall be provided by the conference in preparation for its annual session. The Ministerial Responsibility forms shall be returned at the appropriate time to the person each conference selects to receive them (see page 118).

E. Pastoral Relations

294. The Regional Conference may exercise a general supervision over the pastoral relations existing between ministers and churches, as provided in the following paragraphs:

- a. All elders and conference preachers who are ministering under the direction of a Regional Conference shall be at liberty to enter into engagements to serve any church or churches for one year, starting from the next Annual Conference Session; and it shall be the duty of all elders, conference preachers, and churches, having entered into such engagements, to report the same to the Annual Conference at its next annual session.

- b. Any minister who desires to change churches at the next session of his Annual Conference shall notify the president in writing, in order that his name may be placed on the list of known, available ministers which shall be furnished to pulpit supply committees by the president.
- c. All elders who are unassigned shall be placed on the unstationed list.

295. No Bible Methodist Church may call as pastor or supply pastor, any elder, conference preacher, or local preacher, who is not licensed by The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches unless he is approved and recommended by the Conference President and Conference Executive Committee. Neither may any local preacher or conference preacher be called unless he has been properly recommended as a suitable person to minister under the direction of the conference, has been so received, and has, at the time of such appointment, proper credentials. However, in case of need or emergency, the president of a conference may, with the concurrence of his Executive Committee, give written consent to service by waiving the above restrictions. The consent will stand through the next session of Annual Conference.

296. All elders serving as pastors of churches other than Bible Methodist Churches, unless by the consent of the Annual Conference, may be considered as having withdrawn from the conference, thus surrendering credentials and membership and shall be so reported.

297. Any elder or conference preacher whose name is on the Annual Conference roll, and who shall neglect to report to the Annual Conference for two successive years, shall be notified by the secretary and shall be requested to report at the next Annual Conference Session. On failure to respond to such notification, he may be declared withdrawn from the Regional Conference, and his name shall be so entered in the conference minutes.

F. Transfer of Elders' Credentials

298. When an elder takes resident ministry in a conference other than the one of which he is a member, his conference and church membership shall be transferred to the conference where he is ministering. An elder may supply a Bible Methodist church outside the bounds of his own conference, provided such action has the written approval of the president of each conference concerned.

299. An elder may transfer his membership and credentials from one Regional Conference to another by a letter of standing or transfer from the president of his conference which certifies his good standing at the time (see page 126). He must

present it to the president of the Regional Conference to which he is transferred as soon as he begins ministering within the bounds of that conference. This shall apply to all letters of standing when the holder ministers within another Regional Conference. A letter of transfer thus given shall not be valid for more than one year. When an elder takes a letter of transfer, his membership shall continue with the Regional Conference granting said letter until he joins another Regional Conference, or some other ecclesiastical body.

300. No letters of transfer or standing shall be granted as long as there are unresolved issues involving his character or if he has dishonorably withdrawn from his commitment for service with the church or conference he is leaving.

301. If an elder takes a letter of dismissal from a Regional Conference, declares that he has withdrawn from the conference, or leaves for parts unknown without letting the conference know where he is, then at its next Annual Conference Session, when the facts are known, the elder shall be declared withdrawn from the conference, and that fact may be included in the Conference President's report. When an elder surrenders his credentials, it will be lawful to include the fact that he is not an elder in The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches in the conference reports.

302. An elder receiving a letter of transfer or standing with recommendations as is provided for in paragraph 299 does not affect his standing in a Regional Conference, unless he fails to use it in joining some other Bible Methodist Church. If he joins some other religious body, he should at the same time take a letter of standing from the conference of which he is a member, and failing to do so, shall be marked withdrawn.

303. An elder presenting a letter of standing must be able to show by the written statement of the president of his Regional Conference that his character was passed by the previous Annual Conference at its last annual session in order to make his letter of standing valid to date.

304. When an elder of the Regional Conference asks for a letter of standing and declares in writing that he intends to withdraw from the Regional Conference, it shall require a vote from a session of Annual Conference from which he withdrew to reinstate him should he request to be reinstated.

G. Ordination Process

305. The Regional Conference shall have authority to ordain to the office and work of an elder suitable persons from among those who have been ministering under its direction. The Education and Elders' Orders Committee shall examine such candidates to satisfy themselves that they have such character, educational preparation, Christian experience, and ministerial gifts and calling as qualify them for the office and work of an elder and shall report to the Annual Conference.

306. The candidates shall have been ministering as pastor, assistant pastor, or conference evangelist under the direction of the Regional Conference for two years, or shall have been engaged in religious service which entirely satisfies the Education and Elders' Orders Committee. They shall have passed a satisfactory examination upon the Course of Study adopted by the General Conference or graduated from an approved Bible College. The Committee shall inquire into the character and usefulness of each candidate. In the case of the transfer of a conference preacher, each Annual Conference shall certify his standing in the Course of Study and the time he has served as a pastor, if at all. Each Regional Conference shall consider the previous work and study of the transferred conference preacher when he is being considered for ordination.

307. The Regional Conference shall keep a list of all persons who have been approved as conference preachers and are seeking ordination. This list shall be maintained whether the candidates are participating in active ministry or not. These persons shall meet the Education and Elders' Orders Committee annually and answer the questions the committee presents. A conference preacher who fails to prepare himself by study at a Bible College, Seminary, or by following the Course of Study, shall not be recommended as pastor or for ordination, except when offered exemption by the Conference President with advisement from the Executive Committee and the Education and Elders' Orders Committee. Every person seeking ordination shall be recommended to the Annual Conference by the Education and Elders' Orders Committee and by the Conference President and his Executive Committee.

H. Restoration of Elders and Conference Preachers

308. Those who encounter moral failure are encouraged to participate in the process of restoration developed by their Regional Conference (see para. 254). If a pastor faces marital separation or divorce, he will cooperate with the conference in an attempt to find healing and reconciliation, as outlined below.

I. Separation/Divorce of an Elder or Conference Licensed Minister

309. Within five days of the filing of a request for divorce or legal termination/separation of a minister's marriage or within two weeks of the physical separation of the minister and his spouse for the purpose of discontinuing physical cohabitation, the minister shall contact the Conference President, notifying the president of the action taken. After meeting with the minister, if still unreconciled, the Conference President may consult with the Executive Committee for further recommendation.

310. All ministers without regard to their classification in the conference are subject to the provisions of paragraph 309, and must show due regard for the advice of the Conference President and the Executive Committee. If a minister fails to comply with recommendations given, such noncompliance may be cause for disciplinary action. No active or assigned minister in such circumstances may continue in any ministerial role without the affirmative vote of the Conference Executive Committee.

J. Pastors

311. A pastor is an elder or a conference preacher who has charge of a particular church or a number of churches.

312. Each pastor is expected to complete or facilitate the completion of the appropriate forms requested by the Regional Conference (see page 113).

313. When two or more elders sustain the pastoral relation to a church, as co-laborers, one shall be designated as the senior/lead pastor, who shall be responsible for the performance of the duties outlined in paragraphs 202-206.

314. A local church may make provision for assistant pastors or ministers and leaders as the congregation desires in order to meet the needs of the congregation. Associate ministers, youth pastors, etc. will be considered the employees of the church under the supervision of the lead/senior pastor with counsel from the church board. Upon the resignation of the lead/senior pastor, any associate minister(s) should be willing to submit their resignation as well.

315. To facilitate good relations, ministers are forbidden to go to another pastor's church to preach without the consent of the pastor. This shall not apply to or interfere with the authorized work of the conference and its evangelists and

officers, nor shall it prohibit our preachers from accepting invitations to preach in churches of other denominations.

K. Evangelists

316. An evangelist is an elder or conference preacher, devoted to traveling and preaching the Gospel without any specific pastoral ministry, authorized by a Regional Conference to promote revivals and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

317. Elders or conference preachers of a Regional Conference may be appointed as conference evangelists. Conference preachers so appointed shall be entitled to the rights and privileges of pastors except the right to vote in Annual Conference Sessions and shall be subject to the same rules and regulations as pastors insofar as those rules apply to their circumstances. Elders having had at least five years pastoral experience or the equivalent thereof and authorized to serve as an evangelist shall be appointed as general evangelists.

L. Lay Missionaries

318. A lay missionary shall be responsible to the Regional Conference by which he is commissioned and shall report annually (see Lay Missionary Responsibility Form on page 120).

319. A lay missionary shall have no vote in the Annual Conference Session unless serving as a lay delegate to that conference.

M. Reception of Ministers From Other Churches

320. Ordained ministers of other churches who may desire to unite with us may be received according to our doctrine and practice by giving satisfaction to a Regional Conference of their agreement and knowledge of the *Discipline*, provided that the conference is also satisfied with their character, gifts, and usefulness. Moreover, none shall be received until they have given satisfactory proof of having passed in a satisfactory manner a course of study equivalent to the Bible Methodist Course of Study (see para. 368) and shall have joined some Bible Methodist church, or made provisions to do so. For the first year, such ministers shall minister under the direction of the president of a Regional Conference. The President and the Executive Committee shall have the power to terminate any and all such relations to which said ministers may have been appointed as supplies when in their judgment such ministers are not suitable for

such relationship, and this dismissal shall terminate all ministerial relations to The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.

321. Ministers of other churches who are not ordained elders may be received as local or conference preachers, provided that they give satisfaction to a local church or Regional Conference that they are suitable persons to exercise the office and affirm their agreement and knowledge of the *Discipline*.

XII. Reception and Transfer of Local Churches

A. Reception of New Local Bible Methodist Church

322. A community of believers willing to conform to the *Discipline* and capable of self-governance and financial support, on application to the President of the Regional Conference within the bounds of which it is located, may be recognized as a Bible Methodist church. The process for inclusion in a Regional Conference is as follows:

- a. Interested parties desiring to organize a Bible Methodist church, are encouraged to contact the President of the nearest Regional Conference. The President in consultation with the Conference Executive Committee shall investigate the possibilities for such a church and give direction for its organization, if it is considered advisable.
- b. Following a mutually satisfactory interview with the church's pastor and leadership, the Conference President and Executive Committee may vote to recommend that the church be placed on the Conference roll of churches.
- c. The President shall report such action at the Annual Conference Session for approval.

B. Conference Extension Church Becoming An Organized Church

323. Churches that have been ministering under the committee of a Regional Conference that oversees the development of new churches and that desire to become an organized church may request that change by submitting a letter to the committee's Chairman. Upon approval of the change, the committee will send the church's request to the Conference President and Executive Committee. If the Executive Committee concurs with the requested change, they will report such change in their minutes as a recommendation to the Annual Conference.

324. The requirements for a church to be fully organized shall be established by each Regional Conference.

C. Reception of a Newly Organized Church

325. We recommend that an appropriate meeting be held to celebrate the establishment of the newly organized church. An appropriate ritual of reception may be found in Rituals, page 165.

D. Church Requesting Transfer

326. A church may transfer from one Regional Conference to another by sending a letter of request to the conference where it holds membership, requesting a meeting with conference officials. Upon receiving approval from their current conference and assurances from the receiving conference that they are welcome, the church will be transferred from the roll of their current conference at its next Annual Conference and will be added to the roll of the receiving conference upon ratification at their Annual Conference.

E. Withdrawal of a Local church

327. A local church desiring to withdraw from a Regional Conference shall follow these guidelines:

- a. A written notification of the intent of the church shall be sent to the Conference President.
- b. Within thirty days of receiving the letter of intent, the Conference President shall arrange a meeting with the church to ascertain the grievances and see if a resolution can be effected.
- c. In the event the problem cannot be resolved, a three month waiting period is initiated.
- d. At the end of the three months period, the Conference President shall meet with the church again to ascertain if the church still desires to withdraw.
- e. In the event their intent is unchanged, a date shall be set for a ballot vote to be taken. An announcement shall be made on two consecutive Sundays before the vote is taken, and such vote shall be taken by the Conference President. A two-thirds vote of the lay and ministerial leadership will be required for the church to withdraw.
- f. In the event a church withdraws, they will agree to discontinue the use of the name Bible Methodist.
- g. Where a Conference has invested money in a church, repayment of the funds may be expected by the Conference.

III. THE GENERAL CONNECTION

I. General Information

328. The General Connection is the organization that provides structure and continuity for all entities that bear the name of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. The General Conference is the legislative body of the General Connection which gathers at least once a quadrennium to conduct its necessary business. By design, the General Connection avoids a centralized form of government, respecting the autonomy of the local churches and Regional Conferences (see para. 138). Business is conducted at General Conference by delegates elected by each Regional Conference.

329. Presently the General Connection is made up of three Regional Conferences in the United States and Canada (Alabama, Great Lakes, Heartland), and Missions Conferences in the Philippines and Mexico.¹

II. Delegates to General Conference

330. The General Conference shall be composed of an equal number of elders and lay delegates, who shall be elected by the Regional Conferences. It shall require a majority of all delegates who shall attend and be enrolled to constitute a quorum (see para. 158).

331. General Conference Membership shall be composed of:

- a. The General Conference and Connectional officials, with an equal number of elected delegates, lay or ministerial as required, to maintain equal representation of lay and ministerial members and equal representation among the Regional Conferences.
- b. The President of each Regional Conference. In the event a Conference President is also a Connectional officer or Connectional official, an additional elder shall be elected to serve as a member from that Regional Conference.

