

WILMORE

FREE METHODIST CHURCH

A COMMUNITY THAT REFLECTS JESUS' VISION AND VALUES

1200 LEXINGTON ROAD
WILMORE, KY 40390
PHONE 859.858.3521
FAX 859.858.8047
WWW.WILMOREFMC.ORG
OFFICE@WFMC.NET

CAROL BLANKENSHIP
Nursery Coordinator

DARYL DIDDLE
Senior Pastor

ROSE EVANS
Assistant Minister of Music

PATTI FISKEAUX
Office Assistant

CAITLIN GOTHAY
Minister of Youth

WILLIAM AND JULIE HOWARD
Facilities

DEBBY MARCHAL
Project Assistant

CHERYL SCHELL
Minister of Children

MARK SCHELL
Minister of Music

RENAE THOMPSON
Staff Assistant

STAN WIGGAM
Project Assistant

DWIGHT WINTER
Senior Associate Pastor



Dear United Methodist Brothers and Sisters,

In these days, many United Methodists around our nation are, sadly, finding themselves without a denominational home; a situation which causes me great grief. It's tragic what's happening to the once great Methodist movement.

In light of this, the Free Methodist Church and other sister denominations are receiving much interest in becoming, possibly, a new church home for former United Methodists. As of the end of summer, 2022, nearly 200 former UM churches, and, many more former UM pastors, are in the process of becoming Free Methodist.

While Free Methodists in no way desire to contribute to even more division among methodism, we do want to welcome any UM people and churches who find accord with who we are and our expression of the Methodist movement. Toward explaining this, I've compiled the enclosed, hopefully helpful, documents which include:

- 1) A page from our website especially for UM persons exploring the FMCusa
- 2) A letter of welcome and an overview of the FMC by our current Board of Bishops
- 3) An outline of the Free Methodist Way – the distinctives of the FMCusa
- 4) The Ethical Covenant to which FM pastors and leaders must agree
- 5) A brief outline of the mission of the FMCusa

More information can also be found at the Free Methodist Church USA website:

<https://fmcusa.org/resources/affiliate> The FMCusa has dedicated resources and personnel to help UM persons and congregations move toward the FMC should they so choose. The contact usually begins with the appropriate FMC Conference Superintendent. You are free to contact me and I'll put you in touch with that person.

Blessings upon you in these days of decision and transition.

Daryl A. Diddle

Assistant Superintendent, Wabash /New South Conferences, FMCusa

ddiddle@wfmc.net

United Methodists - Exploring the Free Methodist Church

As Free Methodists, we are grieved over the possible fracture of a sister denomination and find no joy in the prospect of growing our own denomination as a result of a possible split of the United Methodist Church. At the same time, we recognize that there are legitimate and good reasons for pastors and churches to prayerfully consider changing denominational affiliation, particularly when changes in the constitution or theology of their current denomination are substantial. Therefore, we are prepared to engage in meaningful conversation with those who are considering such a move. We write these lines in the hope that we may clarify both the challenges and opportunities that would be involved for you, the United Methodist, as you look at us, the Free Methodist.

Challenges

While it is very possible that some United Methodist pastors and churches might find a mutually beneficial home in the FMC, it is important that we recognize the inherent challenges of size and culture.

Size - The UMC is exponentially larger than the FMC in the U.S., and if even a small percentage of UM churches were to actually make a move to the FMC, it could have an overwhelming effect on the current makeup of the FMC. We are not prepared to dilute our commitment to living out our mission, vision, and strategic initiatives and; because those are the very things that attract interest in the FMC, we are committed to serious and substantive dialogue before any transitions might occur.

Culture - A similar challenge is that you may simply be looking for a more conservative version of what you already have; but that is not the FMC. What is driving the current discontent for many UM's is the hard drift toward a more liberal agenda on social issues and compromise on the authority of scripture. But we must also recognize that the culture in the two denominations is very different. With all the dangers inherent in painting with "a broad brush" it seems fair to say that the UMC has developed a more bureaucratic system which highly values denominational loyalty and advancement, political influence, clergy benefits (minimum salaries, guaranteed appointments, a top-tier pension plan), and a corporate system of advancement that guarantees a relatively smooth transition from one pastor to the next in the appointment process. The differences between the UMC and FMC on these matters are at least as significant as our theological differences.

These challenges highlight our need to clearly and thoroughly communicate who we are and who we are not as a denomination. Forthright communication should help minimize unrealistic expectations and misplaced assumptions, and at the same time let you know that we are not looking for pastors and churches who are primarily motivated by a desire to leave the UMC, but for those who are drawn to what God is doing in and through the FMC.

Who We are Not

- *A large denomination.* You will be shocked by the size difference, particularly in the Southeast and Midwest. For example, there are twice as many UM churches in the state of Georgia as there are FM churches in the entire U.S.! United Methodists looking for connection in the FMC may struggle with the lack of critical mass at regional gatherings, such as district meetings and annual conference. At the same time, there are advantages of a smaller denomination, including greater flexibility, a more personal connection with leadership, more openness to partnerships outside the FMC, and the ability to more readily adjust course when the Spirit leads.
- *A denomination with many large churches.* The average FM church in the US has a worship attendance of 116. It is true that a higher percentage of our newer churches are significantly larger, but we remain a denomination of mostly small and rural churches. One of our challenges in some quarters of the FMC is a tendency toward “small church thinking” and a bias against larger churches. The plus side of this challenge is that our leadership is confronting this challenge and is highly motivated to continue planting new works, particularly in urban areas of the country.
- *A denomination with high clergy security.* The FMC does not guarantee appointments, nor does it have minimum salaries in many places. It is highly unlikely we would make these kinds of clergy-guarantees even if we had the resources to do so. We are not at all convinced such guarantees lead to more fruitful ministries. Also note that the differences in the way the pension plans are structured is significant and should be analyzed as a factor in any transition.
- *A denomination with an extensive network of boards, agencies and committees.* The FMC is a very lean organization. We only have three U.S. bishops, 24 superintendents, and very few boards and agencies. Without question, a lack of abundant resources is a factor contributing to this reality. However, the bent of the FMC is toward a relatively lean organization, regardless of the available resources. The FMC believes the denomination should serve the local church, not the other way around. It is not our aim to become a top-heavy, multi-layered, boards and agency-driven denomination, but one that is committed to the local church as the primary means through which our mission is accomplished.

Who We Are

- *A people guided by passion, clearly expressed in our mission, vision, core values, and strategic initiatives.* Please refer to pages 4-7 of the attached *Earnest Christians for the 21st Century*. These documents help keep our churches united and focused on the essentials of the FM culture. They also reflect the distinct heartbeat of the FMC within the larger framework of the universal church.
- *A people devoted to the authority of God’s Word.* Because we believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God, it holds authority over us in all matters. On a practical level, this means that we must orient our lives and churches to God’s Word, not the other way around. If a doctrine is clear in scripture, we do not debate its legitimacy, but prayerfully consider how we must respond in faithful obedience.
- *A holy people with a progressive mission.* When you think of the FMC, you would be forgiven for thinking of a people deeply committed to scriptural holiness, but perhaps in ways that seem legalistic and result in a “bunker mentality” that insulates the church from the world. But you might not know that in 1995, our leadership had the courage to

- call FM's to a renewed passion for our mission in the world and for personal holiness that grows out of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. On a practical level, our membership covenant changed from one heavily focused on specific behaviors as conditions for membership to one focused on membership as a means to transformational discipleship. The result has increasingly been a people no less devoted to scriptural holiness, but equally devoted to progressive strategies for taking the gospel to a lost and broken world. Although you will find us deeply committed to holy living we trust you won't find our commitment legalistic but flowing out of relationship.
- *A leadership friendly environment.* In addition to calling the church to a renewed sense of mission and a more biblical view of discipleship, our leaders also challenged the denomination to "become a movement again" by removing unnecessary impediments, identifying desired outcomes and strategic priorities, and clearing the way for Spirit-led and missiologically appropriate ministries, systems, and structures. To put it simply, our leadership has said to every FM church, "Placing **mission** ahead of method, our pastors and churches are **free** to strategize and minister in ways which fulfill our **expected outcomes.**" Please see the graphic on page 6 of the attached document.
 - *A people with a heart for the Kingdom.* While we greatly value our denominational connection, Free Methodists recognize that our ultimate loyalty and devotion is to the Kingdom of God. This conviction permeates everything we do as Free Methodists and opens the door for opportunities to partner with and learn from denominations and ministries outside the FMC.
 - *A people with outstanding senior leadership.* The FM Board of Bishops is one of the strengths of the denomination. It is easy for FM pastors and churches to follow the lead of our bishops because they are deeply devoted to Christ and His Word, consistently model servant-leadership, and embody the mission, core values and strategic initiatives of the FMC.