¹ An organized missions conference is any group of organized churches on a Bible Methodist Mission Field which is being supported by the Bible Methodist Connection through its missions program—Bible Methodist Missions. These conferences may be organized variously as their number, size, and locations may demand and as facilitates their function within the context of their culture.

- c. Nine elders and nine laymen from each Regional Conference, including Conference Presidents and Connectional Officials who are delegates by virtue of office.
- d. In addition to the above, each missionary who is a field director and an elder may serve as an *ex officio* member of General Conference; if he attends, a lay delegate shall be elected from his home conference.
- e. Up to three Honorary Delegates may be elected by each Annual Conference to sit within the Bar of General Conference and have speaking but not voting privileges. Organized Missions Conferences may also be represented by as many as two honorary delegates.

332. All former Connectional Chairmen and Missions Directors may sit within the Bar with speaking but not voting privileges, provided they are currently members in good standing of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches.

333. All Bible Methodist ministers and lay persons are encouraged to attend each General Conference.

334. The Regional Conference delegates to General Conference, except those who will attend by virtue of office, shall be elected by ballot during the Annual Conference Sessions immediately preceding the session of the General Conference.

335. Each delegate to the General Conference shall be a member of a Bible Methodist church at the time of his election and at the time of the General Conference, and each delegate so elected shall receive a certificate of his election (see page 127) .

- a. All elders, except those on the unstationed list, shall be eligible to be elected as ministerial delegates to the General Conference.
- b. All lay and non-ordained ministerial leaders of the organized churches within each Regional Conference shall be eligible to be elected as lay delegates to the General Conference.

336. Delegates and alternates are elected for a four year term, unless their status changes (see para. 335). The delegates elected for General Conference shall make up the delegate body if a special session of the conference is called during the quadrennium.

337. Each Regional Conference shall also elect by ballot sufficient alternate ministerial and lay delegates to the General Conference to fill any vacancies. The alternate delegates shall fill any vacancies in the order of their election.

III. General Conference Regular Sessions

338. The General Connection shall meet quadrennially in a General Conference during the month of June at a time and place specified by the Connectional Committee, determined at least two years before the next scheduled General Conference. The date and hour of meeting shall be determined by the Connectional Committee. However, in case of emergency, the Connectional Committee shall have authority to change both time and place of the General Conference.

339. Each Regional Conference shall host the General Conference sessions in rotation. The hosting Conference shall be responsible for arranging the location of the General Conference and for providing food and lodging for the event.

340. In transacting the business of General Conference, the elders and lay delegates shall deliberate as one body, but on the final vote on any question, except proposed amendments to the constitution, at the call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide, and the elders and the lay delegates shall vote separately; it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

IV. General Conference Special Sessions

341. A special session of General Conference may be initiated by a two-thirds vote of the Connectional Committee, a two-thirds vote of a sitting General Conference, or a request of a Regional Conference which receives two thirds of the Regional Conferences' approval. Upon the initiation of a special session by these means, the Connectional Chairman shall call a special session of the General Conference.

342. Called special sessions shall be for a specific agenda, which shall be published and delivered to the delegates a minimum of two weeks prior to the beginning of the session.

343. The Connectional Committee shall be responsible to set the date and place for special sessions.

344. A quorum to permit the beginning of a special session shall require at least half of the General Conference delegates elected from the Regional Conferences.

345. The expenses of the special session will be shared by the Regional Conferences.

V. Procedures and Authority

346. Constitutional rights and responsibilities of the General Conference may be found in paragraph 161.

347. The authority of the General Conference includes overseeing the ministries it chooses to accomplish its mandate. The General Conference may in keeping that mandate, elect officers and create committees and/or departments that it deems necessary for the fulfillment of its responsibilities. It is responsible to give direction to the organization and expectations of those areas of ministry.

348. The General Conference shall have authority to adopt such procedures and policies as it shall judge necessary to promote its own interest, as long as they are in harmony with the *Discipline*.

VI. General Connectional Officers

349. The General Connectional Officers' term of office shall begin with the rise of the General Conference at which they are elected; they shall serve until the adjournment of the next regular session of the General Conference.

350. Connectional Chairman. The General Conference shall elect by ballot from among the elders of the Connection a Chairman for the quadrennial term. The Connectional Chairman shall not be elected to more than two consecutive terms. His duties shall be to preside at the General Conference, chair the Connectional Committee, and make decisions on points of law which shall be ratified by both the Connectional Judiciary Committee and the next General Conference.

351. Vice Chairman. The General Conference shall elect by ballot from among the elders of the Connection, a Vice Chairman for the quadrennial term. His duties shall be to assist the Chairman and to preside in his absence. In the event that the office of the Chairman becomes vacant by death, resignation, or otherwise, the Vice Chairman shall be named Chairman and perform his duties until the rise of the next General Conference.

352. Secretary. The General Conference shall elect by ballot, from among the lay or ministerial leaders or elders of the Connection, a Secretary for the quadrennial term. His duties shall be to record the proceedings of the General Con-

ference sessions and meetings of the Connectional Committee, preserve and publish the same, and perform such other duties as may be directed by the General Conference.

353. Treasurer. The General Conference shall elect by ballot, from among the lay or ministerial leaders or elders of the Connection, a Treasurer for the quadrennial term. His duties shall be to receive, manage, and distribute the funds necessary for the operation of the General Connection. He shall submit his records for review/audit as the Connectional Committee instructs.

354. Editor. The General Conference shall elect by ballot, from among the lay or ministerial leaders or elders of the Connection, an Editor for the quadrennial term. His duties shall be to oversee the Connectional publication, *The Bible Methodist*, and any other Connectional material the Conference may order. He may recommend to the Connectional Committee whatever staff are necessary to manage the business of *The Bible Methodist*.

355. Missions Director. The General Conference shall elect by ballot, from among the lay or ministerial leaders or elders of the Connection, a Missions Director for the quadrennial term. His duties shall be to oversee the various mission fields of the Connection, cast vision, recruit, train, nurture, and manage the missionaries in cooperation with the Missions Committee (see para. 377).

356. Discipleship Director. The General Conference shall elect by ballot, from among the lay or ministerial leaders or elders of the Connection, a Discipleship Director for the quadrennial term. His duties shall be to oversee and encourage discipleship among the churches of the Connection. This person would encourage cooperation with and inclusion of other organizations that have the same purpose and will seek and make available material that teaches and encourages discipleship.

357. Connectional Trustees. The General Conference shall elect by ballot, from among the lay or ministerial leaders or elders of the Connection, three trustees for the quadrennial term, in the event the General Connection owns or holds property.

VII. General Connectional Committees

A. Connectional Committee

358. The General Conference at its quadrennial session shall elect a Connectional Committee to carry out the will of the General Conference during the

quadrennium, consisting of the following Connectional members: Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Editor, Missions Director, Treasurer, Discipleship Director, as well as the Regional Conference Presidents, and one elder and two laymen from each Regional Conference who shall be nominated in caucus by the Regional Conference of which they are members. The Connectional Committee members' term of office shall begin with the rise of the General Conference at which they are elected and shall continue through the next General Conference.

359. When expedited action is needed, an Executive Committee consisting of Connectional Chairman, Vice Chairman, Connectional Secretary, Connectional Treasurer, Mission Director and each Conference President may function under the authority of the Connectional Committee.

360. The Connectional Committee shall work from an agenda when in session and shall request reports from the following officers: Connectional Chairman, each Regional Conference President, Connectional Treasurer, Missions Treasurer, Missions Director, Discipleship Director, and, if applicable, Trustees.

361. In the transaction of all business, a majority of the members shall constitute a quorum.

362. The Connectional Committee shall arrange for any Connectional publication through the Editor defining his duties and giving such direction as is necessary (see para. 354).

363. The Connectional Committee shall have the authority to fill all vacancies of its officers. It may also ratify the nominations of any Regional Conference in case of a vacancy of one of their representatives.

364. The Connectional Committee may appoint a sub-committee that shall handle memorials submitted for consideration.

- a. This committee shall be composed of the Connectional Chairman, the Regional Conference Presidents, and at least one delegate from each Regional Conference.
- b. Each memorial shall be submitted to the Committee by the vote of a Regional Conference, the members of the Connectional Committee, or upon the signature of three or more elders or lay leaders of the Connection.

- c. Each memorial shall be printed and in the hands of the Connectional Chairman and Memorial Committee at least 30 days before General Conference.
- d. The Connectional Committee may submit memorials to the Memorial sub-committee. The Connectional Committee shall be limited by the same time and presentation constraints as listed above.
- e. No memorial may be changed by either committee. They shall simply recommend or not recommend its passage.
- f. The General Conference may entertain amendments to the memorial during floor debate.
- g. All memorials shall take effect upon the publishing of the *Discipline* (or an insert) unless otherwise specified (see para. 175, 178).

365. The Connectional Committee shall order an Audit/Review Committee to review its financial accounts. This committee may be a standing committee.

366. The Connectional Committee shall appoint a statistician or statistical committee, which shall function before General Conference.

367. The Connectional Committee shall have the authority to direct and review all the business transacted by the Trustees of the Connectional Corporation, and should it appear that business is not being properly conducted, or that the laws of the state in which they are incorporated and/or authorized to operate are being violated, it shall have power to correct any mismanagement.

368. The Connectional Committee shall appoint a committee to develop, review quadrennially, and revise as needed a Course of Study to be adopted by the General Conference. It shall be made available for publication by each Regional Conference.

369. A Financial/Estate Planning Department may be established for The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. This department may be organized by the General Connectional Committee and be constituted of people with known financial abilities. This department shall work under the supervision of the Connectional Committee and report to the General Conference during one of the sessions.

B. Connectional Trustees Committee

370. All property necessary for the work of the Connection shall be deeded to the Connection and overseen by the Connectional trustees, unless state laws require otherwise.

C. Connectional Judiciary Committee

371. The General Conference shall elect a standing committee consisting of not less than three members, at least two of which shall be elders, which shall function as the Connectional Judiciary Committee (see para. 390-394).

VIII. Connectional Missions

372. The General Connection shall encourage the Missions Conferences to apply the governmental principles and framework of this *Discipline* as best suits the organizational needs of their particular culture.

373. It is the privilege of Missions Conferences to form general conferences under the direction of the Missions Director and the Missions Committee and in keeping with the spirit and doctrines of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. The Missions Director, as well as the Field Director of each particular field, shall retain membership on these general missions conference boards. Connectional Missions shall endeavor to respect the decisions made by these conferences, provided they are in harmony with the principles and spirit of the *Discipline*.

374. The Connectional Committee shall also give direction to the missions work of the Connection through its Missions Director and Missions Committee.

A. Missions Committee

375. The Missions Committee shall consist of the following: the Missions Director, Treasurer, the Connectional Chairman, the Conference Presidents, and one member from each conference, whether lay leader or elder, nominated by each Conference caucus and elected during the General Conference quadrennial session.

376. The duties of the Missions Committee shall be to:

- a. Elect a chairman from within the Committee whose duties shall be outlined in the Bible Methodist Missions Handbook.

- b. Elect a treasurer. This person may not be the Connectional Missions Director but may be elected from within the committee or from lay or ministerial leaders.
- c. Appoint, as needed, field treasurers for respective fields to oversee mission funds, when this is in the best interest of the work. In such cases the Missions Committee shall define the duties of such treasurers and their relation to the Connectional Missions Treasurer.
- d. Establish, when prudent, a Ways and Means Committee that shall consist of the Missions Director, the Missions Treasurer, and the Conference Presidents.
- e. Set up guidelines and general procedures for carrying on the missions work.
- f. Approve the opening of any proposed mission field, with concurrence of the Connectional Committee.
- g. Select and employ missionaries, set their salaries and their terms of service.
- h. Approve projects for presentation to the churches of the Connection.
- i. Work in cooperation with the Missions Director in any questions or problems that may arise in the work of missions or in cases of conflict with missionaries.
- j. Give an annual report to the Connectional Committee and quadrennial report to the General Conference through the Missions Director.

B. Missions Director

377. The duties of the Missions Director shall be to:

- a. Cast vision for the Missions department.
- b. Recruit, train, and nurture missionaries.
- c. Maintain contact with the various fields and the progress of the work in each. He shall visit the fields when such visits are of importance to the work and have been approved by the Missions Committee.
- d. Make recommendations to the Missions Committee regarding all major items in reference to the work on the fields, such as: approval of special projects, opening of new stations, and the acquisition of or disbursement of property for the mission.
- e. Screen missionary candidates and recommend those he considers suitable to the Missions Committee. He shall also recommend their field of appointment, salary, and term of service.
- f. Cause financial reports from each field and from the Missions Treasurer to be made annually to the Missions Committee and the Connectional Committee, and quadrennially to the General Conference.

- g. Supervise missionary publicity to the churches either by printed literature or by deputation work. He may himself be asked to visit some of the churches when the Missions Committee so directs.
- h. Report annually to the Missions Committee and the Connectional Committee, and quadrennially to the General Conference.
- i. Request a special meeting of the Missions Committee at any time that special needs should be considered.
- j. Perform such additional duties as shall be defined by the Connectional Committee.

IX. Inclusion or Establishment of a Regional Conference

378. When a group of churches desire to become a Regional Conference in The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, they may do so by the following process:

A. Churches in an Existing Regional Conference

379. Churches in a region of an existing Conference may appeal to the Conference through the Conference Executive Committee.