Could the FMC Be a Fit for You?

The FMC is always open to pastors and churches who are interested in affiliation. If this document (along with the attached *Earnest Christians in the 21st Century*) resonates with you or your church, we would love to take the conversation to the next level. At the same, we understand that current, practical realities will make affiliation more feasible for some than others.

Church Planters - The FMC has made church planting a major priority and may provide outstanding opportunities for gifted, entrepreneurial leaders who have a high tolerance for risk and value connection over independence.

Pastors - Pastors who are looking for appointment to an established church may find fewer opportunities. The willingness to make a geographic move would obviously increase the possibilities.

Churches - The FMC is very open to affiliation of established churches. The best-case scenario is with an existing church, with a pastor in place, that decides to enter another denominational connection. In the case of a church that is looking for connection and hoping to find a suitable pastor through the FMC, the affiliation process may require more time.

Affiliation with the Free Methodist Church - USA

Welcome



Thank you for your interest in affiliation with the Free Methodist Church - USA.

This information is intended for interested congregations or groups to prayerfully consider the steps required for affiliation.

The Free Methodist Church is open to pastors and churches who are interested in affiliation. Like all covenant relationships, they should not be entered into lightly. In the pages that follow, you will find information about our Affiliation Process: a four-phase journey to a solid and healthy transition blessed by God and affirmed through steps of the process.

For each pastor, church planter, or congregation desiring to affiliate, variations in each affiliate's realities will shape each scenario. It is our desire to help you initially identify the standard waypoints that guide the Affiliation journey.

Our view of church growth is to see lives and communities transformed, and to seek God's coming Kingdom. Though we welcome affiliates, our focus is as it should be – rooted in evangelism and discipleship. We seek to see Christians disciplined to become holy servants of God.

Is affiliation with the Free Methodist Church a good fit for your congregation or group? We invite you to begin and engage the entire process prayerfully, inviting the Holy Spirit to speak, lead, and guide you.

We look forward to joining you in prayer and investigating affiliation with you.

Sincerely,

Linda Adams, Keith Cowart, Matt Whitehead

The Board of Bishops of the Free Methodist Church - USA



Our Mission:

Love God - Love People - Make Disciples

Drawn from Jesus' Great Commandment and Great Commission, we seek to fulfill the commands of Christ through earnest and sincere love for God, holy love freely given to all people, and discipling the nations for His glory.

Our Vision:

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

Perspective:

How the Church Grows

We know that the church grows by conversion, biology, and transfer. Every healthy church experiences some of each. Transfer is generally not sought as the primary form of growth as it is a shifting of the body of Christ rather than expansion of it. Nevertheless, embracing others is something we are willing and prepared to investigate.

More and more congregations and entire groups find themselves with a desire to affiliate with the Free Methodist Church. The reasons are many. They include:

- Independent group(s) or church(es) seeking covering and accountability.
- Small group(s) or church(es) seeking to be part of something larger and/or global.
- Dissatisfaction (theological or praxis incongruence) with their own governing body/denomination.
- Rapidly expanding group(s) or church(es) often in the developing world with limited infrastructure or leadership to maintain healthy growth.
- Group(s) or church(es) seeking affiliation for the sake of joining ministries (church planting, human trafficking ministry, missions programs, etc.).
- Attractiveness of Wesleyan theology and practice.
- Need (often financial).
- Validation and/or protection.

Growing world Christianity, increasing denominational theological and praxis divides, and a decades-long emergence of unaffiliated, independent churches have caused many groups and churches to seek affiliation with likeminded movements with whom they share compatible commitments and cultural DNA. Yet some want to affiliate for less noble purposes — prestige, material growth, leaders seeking support and protection from membership or personal failure, etc.

Regarding affiliation, we seek to know and understand the reasons. In so doing we want first to ensure that transfer is essential and to confirm that through a witness of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Secondly, we want to learn of the health and life of the group or congregation, and finally, to sense an excellent fit for ministry and accomplishing the mission of Jesus in our world today.

Posture:

Who We Are – The Free Methodist Church

A People Guided by Passion

This passion is clearly expressed in our mission, vision, core values, and strategic initiatives as expressed in the booklet “Whole on Mission.” These documents help keep our church united and focused on the essentials of the FMC within the framework of the universal church.

A People Devoted to the Authority of God’s Word

Because we believe the Bible is the trustworthy record of God’s revelation, and completely truthful in all it affirms, it holds authority over us in all matters. On a practical level, this means that we must orient our lives and the life of the church around God’s Word — not the other way around. If a doctrine is clear in Scripture, we do not debate its legitimacy, but prayerfully consider how we must respond in faithful obedience.

A Holy People with a Transformational Mission

The Free Methodist Church is comprised of people deeply committed to scriptural holiness. However, you may be surprised to know that we do not align with a legalistic, “bunker mentality” that insulates the church from the world. In 1995, our leadership courageously called our people to a renewed passion for our mission in the world *and* for personal holiness that grows out of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Our membership covenant reflects this passion by calling our people to commit to a life of transformational discipleship. The people of the Free Methodist Church are therefore deeply committed both to scripturally holy lives and equally devoted to progressive strategies for taking that gospel to a lost and broken world.

A Leadership-Friendly Environment

In addition to calling the church to a renewed sense of mission and a more biblical view of discipleship, we are committed to removing unnecessary impediments, identifying desired outcomes and strategic priorities, and clearing the way for Spirit-led and missiological ministries, systems, and structures. To put it simply, we say this: *“Placing **mission** ahead of method, our pastors and churches are **free** to strategize and minister in ways which fulfill our **expected outcomes.**”*

A People with A Heart for the Kingdom

While we greatly value our denominational connection, Free Methodists recognize that our ultimate loyalty and devotion is to the Kingdom of God. This conviction permeates everything we do as Free Methodists and opens the door for opportunities to partner with and learn from denominations and ministries outside the FMC.

A Small Denomination Compared to Many

The Free Methodist Church – USA is smaller in size than many other denominations – particularly in the Southeast and Midwest. We have 856 worshipping congregations in the United States organized into 25 Annual Conferences. There are some notable advantages with a smaller denomination, including greater flexibility, a more personal connection with leadership, more openness to partnerships outside the FMC, and the ability to more readily adjust course when the Spirit leads.

Diverse Congregational Ministries, Sizes, and Experiences

The richness of our congregations is found in their diversity of location, ministry context, size, and experiences in worship. The average FM church in the U.S. has a worship attendance of 116 with both significantly larger and smaller congregations. Free Methodists minister to specific audiences such as one congregation that targets inner-city poverty and substance abuse, another to suburban families, others to rural farmers, and yet others to urban professionals and everywhere in between. That is not to say we do not have our challenges, but the plus side of them is that our leadership is confronting those issues and is highly motivated to cultivate church health in every context.

A Denomination That Appoints our Clergy

Pastors of Free Methodist churches who are ordained are called elders, and our denomination appoints its pastors. However, our system is collaborative with a preference for longer appointments. Generally, moves are only initiated with the agreement of the pastor, church, or both. Our leadership structure is a modified episcopal system with bishops as our lead elders, then superintendents who oversee elders appointed to local churches. It is important to know that the FMC does not guarantee appointments, nor does it have minimum salaries guarantees. We would not make these kinds of clergy-guarantees even if we had the resources to do so. We are not convinced such guarantees lead to more fruitful ministries. Our most recent *Book of Discipline*, our denomination's website, and superintendents can provide more information about leadership in Free Methodist churches.