380. Leaders from each of the churches, including both ministers and laymen, shall arrange to meet with the President of the Regional Conference of which they are now a part to offer a petition to become a Regional Conference and discuss the matter. The petition shall include the basis and rationale for forming the new Regional Conference.

381. The Conference President shall present the petition to the Conference Executive Committee for advice and counsel. Following an initial approval in principle by the Conference Executive Committee at the next Annual Conference Session:

- a. The existing Regional Conference in conjunction with the petitioning churches will work together for a specified period of time, the length of which to be mutually agreed upon by both entities.
- b. The purpose for this time would be to test the strength of the petitioning group and to train the people who would lead the petitioning group.
- c. During the process of developing the petitioning churches into a Regional Conference, advice will be sought from the Connectional Chairman and the Connectional Committee in regards to the feasibility of forming a new Conference.

382. Upon a positive vote of the sponsoring Regional Conference and the Connectional Committee, the matter shall be presented to the next session of the General Conference. Upon a two-thirds vote by the General Conference body, these churches will be considered a Regional Conference with all the consequent privileges and responsibilities and may be seated immediately.

B. External Organizations

383. A group of churches that are independent or that compose an organization that chooses to align itself with the Connection may initiate the process of becoming a Regional Conference in two ways:

- a. They may approach the Connectional Chairman and through him the Connectional Committee.
- b. They may approach a Regional Conference President and his Executive Committee to seek introduction to the Connection as a possible Conference. If the introduction is by a Regional Conference, the matter shall be referred to the Connectional Committee for consideration and ultimate recommendation to the General Conference.

384. Upon a two-thirds majority vote of the Connectional Committee and the present Conferences, the new Regional Conference will be established with all the consequent privileges and responsibilities. The delegates from the new Regional Conference will then be full members of the General Conference and shall be seated immediately, provided that the principle of equal representation of lay and ministerial delegates is maintained.

X. Expectations of a New Regional Conference

385. There should be a sufficient number of churches to sustain themselves spiritually, numerically, and financially without the support of another Regional Conference or the General Conference.

386. There should be a person who is qualified and willing to serve as Conference President. This person should carry strong recommendation by the sponsoring Conference and the churches that will compose the new Conference. Along with the Conference President, there should be sufficient strength of leadership among the churches to provide for the officers necessary to compose a Regional Conference as laid out in the *Discipline* (see para. 256-265).

387. Groups who are to become part of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches must accept the *Discipline* as their rule of faith and conduct.

IV. THE JUDICIARY

I. General Information¹

388. It is our sincerest desire to never face the need for enacting any judiciary procedure. We recognize, however, that there are occasions when such action must be taken. As members of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches we have chosen to submit ourselves to a covenant relationship that includes the authority of Scripture and the *Discipline* in matters of dispute or when a lay or ministerial member sins.

389. Scripture provides instruction for how the Church is to work through its difficulties.² biblical church discipline is not punitive. It rather seeks to vindicate the truth, sustain integrity, protect the innocent, enable Christian witness, reconcile and restore the fallen, warn the careless, and strengthen the community of believers. The conduct of a trial is to be the last stage of the biblical process seeking restoration. When one who has erred is brought back to the faith, it is vital that that the Church welcomes the repentant and practices forgiveness.

II. Membership

390. A Judiciary Committee shall be made up of not less than three members. In the event of a trial, additional lay or ministerial members may be selected, provided the final number of members is an odd number.

391. The Connectional Chairman shall not be a member of the Connectional Judiciary Committee because of its responsibility to review rulings by the Connectional Chairman.

392. Regional Conference Presidents shall not be a member of the Conference Judiciary Committee because of its responsibility to review rulings by the Conference President.

393. The members of a Judiciary Committee shall be lay or ministerial leaders of the church and shall be known to be spiritually mature, discreet, and of sound

¹ The principles, rights, and authority for the Judiciary are located in the constitution, paragraphs 166-174.

² Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20.

judgment. At the Regional and General Conference levels, the standing Judiciary Committee shall be composed of three members, at least two of which shall be elders.

394. Terms of Service:

- a. At the local church and Regional Conference levels, all members shall be elected annually and serve a term of one year.
- b. The members of the Connectional Judiciary Committee shall serve for a period of four years, covering a quadrennium.

395. In the event of a trial, the following persons who have been elected as a Judiciary Committee member shall recuse themselves (recused members shall be replaced by the means appropriate to the committee's level of government):

- a. The person against whom charges have been brought.
- b. Family members of any person against whom charges have been brought.
- c. Persons whose relationship to the one charged would constitute a conflict of interest.

III. Procedures and Authority

396. A Judiciary Committee may conduct a trial only when a matter is formally presented in writing and signed by at least two persons who have firsthand knowledge of the matter (see para. 171a).

397. A quorum of no less than three members is required to conduct a trial.

398. A Judiciary Committee shall conduct each trial so that all parties have equal opportunity to present their case fully.

399. The duties of a Judiciary Committee are to:

- a. Investigate all charges formally presented in writing to the Committee. All available committee members will participate in investigations and trials.
- b. Report the results of its investigation to its electing body or its official representative committee.
- c. Conduct a trial when, as established by an investigation, there is probable cause to believe that the charges that have been formally presented are true.

- d. Report its verdict along with its recommendation to its electing body or its official representative committee. If the recommendation is for expulsion, a majority vote of the electing body shall be required to expel.

SECTION II FORMS

I. STATISTICAL REPORT

ITEM I - PASTOR'S LABORS

1. Months Employed in Current Year _____

2. Number of Persons Baptized _____

ITEM II - PERIODICALS

3. Number of Bible Methodist Subscriptions _____

ITEM III - MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

4. Current Lay and Ministerial Leaders (should equal the total of 4A -4E) _____

A. Number of Conference Elders _____

B. Number of Conference Preachers _____

C. Number of Local Preachers _____

D. Number of other Ministerial Leaders _____

E. Number of Lay Leaders _____

5. Lay and Ministerial Leaders Reported Last Year _____

6. Change in Lay and Ministerial Leadership:

A. Lay and Ministerial Leaders Received _____

(1) On Profession of Faith _____

(2) By Transfer _____

B. Lay and Ministerial Leaders Lost _____

(1) Discontinued _____

(2) Died _____

(3) Transferred _____

7. Overall Gain or (Loss) (Line 6A - Line 6B) _____

8. Current Number of Members (excluding lay / ministerial leaders) _____

9. Total Current Membership (members and leaders) _____

10. Total Membership Reported Last Year _____

11. Gain or (Loss) in Total Membership (Line 9 (-) Line 10) _____

ITEM IV - CHURCH MINISTRIES ATTENDANCE

12. Average Sunday School Attendance _____

13. Average Sunday Morning Worship Attendance _____

14. Average Sunday Evening Worship Attendance _____

- 15. Average Mid-Week Service Attendance _____
- 16. Average Bus/Van Ministry Attendance _____
- 17. Average Children/Junior Church Attendance _____
- 18. Average Daily Vacation Bible School Attendance _____
- 19. Average Youth Ministry Attendance _____
- 20. Average Other Auxiliary Ministries Attendance _____

ITEM V - CHURCH PROPERTY

- 21. Value of Buildings and Property:
 - A. Estimated Value of Church (Worship) Building _____
 - B. Estimated Value of Parsonage _____
 - C. Estimated Value of all Other Buildings and/or Property _____
- 22. Total Indebtedness on all Buildings and Property _____
- 23. Insurance Coverage:
 - A. Total Property Loss Coverage on Church (Worship) Building _____
 - B. Total Property Loss Coverage on Parsonage _____
 - C. Total Property Loss Coverage on all Other Buildings _____
 - D. Total Liability Coverage (Including Umbrella Coverage) _____

ITEM VI - FINANCIAL

- 24. Cash on Hand Beginning of Year (Including Savings/Investments) _____
- 25. Monies Received:
 - A. Regular Tithes and Offerings _____
 - B. Building Fund _____
 - C. Sunday School _____
 - D. Missionary _____
 - E. All Other (Including Borrowed Funds) _____
- 26. Total Monies Received (Total 25A thru 25E) _____
- 27. Monies Disbursed:
 - A. Disbursed for Pastoral Services _____
 - (1) Senior Pastor _____
 - (2) Assistant Pastor(s) _____
 - B. Disbursed for Sunday School _____
 - C. Disbursed for Evangelistic Help _____
 - D. Disbursed for Debt Repayment _____
 - E. Disbursed for Building and Repairs _____
 - F. Disbursed for Mileage, Travel, & Car Expense _____
 - G. Disbursed for Bible Methodist Missions _____

H. Disbursed for Other Missions	_____
I. Disbursed for Conference Asking	_____
(1) Conference Asking Assigned _____	_____
J. Disbursed for Conference - Other	_____
K. All Other Disbursements	_____
28. Total Monies Disbursed (Total 27A thru 27K)	_____
29. Cash on Hand End of Year (Including Savings/Investments)	_____
(Total of Line 24 (+) Line 26 (-) Line 28)	_____

PLEASE MAKE THREE COPIES OF THIS FORM

Retain One Copy

Send One Copy to Conference President

Send One Copy to Statistical Committee Chairman

EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE STATISTICAL REPORT

Each pastor shall fill out three copies of this report before coming to conference. One he shall keep for his own use and future reference, one copy shall be sent to the Conference President, and one copy shall be sent to the Chairman of the Statistical Committee. The completed report should be sent to the Conference President and Chairman of the Statistical Committee at least two weeks prior to conference. Following are explanations of the information to be reported on various line items in the report:

Item III

Line 4: This number should be the present number of lay and ministerial leaders according to your current records.

Lines 4A thru 4D: These numbers represent the current make-up of your lay and ministerial leaders as reported on line 4. The numbers reported on 4A and 4B should agree with the official conference minutes and the pastor should be included on one of these lines.

Line 6 and Line 7: These numbers represent a reconciliation of your lay leaders and ministerial leaders beginning with the number of lay and ministerial leaders as reported the previous year; adding the new lay and ministerial leaders received; and subtracting the lay and ministerial members lost during the year.

Line 8: Members listed in this line are those who have joined the church as believers but have not yet entered lay leadership and, thus, do not vote.

Item IV

Lines 12 thru 20: If your church is not involved in any one of these ministries, you should put N/A instead of a -0- on the report line for that ministry.

Line 12: Only those arriving within the first 1/2 hour of the announced starting time for Sunday School should be included in this number.

Line 16 and Line 19: Individuals included in these numbers should also be included in your Sunday School, Sunday Morning Worship, and Children/Junior Church attendance numbers as appropriate.

Line 17: This number should also be included in your Sunday Morning Worship attendance.

Item V - Line 21A – Line 21C: The numbers reported on these lines can be the best estimate by the Trustees, an actual appraisal if available or the value placed on these by your insurance carrier.

Item VI

Line 24: This number should include all cash in checking account(s), savings account(s) and or investment account(s). This number should be all monies belonging to the church which would include the numbers from all treasurers.

Lines 25A – 25E: The numbers reported on these lines should only include monies received from offerings and borrowed funds. Do not include monies put into the treasurer's records that are transferred from savings account(s), investment account(s), or from other treasurers in the church.

Lines 27A – 27K: Monies transferred by one treasurer to another treasurer in the church should not be included as a disbursement on this report.

Line 27A: The number reported here should be the disbursements made to the pastor and assistant pastor(s) as compensation for their services. These should include salary/expense breakout; social security paid by the church; housing allowance (including phone and utilities if paid directly to pastor(s); health insurance or medical expenses paid by the church; retirement benefits paid by the church; etc. The number reported here should not include the following: reimbursement paid to the pastor(s) for items purchased for church and/or parsonage operations such as office supplies, gas for church equipment and/or vehicles, parsonage upkeep or repair items, etc. Also cash gifts for Christmas, Pastor Appreciation and any other special days should not be included. Reimbursement for mileage, travel, vehicle expenses for vehicles titled in the church's name, and fees for attending special events, should be included on Line 27F. If the church purchases a vehicle for the pastor's use and titles the vehicle in the church's name, the amount of the expenditure should not be included in Line 27A. On the

other hand, if the church purchases a vehicle for the pastor and titles it in the pastor's name, the amount of the expenditure should be included in Line 27A.

Lines 27A(1) and 27A(2): These numbers represent a breakout of the amount reported on Line 27A and should not be added in again to the total monies disbursed.

Line 27I(1): The number reported here should be the percentage as requested by your Conference times(X) the amount of your regular tithes and offerings as reported on Line 27A.

Line 29: This number should include all cash in checking account(s), savings account(s), and/or investment account(s). This number should be all monies belonging to the church which would include the amounts from all treasurers. This number should equal the number reported on Line 24 plus the number reported on Line 26 less the number reported on Line 28.

Any questions regarding items you do not understand should be directed to the Conference President or the Chairman of the Connectional Statistical Committee.

II. MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY FORM

To the _____ Annual Conference

Meeting at:

Date:

I. Testimony

1. Are you living in a personal relationship with the Lord? _____
2. Can you testify to the grace of entire sanctification in your heart and life?
_____ If not, are you diligently pursuing heart cleansing? _____
3. Do you have any personal or professional concerns that might hinder your ministry and that you would like to discuss with the Conference President or this committee? _____

II. Credentials

1. Is it your desire to continue to be credentialed with this conference for another year? _____

III. Employment

(Ministers pastoring Bible Methodist Churches)

1. What local church did you serve as pastor? _____
2. How many months did you serve that church? _____
3. Is your membership retained in the church you pastor? _____

(Ministers not pastoring a Bible Methodist church)

1. In which local church do you retain your membership?

2. What appointment or listing were you given at the last session of this Annual Conference? _____
3. If on the stationed list, state the nature of your appointment or work, and give a brief account of your activities (not statistics).