A Denomination with Lean Organizational Structures

The FMC is a very lean organization. We only have three U.S. bishops, 24 superintendents, and very few boards and agencies. Without question, a lack of abundant resources is a factor contributing to this reality. However, the bent of the FMC is toward a relatively lean organization, regardless of the available resources. The FMC believes the denomination should serve the local church, not the other way around. It is not our aim to become a top-heavy, multilayered, boards/agency-driven denomination, but one that is committed to the local church as the primary means through which our mission is accomplished.

Polity:

The 2019 Book of Discipline and Affiliation

The *Book of Discipline* (BOD) is authoritative in the FMC. The BOD is “a contemporary expression of how this part of the Body of Christ both inspires and organizes itself for effective ministry under the direction of the Holy Spirit, as together with other Christian traditions we live and serve our Lord in the neighborhoods of our world.” (*Book of Discipline* Foreword)

The FMC *Book of Discipline* outlines the affiliation process as a means for independent congregations or congregations from existing denominations to become part of the FMC.

Affiliate Congregations

¶6830

- A. Congregations established outside of Free Methodist sponsorship and wishing to become part of the denomination may enter as Affiliate Congregations.
- B. Authority to Recognize. A conference superintendent, with the concurrence of the conference Administrative Committee, may receive a congregation in an affiliate relationship when:
 - 1. the members of the congregation have received adequate orientation to the doctrine, organization, and mission of the Free Methodist Church;
 - 2. a document of affiliation has been signed by the governing board of the congregation, the superintendent, and representatives of the conference, affirming the Articles of Religion and the mission statement of the Free Methodist Church and describing mutual responsibilities; and
 - 3. the group is incorporated or organized under state law and it is duly authorized to transact business in the state where it is located;
 - 4. the members have given public joint assent to the document of affiliation and questions for church membership. The requirement to incorporate or organize under state law is applicable to churches in the United States. For new churches of mission origin, we seek to relate to governmental authorities in ways consistent with the church’s ultimate allegiance to the mission of Jesus Christ and its respect for governmental authorities.
- C. Accountability and Responsibility. The pastor and board of the affiliate church shall meet periodically (at least twice a year) with the conference superintendent or designated liaison to review and strengthen the connectional relationship and shall participate in conference fellowship, mentoring, and reporting procedures. The pastor and board shall consult with the Ministerial

Appointments Committee of the conference regarding any proposed changes in pastoral leadership during affiliate status.

- D. Membership. An affiliate congregation may receive members in all relationships and report them in the same manner as societies.
- E. Financial Matters.
 - 1. An affiliate congregation is encouraged to contribute generously to conference and denominational ministries as the first step towards full participation in these responsibilities.
 - 2. Staff members are eligible but not required to participate in the denominational pension program during affiliate status if an alternate retirement plan is already in effect.
 - 3. Those churches who hold property at the time they join the Free Methodist Church may be given the option by the Board of Bishops, with legal counsel, whether or not to adopt the trust clause for their existing property. Denominational assistance for capital improvement shall be in the form of loans repayable if the church chooses not to become a Free Methodist society.
- F. Local Organization. The governing board of an affiliate congregation shall be guided by the Book of Discipline and the mission of the Free Methodist Church in its decisions and the development of new ministries but may retain its existing bylaws until recognition as a society occurs.
- G. Duration. The normal duration of this relationship shall not exceed three years from the adoption of the document of affiliation. At the end of this period the congregation would become a society, terminate the affiliate relationship or request the conference to grant an extension of time for clarification and development of denominational relationships.
- H. Conference Relationship. An affiliated congregation shall be represented in the annual conference by an honorary delegate who shall have a voice but no vote.

Applying this polity, the following pages outline key points during the affiliation process.

Affiliation: *An Overview*

PHASE ONE: Exploratory Phase

The first step for those seeking affiliation with the Free Methodist Church is that of exploration. This includes:

- Communication: Establish a connection with the World Ministries Center of the Free Methodist Church and the Board of Bishops Office.
- Investigation: Look into available information about the Free Methodist Church at our website – <https://fmcusa.org>
- Introduction: A meeting of Free Methodist leaders and leaders from the affiliating congregation or group will take place. At this meeting the discussion will include specific topics such as:
 - Doctrine of the FMC
 - Organizational Structure of the FMC (*Book of Discipline*)
 - The Mission, Vision, and Strategies of the Free Methodist Church
 - Annual Conferences of the FMC and Meeting with the Overseeing Superintendent(s)
 - The FMC Ordination and Appointment Processes
 - Pastoral Pension Program
 - Question and Answer Time

PHASE TWO: Decision Phase

In the decision phase, the congregation or group desiring to affiliate with the Free Methodist Church processes all the information gathered during the exploratory phase to reach a point of decision to affiliate or not to affiliate. Churches will vary in their procedures for arriving at the decision. FMC leaders may be called upon to answer questions or provide input during this phase.

During the Decision Phase, here are other ongoing objectives:

- Continue in fervent prayer, listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all matters.
- Allow time for relationship development.
- Both the FMC and the affiliating congregation or group attend one another's meetings.
- Allow time for ongoing, full disclosure from both parties.
- Seek to understand motives and compatibility fully and completely.
- Allow time for local church leadership to inform congregational leadership and denominational leadership fully and to be informed fully as to the realities of changing affiliation.

- Draft the transitional affiliation document(s) and allow thorough time for review.

Once a vote of the affiliating congregation or group has reached adequate consensus, mutual agreements have been reached, and all hearts are clear through prayer, the Affiliation Phase begins.

PHASE THREE: Affiliation Phase

The affiliation relationship officially begins when church leaders and the pastor join FMC Conference leaders and representatives to sign the **Affiliate Covenant (MOU)**. This is a public declaration that the church and the FMC are affiliated. The signing of the covenant agreement should be viewed much like an engagement ring. It declares intention while allowing both parties time to continue getting to know the other prior to making a lifelong commitment.

During the affiliation process, the following may take place:

- The pastor(s) can explore or potentially complete the ordination process with the FMC.
- Eligible pastor(s) may enroll in the FMC pension plan.
- Conference and church leaders will continue to meet every six months to review progress, discuss opportunities, and address concerns.
- The pastor and church leaders should attend FMC Annual Conference events such as clergy gatherings, training opportunities, and the Annual Conference gathering.
- The church will contribute financially to the support of the Annual Conference and denominational ministries as agreed upon in the MOU.

While there is no set time period for an affiliation, normally a decision is reached within three years of signing the Affiliate Covenant. When the decision for full membership has been reached by mutual decision of the FMC and the church or group, Phase Four completes the process.

PHASE FOUR: Full Membership

The Affiliation Process concludes when the church leaders and leaders of the FMC express mutual desire to welcome the church as a full member of the Free Methodist Church. The congregation would then be presented at the following Annual Conference gathering to be welcomed as a Free Methodist Society.

Prior to Changing Affiliation:

A Suggested Path

Whether your church is unaffiliated (independent) or affiliated with a larger group or denomination, changing affiliation, or affiliating for the first time, is a decision that requires thoughtfulness, prayer, and strategic communication.

The following is a suggested path leading your church toward a decision to change your affiliation. While it is not intended to be an exhaustive list, we see these as significant markers along the path to a decision as important as affiliation.