IV. Labors

1. Have you faithfully sought by example and ministry to lead people into regeneration, entire sanctification as a definite work of grace subsequent to regeneration, and holy living according to our Statement of Faith? _____
2. If you are pastoring a Bible Methodist church, have you, in your relation to the church, carried out all that the *Discipline* requires of a pastor? _____
3. Have you sought to promote Conference/Connectional endeavors? _____

V. Personal Responsibilities

1. Is your life in harmony with the principles and recommendations of the *Discipline*? _____
2. Have you faithfully tithed your income during the previous conference year? _____
3. Do you have a copy of the Standing Rules and Recommendations of the Regional Conference, and have you complied with the requirements of each of them as they apply to you? _____
4. If you are pastoring a Bible Methodist church, is your spouse in harmony with your ministry? _____
5. If you are pastoring a Bible Methodist church, are you ready to hand over to your successor the contact information of the members and attendees of the church? _____

VI. Statistics

(for Ministers pastoring Bible Methodist Churches)

1. Is your church prepared to submit a statistical report to the Annual Conference? _____
2. Did your church meet its Conference Asking? _____

Signature _____

This form is to be returned to the Education and Elder's Orders Committee or the person designated by the conference.

III. CHURCH RESPONSIBILITY FORM

(To be answered by the Church Treasurer)

1. Did your church make reasonable provisions for the financial support of the pastor? _____
2. Has your church met its financial obligations to him? _____
3. Did your church meet with your pastor this year to discuss his financial remuneration? _____
4. Has your church board given the pastor an opportunity to express concerns about church or parsonage repairs and improvements? _____
5. Is your church carrying an indebtedness? _____ If so, are you up to date with current payments and obligations? _____
6. Has your church met its Conference Asking? _____
7. Has your church sought to support Conference/Connectional endeavors financially? _____

Signature _____

This form is to be returned to the Conference President.

IV. LAY MISSIONARY RESPONSIBILITY FORM

To the _____ Annual Conference

Meeting at:

Date:

I. Testimony

1. Are you living in a personal relationship with the Lord? _____
2. Can you testify to the grace of entire sanctification in your heart and life?
_____ If not, are you diligently pursuing heart cleansing? _____
3. Do you have any personal or professional concerns that might hinder your ministry and that you would like to discuss with the Conference President or this committee. _____

II. Membership

1. In what local church do you hold your membership?

III. Employment

1. How many months have you served in ministry this year? _____
2. Of what missions ministry are you a part?

3. Is it your intention to continue serving in this ministry? _____

IV. Service

1. Have you faithfully sought by example and ministry opportunities to lead people to Christ?
2. If you are ministering under the Bible Methodist Missions Board, have you followed the guidelines of the Missions Handbook? _____

Is your relationship to the Bible Methodist Missions Board harmonious? _____

V. Personal Responsibilities

1. Is your life in harmony with the principles and recommendations of the *Discipline*? _____
2. Have you faithfully tithed your income during the previous conference year? _____
3. If you are serving within a Bible Methodist context, is your spouse in harmony with your ministry? _____

Signature _____

This form is to be returned to the Education and Elders Orders Committee or designated individual.

V. MINISTERIAL CREDENTIALS

1. Local Preacher's License

To Whom It May Concern:

This certifies that the bearer has been duly recommended by the Church of which he is a lay leader and has been examined concerning his gifts, graces, and usefulness; therefore, he is hereby authorized to preach the Gospel and perform ministerial responsibilities as a Local Preacher according to the guidelines of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. Done this day of _____ A.D., 20__ by official action of the _____ (local church) and signed by its order and in its behalf.

Pastor Secretary/Clerk

2. Ministerial Study Course Certificate

This certifies that the bearer has honorably pursued and passed satisfactory examinations in the Ministerial Course of Study of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches and is entitled to this certificate of recognition.

Done by the _____ Regional Conference this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__, and signed by its order and in its behalf.

President Secretary

3. Conference Preacher's License¹

To Whom It May Concern:

This certifies that the bearer has been received by the _____ Regional Conference; therefore, he is hereby authorized to preach the Gospel and perform ministerial responsibilities according to the guidelines of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. Done this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__, and signed by its order and in its behalf.

President Secretary

¹ This license is to be renewed yearly.

4. Conference Preacher's License for Pastoral Ministry

To Whom It May Concern:

This certifies that the bearer, the Rev. _____, having been appointed to the work of a pastor or chaplain by the _____ Regional Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, is hereby authorized to administer the sacraments and to solemnize marriages for the period of one year from the date given below, provided he remains in his appointed work. Done this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20____, and signed by its order and in its behalf.

President

Secretary

5. Elder's Credentials

To Whom It May Concern:

Be it known that _____ having been duly approved by the _____ Regional Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, has been this day set apart, by the laying on of hands and prayer, to the office and work of an Elder in the Church of God so long as his life and doctrines shall conform to the Holy Scriptures. He is hereby empowered and fully authorized to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, solemnize marriages, and to feed the flock of Christ, taking oversight thereof, not as Lord over God's heritage, but as being an example to the same.

Signed by the order and in behalf of the aforesaid Regional Conference held at _____ this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20____.

President

Secretary

6. Elder's Letter of Standing¹

This certifies that the bearer has been, up to this date, an elder in the _____ Regional Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, and being desirous of withdrawing from said Connection is hereby dismissed and cordially recommended to the Christian confidence of those to whom this certificate may be presented. Given at _____ this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__.

President

VI. INSTRUCTION COMPLETION CERTIFICATES

1. Certificate of Membership Instruction

This certifies that _____ has completed the Membership Instruction which is prerequisite to membership application.

Instructor

Date

2. Certificate of Bible Methodist Discipline Instruction

This certifies that _____ has completed the Bible Methodist Discipline Instruction which is prerequisite to lay leadership application.

Instructor

Date

¹ This certificate may be granted at the discretion of the Conference President and his Executive Committee.

VII. MEMBERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP REMOVAL CERTIFICATES

1. Membership Removal

This certifies that _____ has been a member of the _____ Bible Methodist Church, and being desirous of removing from this church is hereby granted this certificate of membership.

Pastor
Date _____

Secretary

2. Lay Leadership Removal

This certifies that _____ has been a Lay Leader in the _____ Bible Methodist Church and being desirous of removing from this church is hereby granted this certificate of Lay Leadership.

Pastor
Date _____

Secretary

3. Ministerial Leadership Removal

This certifies that _____ has been a Ministerial Leader in the _____ Bible Methodist Church and being desirous of removing from this church is hereby granted this certificate of Ministerial Leadership.

Pastor
Date _____

Secretary

VIII. CERTIFICATES OF TRANSFER

1. Transfer of Local Church Membership

This certifies that _____, a member in good standing in the _____ Bible Methodist Church, being desirous of transferring his membership to the _____ Bible Methodist Church, is hereby transferred.¹

Pastor/Secretary

2. Transfer of Local Church Leadership

This certifies that _____, a lay/ministerial leader in good standing in the _____ Bible Methodist Church, being desirous of transferring his membership to the _____ Bible Methodist Church, is hereby transferred.¹

Pastor/Secretary

3. Notification of Transfer

The following is to be returned to the pastor or church issuing either of the above letters:

The member/lay leader of your Church, to whom you issued a letter of transfer to _____ Bible Methodist Church, has been received by vote of this church into its membership/lay leadership, and we send you this notification in completion of this transaction.

Pastor:

Address:

Date:

¹ This dismisses the member from the church granting the transfer when he is received by vote of the church to which the member is transferred.

4. Transfer of Conference Preacher/Elder

This certifies that _____, a conference preacher/an elder in good standing in the _____ Regional Conference, having requested to be transferred to the _____ Regional Conference, is hereby duly transferred.

President of the _____ Regional Conference

President

Date

IX. CERTIFICATES OF RECOMMENDATION / WITHDRAWAL

1. Certificate of Recommendation

This certifies that _____, has been up to this date an acceptable member/lay leader of the _____ Bible Methodist Church, and being desirous of removing from said Church, is hereby dismissed and cordially recommended to the Christian confidence of those to whom this certificate may be presented. Given on behalf of the aforesaid Church this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__.¹

Pastor/Secretary

2. Certificate of Withdrawal

This certifies that _____, has been up to this date a member of the _____ Bible Methodist Church and being desirous of withdrawing from said Church, is hereby dismissed. Given on behalf of the aforesaid Church this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__.

Pastor/Secretary

¹ It is understood that this form of certificate dismisses the bearer from membership in the designated church.

X. DELEGATE FORMS

1. Annual Conference Delegates

This certifies that _____, was duly elected by the _____ Bible Methodist Church as a delegate to the Annual Conference Session of the _____ Regional Conference, to be held at _____ on the _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__.

Done by the lay and ministerial leadership of the aforesaid Church, assembled this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__.

Pastor/Secretary

2. General Conference Delegates

This certifies that _____, was duly elected a _____ (Ministerial / Lay) Delegate to the General Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches to be held at _____ beginning _____.

Done by the _____ Conference this _____ day of _____, A.D., 20__.

Regional Conference Secretary

Date

SECTION III RITUALS

I. THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Scripture

An appropriate sermon may precede the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Let the officiating minister read the following Scripture or other fitting passages.

“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom” (Matt. 26:26-29).

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ. For we being many are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

“For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you. That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment [damnation] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body” (1 Cor. 11:23-29).

FORM A

Invocation

ALMIGHTY GOD, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You, and worthily magnify Your holy Name; through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Invitation

All you who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who live in love and peace with your neighbors, and who intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking in His holy ways, draw near with faith, and take this holy sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to Almighty God.

The Prayer

Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for all Your mighty acts, but especially for giving Your only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, whereby He offered up Himself as a full and perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Humbly we come now to this holy sacrament which He has instituted and commanded us to keep as a continual remembrance of His precious death and sacrifice until His coming again. For on the night on which He was betrayed, He took bread, and after giving thanks to You, He broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this is remembrance of Me." Amen.

(Alternate Prayer)

It is truly right and our greatest joy at all times and in all places to give thanks to You, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Everlasting God. Therefore with angels and archangels and with the whole company of Your saints in heaven and on earth, we magnify Your holy name, always praising You and saying [*here the congregation may say with the minister*]:

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for all Your mighty acts, but especially for giving

Your only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption, whereby He offered up Himself a full and perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

Humbly we come now to this holy sacrament which He has instituted and commanded us to keep as a continual remembrance of His precious death and sacrifice until His coming again. For on the night on which He was betrayed, He took bread, and after giving thanks to You, He broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this is remembrance of Me." Amen.

The Distribution

Upon distributing the bread the minister shall say: The body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on Him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

Upon distributing the wine the minister shall say: The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

The Lord's Prayer In Unison

The minister or a person of his appointment shall lead the congregation in the Lord's Prayer.

The Benediction

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ Our Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. Amen.



FORM B**Scripture**

See Scripture given prior to Form A.

Instruction

Our God loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to die in our place so that all people can repent and have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16). Even while we were sinning against Him, Jesus loved us enough to sacrifice His life for us (Rom. 5:8). He asked us to remember His love as expressed through the crucifixion and therefore exhorted His church to regularly partake of this sacrament called the Lord's Supper. He instructed us to eat the bread in memory of His wounded body and to drink the cup remembering His life's blood that flowed from those wounds.

As you eat this bread and drink this cup, think deeply of the sacrificial love that you did not deserve. Pray that you respond to this memory by loving Christ with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength and by loving others as Christ loves you. In this manner you will show His grace to others that they too may find God's redemptive healing.

Invitation

The Lord's Supper is for any who will come in repentance for their sins. Here you may cry out your confession to God who will hear and forgive you. The Lord's Supper is for all who will come remembering Christ's death and celebrating the peace they have found through faith in Him.

Friends, Jesus invites you now to come to Him and fellowship with Him at His table. Come earnestly and sincerely. Come humbly and honestly. Come expecting to meet Him here by faith and personally express your love to Him for His death on the cross.

Distribution

The piece of bread is a symbol of Christ's broken body that was hung on the cross. Eat it believing that He died for you.

The cup is a symbol of the blood Jesus shed for your sins and mine. Drink it knowing that He bled for you.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we have eaten this bread and drank this cup remembering Christ's death for us. By faith, we are embracing His sacrifice for our sins and receiving His life into our needy spirits. We thank You for reaching to us when we were spiritually dead in our sins. We thank You for loving us when we were unlovely. We thank You for making a way for us to come to You and to know Your peace and pardon. Here we celebrate the joy of forgiveness that is ours through Christ's horror and suffering. We worship in awe that the Holy and Sinless Creator would love us enough to become a man and die that we might live.

With believers around the world, we look forward to our Lord's return. We ask that the grace we have received will strengthen us and help us to honor His name. We pray for the Holy Spirit to use us in sharing the message of Jesus' death with our hurting world. Amen.

Hymn

An appropriate hymn may be sung to conclude the service.

II. BAPTISM

FORM A

Introduction

Dearly Beloved, Holy Baptism is a most precious sacrament which Our Lord Jesus Christ has instituted in His Church and which He commands us faithfully to observe. In baptism we enter into solemn and lifelong covenant with God and receive the sign and seal of that covenant to our comfort; we publicly identify ourselves with Our Lord, His death, His resurrection and His Church, which is the body and the company of all the faithful. These persons¹ present have come to receive this holy sacrament. Let us therefore pray for them that God our Father will grant them strength to keep the vows which they shall make and remain faithful in His service throughout all their lives.

Prayer

Either the following or an appropriate extemporaneous prayer may now be offered.

Almighty and everlasting God, You are the aid of all who need, the helper of all who come to You, the life of those who believe, and the resurrection of the dead. Look now in Your great mercy upon these Your children [*you may name the persons being baptized if you wish*], who in loving obedience to Your command, come now to be baptized. Remind them often of the sacred vows which they are about to take before You and Your people, and strengthen them always to keep them faithfully. Grant them true faith, firm hope, and steadfast love, that joyfully bearing their cross, they may faithfully obey Your Word, trust fully in Your grace, and come at last to Your eternal joy, through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.

The Scripture Lesson

The officiating minister may read the following Scripture or another fitting passage.

Hear the words of Our Savior, Jesus Christ, recorded in St. Matthew, chapter 28: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father,

¹ Wherever necessary, change the terms to singular and use the pronouns he or she or him or her.

and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Address To The Baptismal Candidates

Dearly Beloved, you have heard how that we have prayed for you that God will look in mercy upon you, strengthen you to keep the sacred vows that you are about to make, and bring you at last to His eternal joy. Be assured that He is always faithful to keep His covenant with His children and has promised through Our Lord Jesus Christ, whom He yielded up for our redemption, to grant these gracious favors which we have asked of Him. Now on your part, you must promise before Him in the presence of this congregation to take upon yourself all the obligations of this holy sacrament.

The Baptismal Covenant

Do you renounce the devil and all his works, and the love for the evil of this world, with all its sinful desires, so that you will not follow or be led by them?

ANSWER: I renounce them all.

Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and of earth? And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, Our Lord? And that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary? That He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and was buried? That He arose again the third day? That He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, and that from thence He shall come again at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead? And do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting?

ANSWER: All this I steadfastly believe.

Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, put your whole trust in the sufficiency of His grace, and promise to serve Him faithfully within the fellowship of His holy church?

ANSWER: I do.

Is it your desire now to be baptized in the Christian faith?

ANSWER: It is my desire.

Will you then obediently keep God's will and commandments and walk in the same all the days of your life?

ANSWER: I will endeavor to do so, the Lord being my helper.

Prayer

Almighty and Everlasting God, the Author of Eternal life, grant that the regenerating grace which You have mercifully given to these persons shall not have been bestowed in vain. May they who are about to be baptized in water know also that greater baptism of the Holy Spirit, that being cleansed from all sin and being replenished with Your strength, they shall grow in every Christian grace and virtue. Look mercifully upon them—and upon all of us who profess Your name—all throughout this life and then in the world to come. We now consecrate these believers to You through the sacrament of baptism. In the name of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has taught us to pray, saying: [*Corporately recite The Lord's Prayer*]

The Administration

_____ [Full name of candidate], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The minister shall then immerse in water or sprinkle or pour water upon each candidate.

The Benediction

May God Almighty, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, grant you to be strengthened with power through His Holy Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you may be filled with the fullness of God.



FORM B**Introduction**

Jesus Christ instructed us to "... make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He had commanded." And His promise was that He would be with us day after day after day, to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20).

Dear Friends, in keeping with the command of Jesus, you have presented yourselves this day that you might receive the sacrament of baptism. Baptism is not itself the door to salvation, but rather is an outward sign of the new birth which God has wrought in your heart. It proclaims to all the world that you have taken Christ Jesus as the Lord of your lives, and that it is your purpose always to obey Him. In order that we may hear your testimony of what God has done for you, and that we may know that you understand the significance of the step you are taking, we want to ask you these questions:

1. Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and do you know that He has forgiven your sins?

ANSWER: I do.

2. Do you desire to be baptized in His name?

ANSWER: I do.

3. Do you intend by this act to testify to all the world that you are a Christian and will be a loyal follower of Christ?

ANSWER: I do.

4. Do you believe in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments? And will you make them the guide for your life?

ANSWER: I do and I will.

5. Trusting God to help you, will you resist temptation always and keep from doing those things that you know to be sinful or displeasing to God?

ANSWER: I will.

6. Will you attend church services and do those things you know a Christian should do?

ANSWER: I will.

Please join us in saying the Apostles' creed and, thus, declare now your faith both publicly and with conviction.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And 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 hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy Church universal, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer

The minister shall ask the name of each candidate and shall immerse the candidate in water, or, if desired, may sprinkle or pour water, saying:

_____ [Full name of candidate], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let the group lift a song of worship (such as "My Jesus I Love Thee") and then the minister shall close in prayer.

III. CHILD DEDICATION

FORM A

After the singing of a suitable hymn, the minister shall take his place at the altar and shall call to take their places before the altar the parents, or guardians, of the child/children to be dedicated to the Lord. These shall take their places, with the child/children, after which the minister shall say:

Dearly Beloved, inasmuch as Christ, our Savior, saith, “Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God”; and as the holy apostle St. Peter declares that, “The promise is unto you and to your children,” therefore this child has been brought to be consecrated to God and to His service.

I beseech you to call upon God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that of His bounteous mercy He will grant that this child may early become a partaker of the divine nature and grow up into Christ our living Head in all things, and come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto perfect spiritual manhood, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, and may God grant unto you the needed grace that you may properly discharge all the duties you owe to this child which God has given you.

Charge to the Parents/Guardians

The minister shall say to the parents, or guardians, of the child which is brought for dedication:

You have brought this child whom God has given you to be dedicated to God and to His service. By this act you therefore signify your faith in the Christian religion, and also your desire that he/she shall receive the benefits of consecration to God, and of the prayers of the church and congregation, and may early learn to know and follow the will of God; and thus doing may live and die a Christian, attaining in the end of this earthly life to everlasting life in the kingdom of God.

In order that this may be accomplished, it will be your duty as parents (or guardians) to early teach this child the fear of the Lord; to watch over his/her education, that he/she may not be led astray by false teachings or doctrines, to direct his/her mind to the Holy Scriptures as expressing the will and authority of God for all mankind, also to direct his/her feet to the sanctuary; to restrain him/her

from evil associates and habits; and, as much as in you lies, to “bring him/her up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Question: Will you endeavor to do so, by the help of God?

ANSWER: I will.

Charge To the Congregation

You have heard the charge given to these parents. Do you, as members of this congregation of Christ, acknowledge and accept your responsibility to do all within your power to aid and assist these parents in keeping the solemn vows that they have taken upon themselves and also to provide all necessary support for this child that he/she may early come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and grow up in Him? If so, will you say, “We will?”

ANSWER: We will.

Hear now the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, recorded in Mark 10:13-16: “Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’ And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them.”

Then shall the minister ask the name of the child, and placing his right hand upon the child’s head, shall say: _____ [Child’s full name] I dedicate you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

Prayer

O God, Our Heavenly Father, grant that as this child grows in stature, he/she may grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and being Your faithful child, strengthened and renewed by Your sanctifying grace, may serve You through all the days of his/her life. Amen.

Almighty God, source of all love, wisdom, and power, so guide and uphold these parents that they, by loving care, wise advice, and holy example, may lead this child into the life of faith whose strength is righteousness, and whose fruit is everlasting joy and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The minister shall then offer the Lord's Prayer or some other appropriate or extemporaneous prayer.



FORM B

Introducing the Ceremony

It is exciting when a new child enters a family. There is no greater moment than when parents sense that children are a gift from God. In these joyful moments, ministers have the privilege to share with the parents as they express their appreciation to God by dedicating their child/baby to God. That special event is what we celebrate today.

Dedicating a child acknowledges God's sovereignty not only over the child, but also over Mom and Dad. Parents present their child before God and His people asking for grace and wisdom in carrying out their responsibilities. Parents also come praying that their child might one day trust Jesus Christ as Savior for the forgiveness of sin and become a devoted disciple of Christ.

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 reads, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

This scripture commands parents to love God; if they truly wish for their child to one day love and follow God, their lives must be an example.

Deuteronomy 6 also makes it clear that the duty of teaching children belongs to parents. Church, Sunday school, and Christian schools can provide excellent Christian training, but parents must seize the teachable moments that arise throughout life. Parents are best suited to teach prayer and devotion to God by training and example and to teach the child to really love God and people. They also teach the mundane but necessary disciplines of life.

I now invite [father], [mother], [grandparents], and [children] to bring [child's name] for this special time of dedication.

Conducting the Ceremony

I would like [father], [mother], [grandparents], and [children] to stand to my/our right.

Minister should pray with the child's father closest to him; any other family may stand to the minister's left. Mother will hold baby and give to father for the vow of dedication who will give baby to minister for the dedication prayer — recognize everyone at the front of the church and their supportive role.

[If grandparents stand with the parents:]

“Standing here are three generations. Seeing this brings to mind Proverbs 17:6 which tells us that “Grandchildren are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of children.”

I know the grandparents are very proud of their grandchild/grandchildren and are proud of [father] and [mother] for many reasons and certainly for their determination to dedicate their children to God. Mom and dad, we trust that the step of faith you're taking today will one day make [child's name] proud of your actions.

Psalm 127:3 proclaims that God in His goodness gives children as gifts to parents and with that comes the awesome responsibility of caring for this gift. Thus, it is only proper and appropriate that children be dedicated back to God.

Hannah presented her son Samuel to the Lord. Mary and Joseph brought their baby Jesus to the temple in order to present him to the Lord. In the same way, [parents] today bring their child presenting first themselves and then [child's name] to our Heavenly Father.

[If siblings stand with the parents:]

Accompanying them in making this commitment is/are [sibling(s)].

Add any appropriate comments about being older siblings and teaching baby to love God and to obey parents.

[Father] and [mother], God's commands that I read in Deuteronomy said:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”

God’s instructions to you are plain. Love God with every ounce and fiber of your energy and teach [child’s name] to do the same. As you love God, each other, [other children] and your neighbor as yourself you will model before [child’s name] a wonderful love that he/she will want for him/herself.

God’s instructions to fathers are plain. Ephesians 6:4 says: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

[Father] and [mother] by coming forward before God and his people, do you hereby declare your desire to dedicate yourselves and your son/daughter [child’s name] to the Lord? If so, please respond by saying, “We do.”

ANSWER: We do.

Having come freely, I ask now that you enter into the following commitment in the presence of God and his people. [Mother’s name] would you please give [child’s name] to [father] as a sign of his spiritual headship in the family. So that [child’s name] may walk in the abundant life that Christ offers, do you as parents vow by God’s help and in partnership with the church, to provide [child’s name] a Christian home of love and peace, to raise him/her in the truth of our Lord’s instruction and discipline, and to encourage her to one day trust Jesus Christ as her Savior and Lord? If so, please respond by saying, “We do.”

ANSWER: We do.

The minister shall take the child and ask for the baby’s full name.

_____ [child’s full name], I dedicate you to God in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The minister may hand the child back to the parents.

Prayer of Dedication

The minister may pray an appropriate prayer of dedication.

Modeling this kind of love cannot be done alone. It requires the help of others. For this reason, [father] and [mother] call upon the help of all of their family and friends and the church.

I ask all of you to join in this commitment as well. Parents have the first responsibility. But parents need the help and support of family, friends, and church—we are stronger when we work together for the common goal. So I direct my question now to all of you.

Would you please stand? I ask now that you make the following commitment to this family: So that [child's name] may walk in the abundant life that Christ offers, do you pledge by God's help, to be faithful in your calling as family, friends, and as members of the body of Christ, to support [father] and [mother] in their Christian commitment to [child's name] so that he/she will one day trust him as Savior and Lord? If you accept this responsibility, please respond by saying, "We do."

ANSWER: We do.

If desired, an appropriate song may be sung.

IV. BABY BLESSING

This ceremony may be used in the case of parents or guardians for whom the child dedication is not suitable.

Hear the words of Scripture: "...they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it. And He took them up in His arms, put His hands on them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16).

Today, [parent's/guardians' name] has brought his/her/their baby [child's name] to present him/her to the Lord. We commend the desire of this parent/these parents to seek God's blessing upon his/her/their little one. And, we pray that this moment will forever mark itself upon [parent's/guardians' names] heart and mind.

May I remind you of the command in Deuteronomy 6:4-7: "...You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

God's instructions are plain. You are to give your life completely to God and then teach [baby's name] to do the same. You are to model right living and wholesome character. You are to take your child to church and teach him/her to pray. You are to read the Bible to him/her and lead him/her to make right choices.

Do you now offer [baby's name] to Jesus for His blessing and for His tender purposes to be worked out in his life?

Parent/Guardians answer: Yes.

The minister takes child in his arms.

_____ [baby's full name], just as Jesus blessed little children when He was here on earth, may His blessing now rest on you. May you early come to know Jesus as your Savior and live for Him.

The minister hands baby back to mother.

Kneeling or standing, the minister offers an appropriate prayer for baby and parent/guardians.

V. WEDDING CEREMONY

FORM A

Call to Worship

Dearly Beloved, We are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the presence of these witnesses, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony, which is an honorable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocence, signifying unto us the mystical union that exists between Christ and His Church. This holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with His presence and first miracle that He wrought, in Cana of Galilee, and St. Paul commended as being honorable among all men. It is, therefore, not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these persons present now come to be joined.

Giving of the Bride

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

Response (by the father, or whoever gives the bride in marriage): Her mother and I do.

Prayer

Declaration of Intent

The minister shall say unto the man:

_____, will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto her, so long as you both shall live?

Response: I will.

Then shall the minister say unto the woman:

_____, will you have this man to be your wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Will you love, honor, and keep him, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep yourself only unto him, so long as you both shall live?

Response: I will.

Vows

The man shall repeat after the minister:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge you my faith.

The woman shall repeat after the minister:

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge you my faith.

Prayer

O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace, the Author of everlasting life, send Your blessing upon these Your servants, this man and this woman, whom we now bless in Your name; that as Isaac and Rebekah lived faithfully together, so these persons may surely perform and keep the vow and covenant made between them this hour and may ever remain in love and peace together, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pronouncement of Marriage

Then shall the minister say: Forasmuch as this man and woman have consented together in holy wedlock, and have witnessed the same before God and this company, and have declared the same by joining of hands, I pronounce that they are husband and wife together, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together let not man put asunder. Amen.

You may kiss your bride.

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Presentation of Couple

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege to present to you Mr. and Mrs. _____



FORM B

Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here in God's presence to witness the marriage of _____[man's name] and _____[woman's name], and to ask God to bless them. By our presence we accept the responsibility for supporting them in the new relationship they are about to enter. We are called to rejoice in their happiness, to be patient when they make mistakes, to help them in times of trouble, and to remember them in our prayers.

On their behalf, I want to thank you for joining us on this wonderful occasion. Here, in the presence of the Almighty God, your attendance has made their celebration complete.

Marriage is an honorable estate instituted in the time of man's innocence. It was sanctioned and adorned by Christ's presence at the marriage in Cana of Galilee, and it was likened by St. Paul to the mystical union which subsists between Christ and His church.

Marriage is therefore not to be entered into lightly or thoughtlessly, but reverently, discreetly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate these two persons now desire to enter.

Who gives this woman to be married to this man?

Most commonly the father responds by saying, "Her mother and I."

The father shall present his daughter's hand to the groom, who shall escort his bride to the minister.

Prayer

O God of love, today, we invoke the presence of Christ our Lord to grace this wedding celebration. Though You are unseen, please grace these moments with Your unmistakable nearness.

We have not come to this hour lightly or casually. And, thus, we beseech Your grace to be upon us now. Bless _____[man's name] and _____[woman's name] as they pledge their lives and love to each other. May the sacredness of their vows and the reality of Your regal presence never be forgotten by this lovely couple.

This we ask through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Exhortation

God, Himself, designed marriage. He designed it to be lasting and lovely, a reflection of the Godhead's mutual harmony and happiness. Marriage is to be our testimony to the world of the relationship Christ shares with His church. In the Scriptures, St. Paul admonishes "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... Let each one of you in particular so love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (Eph. 5:25, 33)

Christ valued humanity enough to leave heaven's splendor and come to us. His death on the cross was a demonstration of His self-giving love. _____ [Man's name], Christ's love for us is to be your example for loving _____ [woman's name]. That love is not soft and effeminate, but sacrificial, strong and selfless. She will feel your love as you develop a relationship that is trusting, committed and graciously understanding. You are to esteem her not only with nurturing words, but through character and conduct that makes her proud to say, "That's my husband." Your love will be her happiness and will inspire her respect.

_____ [Woman's name], God said that it is not good for man to be alone. _____ [Man's name] will function at his best when he is nurtured by your respect and bolstered by your encouragement, cheerfulness and confidence. Even if people forget him, lose confidence in him, and turn their backs on him, you must not. It has been truly said that behind every successful man stands a more successful woman. You will inspire him when you believe in him and dream with him. As you verbalize your pride in him and tell him you feel safe by his side, it will make him feel respected and will motivate his love for you.

This kind of a relationship is the happy haven of love and respect that God designed for marriage. If you will ask your Heavenly Father, the Designer, He will grace your home with His presence, His wisdom and His enabling. Seek Him first and He will supply your needs. Honor Him and He will honor you. Love Him and He will embrace you. Love like Him and He will bless your marriage with closeness, strength and spiritual unity.

Declaration of Intent

And now, in token that your hearts are joined together in love, you will please join your hands.

_____ [Man's name], as you stand in the presence of God, your family and friends, do you take this woman, whose hands you hold, choosing her alone, to be your wedded wife? Will you promise to keep God first in your life and in your home? Will you promise to lead and guide _____ [woman's name], to protect her and provide for her? Do you promise to listen to her, encourage her, comfort her, and to stand by her always? Will you love her and be faithful to her at all times? As you begin your life as one, will you promise to keep yourself only unto her, forsaking all others, as long as you both shall live? Do you so promise?

Groom responds: I do

_____ [Woman's name], as you stand in the presence of God, your family and friends, do you take this man, whose hands you hold, choosing him alone to be your wedded husband? Will you promise to keep God first in your life and in your home? Will you promise to follow _____ [man's name] direction and leadership as he follows Christ? Do you promise to listen to him, encourage him, comfort him, and to stand by him always? Will you love him with patience and kindness through good times and bad, honor him at all times, and be faithful to him? As you begin your life as one, will you promise to keep yourself only unto him, forsaking all others, as long as you both shall live? Do you so promise?

Bride responds: I do

Vows

The minister shall say:

Repeat after me: I, _____ [man's name], do take you _____ [woman's name], — to be my lawful wedded wife — to have and to hold — from this day forward — for better, for worse — for richer, for poorer — in sickness and in health — to love and to cherish — and to be faithful to you alone — until death do us part.

I _____ [woman's name], do take you _____ [man's name], — to be my lawful wedded husband — to have and to hold — from this day forward — for better, for worse — for richer, for poorer — in sickness and in health — to love and to cherish — and to be faithful to you alone — until death do us part.

Bible Ceremony (optional)

_____ [Man's name], what do you give to _____ [woman's name] as an expression of your Christian devotion and the foundation of your home?
Groom hands Bible to bride for them to hold together.

Groom: _____ [Woman's name], I give you a Bible, God's Holy Word. It is to be the foundation of our home. Upon its precepts we will build our lives and our future. To the great and Almighty God we will bow our knees in prayer. And, in the end, we will live with Him forever.

Unity Candle (optional)

Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife, and they together shall be one flesh. Hitherto you have shone as two lights; henceforth you shall shine as one. May the grace of God sustain the great flame of your souls and shine through you to light the paths of others.

Prayer

The minister may use an extemporaneous or the following prayer.

The minister shall say:

Please join your right hands.

O God, You have established marriage for the welfare and happiness of mankind. You said, "It is not good for man to be alone, I will make a helper who is just right for him." (NLT) Now our joys are doubled since the happiness of one is the happiness of the other. And our burdens are lightened as we share the load.

Father, _____ [man's name] and _____ [woman's name] have prayed together many times. But here they kneel at their first family altar on their wedding day. Make their home your sanctuary and their family altar blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Bless _____ [man's name]! Bless this husband. Bless him as provider of food and clothing, and sustain him in all the pressures of life. May his strength be [woman's name]'s protection, his character be her boast and her pride, and may he so live that she will find in him the haven for which the heart of a woman truly longs.

Bless _____[woman's name]! Bless this loving wife. Give her tenderness that will make her great, a deep sense of understanding and a great faith in You. Give her that inner beauty of soul that never fades, that eternal youth that is found in holding fast the things that never age.

Teach them that marriage is not merely for each other; it is two uniting and joining hands to serve You. Give them a great spiritual purpose in life. May they seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the other things shall be added unto them.

May they not expect that perfection of each other that belongs alone to You. May they minimize each other's weaknesses and see each other through a lover's kind and patient eyes.

Now make such assignments to them on the scroll of Your will that will bless them and develop their characters as they walk together. Give them enough tears to keep them tender, enough hurts to keep them humble, enough failure to keep their hands clenched tightly in Yours, and enough success to make them sure they walk with You.

May they never take each other's love for granted, but always experience that breathless wonder that exclaims, "Out of all this world you have chosen me."

When life is done and the sun is setting, may they be found then as now hand in hand, still thanking God for each other. May they serve You happily, faithfully, and consistently, until at last one shall lay the other in the arms of God.

This we ask through Jesus Christ, great lover of our souls, Amen.

Minister places his hand on theirs.

Forasmuch as you _____[man's name] and you, _____[woman's name], have consented together in holy matrimony and have pledged your faith to each other in the sight of God and in the presence of these witnesses; now, therefore in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, I pronounce you husband and wife. Whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder.

You may kiss your bride.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen.

Please turn and face the congregation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my privilege to present to you, Mr. and Mrs.
_____ [couple's name].

VI. THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

Order For A Christian Funeral Service

We recommend that wherever possible a Christian funeral be conducted in a church building. It is customary that the presiding minister meet the coffin and go before it into the church.

Opening Sentences

The minister or someone whom he may appoint shall read one or more of the following scriptures or use such other call to worship that he shall choose.

“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah” (Psalm 46:1-3; 11).

Order Of Service

Invocation

Congregational Hymn

Obituary and Tributes (if desired)

Scripture Reading (Suggested passages include Psalms 23, 90, 121; John 14:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:35-49; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5; Revelation 7:9-17)

Hymn (either congregational or offered by musicians)

Meditation or Sermon

Pastoral Prayer

Benediction

Order For The Service At The Grave

When all shall have gathered at the grave, the minister shall say:

“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

“I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another” (Job 19:25-27).

“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (1 Tim. 6:7; Job 1:21).

The minister may read such scriptural passages as he shall choose, then offer prayer, either extemporaneous or one or more of the following:

Almighty God, in the midst of life we are in death. Of whom shall we seek for comfort but in You, whose only Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection has conquered death for us. Out of the depths of our grief and loss, we turn to You, praying that the light of Your countenance will now shine upon us, a sense of Your presence will strengthen us, and the reality of Your promise of eternal life will console us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

O God of life, as we have learned to do in all our experiences, we come to You in the hour of death. We know that You love us, and that You can turn even the shadow of death into the light of morning. Help us now to wait before You with reverent and submissive hearts. Make this a time of opening our eyes and our understanding, and a time of admonition to our hearts and souls. Bless those who feel this sorrow most keenly, and cause the bonds of Christian love to bind us closer together, so that we may share with them that spiritual strength and that faith in God which is ours through the love of Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

O Lord, be with us in this hour of need and loss. Let not our faith fail or our hope grow dim. May we now perceive the shadow of Your hand, outstretched in love; and may the ministry of Your Holy Spirit surround us with the hope of heaven with You forever. Now thanks be to Him who lives, though He was dead; and behold, He is alive forevermore, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Committal

The minister shall read one of the following committals.

1. For a Believer, Form One

Forasmuch as the spirit of our departed loved one has returned to God, who gave it, we therefore tenderly commit his/her body to the grave in sure trust and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come,

through our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall give to us new bodies like unto His glorious body. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”

2. For a Believer, Form Two: Traditional Methodist Committal

Forasmuch as it has pleased Almighty God, in His wise providence, to take out of the world the soul of the departed, we therefore commit his/her body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, looking for the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming in glorious majesty to judge the world, the sea and the dead shall give up their dead, and the corruptible bodies of those who sleep in Him shall be changed and made like unto His own glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

3. For a Non-Believer

We have come now to commit the body of our departed friend to its kindred dust. The spirit we leave with God, for we know the merciful Judge of all the earth will do right. Let us who remain dedicate ourselves anew to live in the fear and love of God, so that we may obtain an abundant entrance into the heavenly Kingdom.

4. For a Child

In the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commit the body of this child to the grave. And as Jesus, during His earthly life, took the children into His arms and blessed them, may He receive this dear one unto himself, for, as He said, “The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Then shall the minister say:

“I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, From henceforth blessed are the dead who die in the Lord; even so, saith the Spirit, for the rest from their labors.”

Then may be offered The Lord's Prayer in unison:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

The Benediction

Then the minister may dismiss the people, saying:

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be yours now and forever. Amen.

Or this:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and the love of God; and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore.

The singing of a hymn may be added to the service at the grave if desired.

VII. THE ORDINATION OF ELDERS

When the time appointed for ordination shall have come, one of the elders shall present unto the Conference President those who are to be ordained. Their names being read aloud, the Conference President shall say unto the people:

Brethren, these are they whom we purpose, God willing, this day to ordain as elders. For, after due examination we find not to the contrary, but that they are lawfully called to this function and ministry, and they are persons meet for the same. But if there are any of you who knoweth any impediment or crime in any of them, for the which he ought not to be received into this holy ministry, let him come forth in the name of God, and show what the crime or impediment is.

The Epistle: Ephesians 4:7-13

“Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same that also ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

The Gospel: St. John 10:1-16

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them, but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again: Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; by me if any man enter in he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture. The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the

shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep and fleeth; and the wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.”

And that done, the President shall say unto them as follows:

You have heard, brethren, as well in your private examination as in the exhortation which was now made to you, and in the holy lessons taken out of the Gospel and the writings of the apostles, of what dignity and what great importance this office is, whereunto you are called. And now again we exhort you, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you have in remembrance into how high a dignity, and to how weighty an office you are called; that is to say, to be messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord; to teach and admonish; to feed and provide for the Lord’s family; to seek for Christ’s sheep that are dispersed abroad, and for His children who are in the midst of this evil world that they may be saved through Christ forever.

Have always, therefore, printed in your remembrance, how great a treasure is committed to your charge; for they are the sheep of Christ which He bought with His death and for whom He shed His blood. The church and congregation, whom you must serve, is the spouse and His body. And if it shall happen the same church, or any member thereof, do take any hurt or hindrance by reason of your negligence, you know the greatness of the fault and also the horrible punishment that will ensue. Wherefore, consider with yourselves the end of the ministry toward the children of God, toward the spouse and body of Christ; and see that you have done all that lies in you, according to your bounden duty, to bring all such as are or shall be committed to your charge, unto the agreement in the faith and knowledge of God, and to that ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ, that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion, or for viciousness in life.

Forasmuch, then, as your office is both of so great excellency and of so great difficulty, you see with how great care and study you ought to apply yourselves, as well that you may show yourselves dutiful and thankful unto that Lord who has placed you in so high a dignity, as also to beware that neither you yourselves offend. Howbeit, you cannot have a mind and will thereto of yourselves; for that will and ability is given of God alone; therefore, you ought and have need to pray earnestly for His Holy Spirit. And seeing that you cannot by any other

means compass the doing of so weighty a work pertaining to the salvation of man, but with doctrine and exhortation taken out of the Holy Scriptures and with a life agreeable to the same, consider how studious you ought to be in reading and learning the Scriptures; and for the selfsame cause how you ought to forsake and set aside, as much as you may, all worldly cares and studies.

We trust that you have all weighed and pondered these things with yourselves long before this time, and that you have clearly determined by God's grace, to give yourselves wholly to this office, whereunto it hath pleased God to call you; so that as much as lies in you, you will apply yourselves wholly to this one thing, and draw all your cares and studies this way, and that you will continually pray to God the Father, by the mediation of our only Savior, Jesus Christ, for the heavenly assistance of the Holy Spirit; that by daily reading and weighing the Scriptures you may wax riper and stronger in your ministry; and that you may so endeavor yourselves, from time to time, to sanctify the lives of you and yours, and to fashion them after the rule and doctrine of Christ, that you may be wholesome and godly examples, and patterns for the people to follow.

And now, that this present congregation of Christ here assembled may also understand your minds and wills in these things, and that this your promise may the more move you to do your duties, you shall answer plainly to these things, which we, in the name of God and His Church, shall demand of you touching the same.

Do you think in your heart that you are called according to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the office and work of an elder in The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches?

ANSWER: Yes, I do.

Do you cordially accept our Statement of Faith and agree to declare and defend it?

ANSWER: I do, in the fear of God.

Are you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures are the fully inspired and inerrant Word of God and that they contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? Are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures?

ANSWER: I am so persuaded, and have so determined by God's grace.

Will you then give your faithful diligence always so to minister the doctrine, and sacraments, and discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded?

ANSWER: I will do so by the help of the Lord.

Will you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines contrary to God's Word, and to use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole, within your charge, as need shall require and occasion be given?

ANSWER: I will, the Lord being my helper.

Will you be diligent in prayers and in reading the Holy Scriptures, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same, laying aside the study of the world and of the flesh?

ANSWER: I will endeavor to do so, the Lord being my helper.

Will you be diligent to frame and fashion yourselves and your families according to the doctrine of Christ, and to make both yourselves and them, as much as in you lies, wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?

ANSWER: I will, the Lord being my helper...

Will you maintain, and set forward, as much as lies in you, quietness, peace, and love among all Christian people, and especially among them that are, or shall be committed to your charge?

ANSWER: I will do so, the Lord being my helper.

Prayer

The President or officiating elder may pray an appropriate prayer for those who are to be ordained.

When this prayer is done the President or officiating elder, with the elders present, shall lay their hands upon the head of every one that receives the Order of Elders—the receivers humbly kneeling upon their knees and the president saying:

The Lord pour upon thee the Holy Spirit, for the office and work of an elder in the Church of God. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the Word of God, and of His holy sacraments; in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

They shall continue to kneel, and the President shall deliver to each one of them the Bible into his hands, and shall say:

Take thou authority to preach the Word of God and to administer the holy sacraments in the congregation.

The President or officiating elder shall then, in behalf of the conference, give to each of the persons ordained the right hand of fellowship, welcoming him to the work and labors of the ministry, adding such remarks as he may deem fitting, followed by the benediction.

VIII. CHARGE TO INCOMING CONFERENCE PRESIDENT

Dear Brother in Christ: In the providence of God, you have been elected President of the _____ Regional Conference of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. Your brothers and sisters have thus invested you with a position of great honor, indicating their confidence in your godliness of life, maturity of judgment, and commitment to the church. Remember, however, that this honor is also a solemn and sacred responsibility, demanding steadfast purpose, arduous labor, and continual sacrifice. Only God can enable you to fulfill the charge which is now laid upon you.

In the decisions of office, may He give you wisdom. In the rigors of labor, may He give you strength. In the setting of an example, may He give you consistency. In the administration of discipline, may He give you patience. In the agony of failure, may He give you comfort. In the elation of success, may He give you humility. Never forget that as an overseer in the church of Christ, which He has loved even to the shedding of His own blood, that you “must be blameless as the steward of God, not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; a lover of hospitality; a lover of good men; sober, just, holy, temperate, holding fast the faithful word.” (Titus 1:7-9)

Do you now accept the office of President of the _____ Regional Conference of the Bible Methodist Connection of Churches, believing that you are truly called to this work and ministry according to the will of God?

ANSWER: I do, the Lord being my helper.

Do you embrace the Holy Scriptures as the absolute and authoritative Word of God; and submitting yourself to its direction, do you promise to pursue a gentle, loving, and holy life, following the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and in all things serving as an example of good works, as a leader in His Church?

ANSWER: I do, as He shall assist and strengthen me.

Will you in the exercise of your office steadfastly uphold and administer the *Discipline* of the Bible Methodist Connections of Churches, and to the best of your ability, maintain the peace, purity, and prosperity of the church, treating those committed to your charge with kindness, integrity, and grace?

ANSWER: I will do so with the help of the Lord.

Now, Dear Brother, may the Holy Spirit strengthen you to keep these vows, which you have made before God and before us; and may He also fill you with wisdom and with grace that the work of God placed under your direction shall advance in every way to His glory. In the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

IX. RECEPTION OF A NEWLY ORGANIZED CHURCH

It is the delightful purpose of this service to officially organize, in this community, a body of believers as a part of the _____ Regional Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. Today, charter members/lay leaders will be established as a local Bible Methodist Church for worship, edification, discipleship and evangelism. We have looked forward to this occasion, and pray that our Heavenly Father will superintend these moments with His gracious presence and leadership.

Would the potential members and lay leaders of this body please rise and come to the front?

Covenant questions for reception of members/lay leaders shall be directed to those who have presented themselves (see pp. 167 and 169).

Friends, we rejoice to receive you as members of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches and the _____ Regional Conference in particular. We are honored by your desire to be one of us and we welcome you into our fellowship. It is our prayer that you will experience our love, affirmation and encouragement as we journey to heaven together. We look forward to the added inspiration that your involvement will bring to Bible Methodism.

May the Great Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, bless you as a congregation and fill you with His Spirit. May the future of this church be the best days under God that you have ever known!

On behalf of the Conference Executive Committee and the _____ Regional Conference at large, I extend to you the right hand of fellowship as a token of our love and appreciation for you.

Prayer

The Conference President or officiating elder may pray an appropriate prayer.

X. RECEPTION OF CHURCH TRANSFERRING INTO A REGIONAL CONFERENCE

It is the delightful purpose of this service to officially transfer, as a body, the voting members of this congregation into the _____ Regional Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. We have looked forward to this occasion, and pray that our Heavenly Father will make us a mutual blessing, the one to the other.

Would the voting members of this church please rise and come to the front?

As a church body, you have voted to transfer your church affiliation and your individual membership into the _____ Regional Conference of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches. Do you freely affirm these intentions and will you give yourself, as God shall enable you, to the unity of the body of Christ, the mutual edification of fellow believers, the advancement of holiness and the salvation of the lost? Do you accept the Statement of Faith, church polity, and scriptural principles of holy living as stated in the Bible Methodist *Discipline* to guide your faith and conduct?

ANSWER: We do, God being our Helper.

Friends, we rejoice to receive you as members and lay leaders of The Bible Methodist Connection of Churches and the _____ Regional Conference in particular. We are honored by your desire to be one of us and we welcome you into our fellowship. It is our prayer that you will experience our love, affirmation and encouragement as we journey to heaven together. We look forward to the added inspiration that your involvement will bring to Bible Methodism.

May the Great Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, bless you as a congregation and fill you with His Spirit. May the future of this church be the best days under God that you have ever known!

On behalf of the Conference Executive Committee and the _____ Regional Conference at large, I extend to you the right hand of fellowship as a token of our love and appreciation for you.

The Conference President or officiating elder may pray an appropriate prayer.

XI. RECEPTION OF MEMBERS

Dear friends, as believers we are blessed with many sacred privileges. These privileges are granted to us through Jesus Christ who loved the world so much that He sacrificed His life to redeem us. Christ welcomes believers into a relationship with Himself as the head of the church. He has incorporated us as members of His body to worship Him, edify one another, and evangelize the lost. The church receives its life and mission from Christ and through communities of fellowship continues His work on earth in the power of His Spirit. Today we are honored to receive members into our local community of believers. These candidates have joined the church universal by the saving grace of Jesus Christ and, having completed the prerequisite membership instruction, now desire to unite with this local body of believers.

Membership Covenant

To the candidates for membership...

By presenting yourself for membership do you affirm:

that God has forgiven your sins,

that you have been baptized,

that you will make the Bible your guide for life,

that you will pursue diligently Scripture's call to entire sanctification, and

that you will endeavor to live a holy life both publicly and privately?

ANSWER: I do.

Will you endeavor to:

participate faithfully in worship services and other means of grace,

serve and support the ministries of this church, and

live in harmony with your fellow believers?

ANSWER: I will.

Seeing your desire to unite with this church, giving testimony to God's grace, and pledging the vows of membership, do you also purpose to seek earnestly the peace, purity, and edification of the church, and to walk with all its members in charity, faithfulness, and sobriety?

ANSWER: I do.

Church Response

Addressing the membership of the local church the pastor shall say:

It is an honor to receive you as members of the _____ Church and to offer you the right hand of fellowship.

Personal words of affirmation may be expressed.

Would the congregation please stand to confirm our reception of these members.

We welcome you as members of this community of the body of Christ. We will endeavor to walk with you in love and nurture your growth as disciples of Jesus. We need and value your contribution to the strength and life of this body. And, we pray God's blessing to be upon you and this church.

A prayer of blessing shall be offered for the incoming members.

XII. RECEPTION OF LAY LEADERS

God instructs the church to acknowledge its leaders and to regard them highly for their work's sake (1 Thess. 5:12-13). This is not because leaders are better than those they lead but because they accept additional responsibility in furthering God's work through the local church. As you step into this higher calling to participate in directing our fellowship of believers, we admonish you to remain focused on the purpose of leadership—to enable the church to effectively care for the souls of our people (Heb. 13:17). This purpose remains true no matter the specific role that you assume. We thank God for you and all who accept the responsibility necessary to help facilitate the work of God through the _____ Church.

Lay Leadership Covenant

Questions for Lay Leaders...

As a believer in Jesus Christ and a member of this church, do you accept the responsibility for participating in its spiritual leadership and governance?

ANSWER: I do.

Do you have the assurance that you have been entirely sanctified through the infilling of the Holy Spirit? If not, do you purpose to diligently seek this grace?

ANSWER: I do.

Do you accept the Statement of Faith, church polity, and scriptural principles of holy living as stated in the Bible Methodist *Discipline* to guide your faith and conduct?

ANSWER: I do.

Do you recognize your obligation to God and the church and will you contribute your tithes and offerings for the support of the Gospel in its local and general interests?

ANSWER: I do and I will.

Do you purpose that your life shall be governed by love in all its relations to God and fellow men?

ANSWER: I do.

Seeing your desire to become a Lay Leader of the church do you cheerfully devote yourself to God in the everlasting covenant of His grace, consecrating all your powers and faculties to His service and glory? Do you promise that you will cleave to Him as your chief good; that you will give diligent attention to His Word; that you will seek the honor and advancement of His kingdom; and that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, you will live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Do you also purpose to seek earnestly the peace, purity, and edification of the church, and to walk with all its members in charity, faithfulness, and sobriety?

The following paragraph may be used instead of the preceding paragraph in the event of a reception of lay leaders uniting on transfer.

In transferring your membership to this church and becoming one of its Lay Leaders, do you cheerfully devote yourself to God in the everlasting covenant of His grace, consecrating all your powers and faculties to His service and glory? Do you promise that you will cleave to Him as your chief good; that you will give diligent attention to His Word; that you will seek the honor and advancement of His kingdom; and that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, you will live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Do you also purpose to seek earnestly the peace, purity, and edification of the church, and to walk with all its members in charity, faithfulness, and sobriety?

ANSWER: I do.

XIII. RECEPTION OF MINISTERIAL LEADERS

Ministerial leaders participate in the spiritual oversight and nurture of fellow believers. When it is apparent that the Spirit has enabled an individual to share in ministry functions and that person has prepared himself for service to the church of God, we join together in acknowledging the Spirit's gifting. Whether this represents responsibilities to a specific part of the body of Christ, or to lead in corporate worship, discipleship, or evangelism, we acknowledge God's special endowment of grace and wisdom. Among the lay leaders of this church, we believe that God has given specific ministry enabling the one(s) standing before us.

In the words of Saint Paul we admonish you: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Ministerial Leadership Covenant

Do you affirm your covenant of lay leadership that you have previously declared?

Answer: I do.

Having received specific direction and instruction for the ministry to which it is apparent that God has enabled you, will you give of your time and talents to the spiritual edification of those to whom you minister?

Answer: I will.

Paul admonished Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16). Will you guard your heart, your influence, and the doctrines of the Scriptures?

Answer: I will.

Seeing your desire to become a ministerial leader of the church, do you cheerfully devote yourself to God and the everlasting covenant of His grace, consecrating all your powers and faculties to His service and glory? Do you promise that you will cleave to Him as your chief good; that you will give diligent attention

to His Word and prayer; that you will seek the honor and advancement of His kingdom; and that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, you will live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? Do you pledge that you will seek earnestly the peace, purity, and edification of the church, and walk with all its members in charity, faithfulness, and sobriety?

Answer: I do.

XIV. SERVICE OF PASTORAL INSTALLATION

This form may be used for an entire service of public worship or it may be adapted for use within the framework of another service. The Conference President or some other elder whom he may appoint shall be presiding minister. The service may begin with a call to worship and the singing of a congregational hymn.

The Invocation

The presiding minister shall offer the following prayer:

Almighty God, look with favor now upon us who are assembled to worship You, one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. We give You praise for all Your gifts so abundantly poured out upon us, and especially for Your holy Church, which is the company of all the faithful, the pillar and ground of the truth. Establish it everywhere in righteousness, advance all its godly interests, and defend it from false doctrine, division, and persecution. Supply it always with devout and diligent ministers to labor within its service; enlighten their minds, sanctify their hearts, and strengthen their purposes to do Your will. Grant that they shall declare the whole counsel of God, declaring both the demands of Your holy Law and the comforts of Your holy Gospel. May all whom You have called to perform this sacred office, and may all of us whom You have called to follow them, so serve You in constancy of faith and holiness of life that at the last we shall hear Our Lord Jesus say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." For it is in His name that we pray. Amen

The Scripture Lessons and Sermon

The presiding minister or someone else whom he may appoint shall read such readings from the Holy Scriptures that are appropriate to the occasion. It is fitting that a sermon now be preached setting forth the office, duties, and rewards of the Christian ministry. Then shall a hymn be sung.

The Ritual of Installation

Then shall the presiding minister say:

Dearly Beloved in Christ Jesus, we are assembled here before God to install Reverend _____, as pastor of this congregation. He has been duly called to this holy office by your own invitation, by the authority of the annual conference, and as we believe, by the direction of God. May the Holy Spirit add His blessing and anointing to this sacred service.

The minister to be installed as pastor shall stand before the presiding minister, who shall say:

“Dear Brother in Christ, as you well know, the duties and responsibilities of your holy office are clearly set forth in the Word of God. As a minister and representative of Our Lord Jesus Christ, you are first of all to preach both the Law and the Gospel as they are set forth in the Holy Scriptures and as they are understood in the teachings of His Holy Church. This you are to do faithfully and without deviation from the truth, remembering the words of St. Peter the Apostle: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

All that is contrary to sound doctrine or to holiness of heart and life you must refute with kindness yet with faithfulness. Those who are committed to your pastoral care are to be diligently admonished to walk in the commandments of the Lord blamelessly, trusting always in the mercies of Our Lord Jesus Christ and depending upon the leadership of the Holy Spirit in all things. You are to offer grace to the penitent and broken-hearted, give warning to the erring and sinful, and extend direction to the troubled and confused. You are to bring the compassion of Our Lord Jesus, the Great Physician, to the sick and the hope of His mercy to the dying. Remember always that you stand before your people and serve among them in His name and on His behalf.

You are also faithfully to administer the holy sacraments to your people, baptizing all those who come to repentance and faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ, and celebrating with them the Holy Communion by which they are reminded of His atoning death.

You are to instruct the children and youth of this congregation in the doctrines and discipline of our most holy faith, counseling and leading them as a faithful shepherd into the maturity of Christian life and service.

You are to be an example in your own life and ministry of a faithful steward in the Church of God. Your life of prayer, devotion, and study of the Scriptures must be a pattern for those committed to your charge. Your holiness of life, your steadfast faith, and your integrity of purpose must always be without question. Your love of righteousness and your hatred of iniquity must be without question. So it was for Our Savior, Christ, and so it must be for you. “Be thou faithful unto death,” He has said, “and I will give thee a crown of life.”

Do you, Dear Brother, now solemnly promise before God and this congregation to diligently perform these duties?

ANSWER: This I do so solemnly promise, the Lord being my Helper.

The Charge to the Pastor Being Installed

Then shall the presiding minister say to pastor being installed:

“I charge thee now before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine... but watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”

The Charge to the Congregation

The presiding minister shall ask the congregation to rise, and he shall say to them:

Now, my dear friends in Christ, you who comprise this congregation, I urge you to receive as your pastor, Reverend _____, whom you have called and whom God has established as His representative to you. Accept the Word of God that he shall faithfully preach to you, receive at his hands the holy sacraments that he shall celebrate to your comfort, and submit to the godly discipline that he shall exercise to lead you into all holiness of life.

See that your children and youth shall receive instruction in the Christian faith under his counsel, and bring them faithfully to the house of God where they shall sit under his ministry. Pray for him that the ministry he shall offer may tend to the salvation of many souls; and that as he faithfully performs his duties, directed and anointed by the Holy Spirit, you shall be saved from your sins, walk blamelessly in the commandments of Lord, and at last be brought to share in the glories of eternal life.

Honor and esteem your pastor who is to minister to your souls. Remember the words of Saint Paul, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. And to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (2 Thess. 5:12-13).

Do you now accept these obligations to your pastor?

ANSWER: We will, the Lord being our Helper.

The Act of Installation

Then shall the presiding minister say:

Having received your promise and the pledge of this congregation, I install you, Rev. _____, as pastor of this church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Installation

The presiding minister shall then offer a prayer of his choosing or he may use the following:

Most Gracious Father, the giver of all good and perfect gifts, give grace, we now beseech You, to Your servant, to whom the charge of this congregation is now committed; and so replenish him with the truth of Your Word, and so endue him with purity of life, that he may faithfully serve before You, to the glory of Your great name and the welfare of Your holy Church. Grant to this pastoral family the blessings of Your sustaining grace and wisdom. Visit this congregation with Your love and favor; enlighten their minds more and more with the light of the everlasting Gospel; graft in their hearts a love of Your truth; advance them in holiness of heart and life, nourish them with all goodness; and of Your great mercy, keep them in the same, O Holy Spirit, whom with the Father and the Son together we worship and glorify as one God, forever and ever. Amen.

The Conclusion of the Service

The minister in charge may invite the congregation to come forward to greet the pastor and his family.

XV. THE DEDICATION OF A CHURCH

The Call To Worship

The congregation being assembled, the minister shall begin the service by saying:

Dear Friends in Christ, The Holy Scriptures teach us that God is well-pleased with those who build houses for His worship. Remember how He filled the temple of Solomon with His glory, and how in the second temple He manifested Himself even more gloriously. Further, the Gospels commend the Roman centurion who built a synagogue for the people.

Let us not doubt that God will also approve our purpose of dedicating this place in a solemn manner for the various acts of Christian worship; and let us join in joyful praise to His name that this godly undertaking has been completed and in prayer for His continued blessing upon all who shall worship His name in this place.

Invocation

Then this prayer or some other appropriate prayer shall be offered:

O Eternal God, mighty in power and of majesty beyond our understanding, we reverently bow before You in worship. We know that not even the heaven of heavens can contain You, much less the walls of temples made with hands. Yet we pray that You will be present with us who are gathered together to consecrate this place to the honor of Your great name; separating it from all unhallowed, ordinary, and common uses; and dedicating it for Your service, for the reading and preaching of Your Holy Word, for celebrating Your holy sacraments, and for offering to You the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving. Bless this undertaking, all to Your glory and to our good, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Let care be taken that this is suitable to this solemn occasion.

It is appropriate that the congregation shall say the Apostles' Creed in unison.

The Old Testament Reading

2 Chronicles 6:1-2, 18-21, 40-42; 7:1-4, or such other lesson may be chosen.

Special Music

The New Testament Reading

Hebrews 10:19-2. or another such lesson may be chosen.

The Sermon

The Offering

Presentation of the Building

Then shall the trustees stand before the altar, and one of them shall say to the minister:

We present this building to you to be dedicated as a church for the service and worship of Almighty God.

Then shall the minister ask the congregation to stand, and he shall say the following:

Beloved Friends in Christ, We rejoice that God has put it into the hearts of His people to build this house to the glory of His name. Let us now dedicate it for its holy uses, setting it apart for the worship of Almighty God and the service of His people.

*Then, all standing, the minister shall say, **the people responding:***

To the glory of God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth;
 To the glory of God the Son, Redeemer of the world;
 To the glory of God the Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of the faithful;
 We dedicate this house.

For the worship of God in prayer and praise;
 For the preaching of the everlasting Gospel;
 For the celebration of the holy sacraments.
 We dedicate this house.

For the comfort of all who mourn;
 For strength to those who are tempted;
 For light to those who seek Christ's way.
 We dedicate this house.

For the hallowing of family life;
 For teaching and guidance of the young;
 For the perfecting of the saints.
 We dedicate this house.

For the conversion of sins;
 For the promotion of righteousness;
 For the extension of God's kingdom;
 We dedicate this house.

In the unity of the holy Christian faith;
 In the bond of Christian fellowship;
 In charity and good will to all;
 We dedicate this house.

In gratitude to all those who love and serve this church;
 In loving memory of the saints who have finished their course;
 In the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
 We dedicate this house.

Then shall the minister offer extemporaneous prayer or this traditional prayer used at dedications:

Now, O Lord, let Your eyes be open toward this house day and night; and let Your ears be open to receive the prayers of Your children, which they offer to You in this place. May Your rich blessing be upon this building which we have dedicated to Your honor. Grant that here and elsewhere Your ministers may be clothed with righteousness and that Your saints may rejoice in the glory of Your salvation. May we all, with Your people everywhere, grow up into a holy temple in the Lord, and at last be received into the glorious temple above, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And to the Father, and to the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be glory and praise forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

Then shall the minister dismiss the congregation using this or some other appropriate blessing:

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. And the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always. Amen.

It is appropriate that the Doxology shall then be sung.

XVI. THE DEDICATION OF A PARSONAGE

The Call To Worship

The congregation being assembled either at the church or at the parsonage to be consecrated to God's service, the minister shall begin the service by saying:

Dear Friends in Christ, throughout the ages, God's people have not only erected buildings to the glory of God for divine worship but also houses for His ministers, who have been separated and ordained to His special service. Let us rejoice that He has enabled us now to do this holy work; and let us pray that His blessings shall be upon us as we dedicate this parsonage to His glory and to the service of His Church. "Except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it." Blessed be the name of the Lord forever and ever. Amen.

The Invocation

Then shall the minister offer this prayer:

All glory be to You, O Lord, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Graciously pour out Your blessing upon us as we dedicate this parsonage to Your service and for the use of Your ministers and their families. Illuminate it with Your presence, defend it and those who shall inhabit it from evil, and hallow it with Your grace. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Scripture Reading

The minister or someone whom he shall appoint shall read a lesson of his selection from the Scriptures.

Special Music

Sermon or Meditation

Act of Dedication

Then shall the trustees or church board stand before the altar or at some other convenient place, and one of them shall say to the minister:

In behalf of this congregation, we present this building to be dedicated to the glory of God as a parsonage to be used as a residence for our ministers. May His blessings be upon our undertakings.

Then shall the minister say:

Dear Friends in Christ, it is fitting that buildings erected for service in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ should be devoutly set apart for their special use. For such a dedication we are now assembled. We give praise to Him who has put it into our hearts to prepare a parsonage for the use of the ministers of this congregation and their families, and we ask Him to receive it as our offering, all to His glory and for the honor of His Church.

Prayer of Dedication

Then shall the following prayer be offered:

Almighty God, Your ears are always open to the prayers of Your people, and we rejoice that You are present with us now in the service You have enabled us to complete. Graciously accept this parsonage, which we offer to You and to Your service, and pour out Your blessing upon it and upon Your servants who shall dwell within its walls. And since our acts here are vain without the devout consecration of our hearts and minds to You in holiness and service, we also give ourselves anew to You and to the work to which You have called us. Renew us in the likeness of our Lord, use us in whatever way that shall best bring glory to You, and bring us at last to dwell with You forever in heaven, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now, O Lord, we dedicate this parsonage to You and to Your service as a dwelling place for the ministers of this congregation. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Then may be offered The Lord's Prayer in unison:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn

Benediction

Then shall the minister dismiss the congregation with this blessing or some other that he may choose.

Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the flock, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make

you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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