1. Prayerfully discern and prioritize all reasons for changing affiliation. Engage with all leaders and key influencers in your congregation to focus in on the most crucial reasons. Evaluate these reasons and ask essential questions based on your situation. If you will be leaving one affiliation for another, then ask questions like, "Is this worth breaking fellowship with our current affiliation and changing?" "Can we do this in a way where we will 'leave well'?" "How will our congregation respond to the change?"
2. Create a research team to gather and consider all legal requirements and considerations, denominational differences and requirements, pastoral appointment, employment and benefits. Consider at least two possible new denominations or organizations with which to affiliate.
3. Notify the leaders in your current denomination or group and engage conversations about your desire to affiliate with a different denomination. Listen carefully to all points offered from your leaders and ask to be heard on all viewpoints motivating your decision to change affiliation.
4. Invite representatives from those denominations or organizations with which you are considering affiliation to address the leadership team and governing church board, allowing for questions and answers.
5. Engage in fasting and prayer. Seek the Lord's will regarding your calling and mission as a church to your community and ask for the Lord's leading in regard to how any change in affiliation will help or hinder that mission.
6. Inform the congregation in a way that shares the process up to that point, engages conversation allowing for questions and answers, and prayerfully considers any resistance from the congregation. Present all legal, property, and pastoral implications that will take place should there be a change of affiliation.
7. If, after navigating through this process, reaffiliation is desired, then set a time for a congregational vote. In the time leading up to the vote, have copies of a complete plan for reaffiliation prepared for view by the congregation that addresses all legal, property, financial, and pastoral implications and changes.



For More Information about the Free Methodist Church

Our World Ministries Center

770 North High School Road, Indianapolis, IN 46214
317-244-3660 or 800-342-5531

Our Website

<https://fmcusa.org>

World Ministries Center Contact Directory: <https://fmcusa.org/about/contact-us>

Our Leaders: Bishops and Superintendents

<https://fmcusa.org/about/fmc-leaders>

Free Methodist Global Ministries

<https://fmcusa.org/go-global/fmg>

- Free Methodist World Missions
- SEED (Sustainable Empowerment through Economic Development)
- ICCM (International Child Care Ministries)
- Set Free Movement

Free Methodist Communications

- Light + Life Magazine: <https://lightandlifemagazine.com/>
- Light + Life Online Bookstore: <https://freemethodistbooks.com/>
- Amazon Bookstore for Light + Life: <https://www.amazon.com/lightandlife>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/fmcusa/>
 - Light + Life Conversations:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/474947123124807/>

Free Methodist Foundation

<https://fmfoundation.org/>

Free Methodist 2015 Book of Discipline

Read online at: <https://fmcusa.org/resources/2015bodforeward>

Departments

- Ministerial Development and Credentialing: <https://leadership.fmcusa.org/>
- Association of Free Methodist Educational Institutions (AFMEI):
<https://fmcusa.org/ministries/educational-institutions>
- Marston Memorial Historical Center: <https://fmcusa.org/ministries/marston-memorial-historical-center>

The Free Methodist Way

Life-Giving Holiness

Love-Driven Justice

Christ-Compelled Multiplication

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

God-Given Revelation

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

Life-Giving Holiness

GOD'S CALL TO HOLINESS was never meant to be a burden, but a gift that liberates us for life that is truly life by delivering us from the destructive power of sin.

All who are born again are made right with God by the finished work of Jesus Christ and called to experience the fullness of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Forgiven and filled, we approach life with confidence that we are acceptable to God even as He continues to transform our character and behavior to become more and more like Jesus. Life-giving holiness, then, is the fruit of full surrender to the loving reign of God over every aspect of our lives, establishing within us love that is truly love.

Leaving behind the legalism that once hindered our movement, *The Free Methodist Way* invites every believer to embrace the transforming work of the Holy Spirit that empowers us to love and serve God and others in joyful obedience.

Love-Driven Justice

LOVE IS THE WAY WE DEMONSTRATE GOD'S HEART FOR JUSTICE by valuing the image of God in all men, women, and children, acting with compassion toward the oppressed, resisting oppression, and stewarding Creation.

We devote ourselves to our founders' deep convictions around matters of injustice as they took their stand against the evils of slavery, the oppression of the poor, the marginalization of women, and the abuse of power in the church. Our heart for justice continues and expands today, fueled by God's holy love for the unborn, the vulnerable, oppressed, marginalized, and people of all races and ethnicities.

The Free Methodist Way is not only to realize a better society, but that all may be reconciled to God and one another in ways that reflect God's just character.

Christ-Compelled Multiplication

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST — the message He proclaimed, the life He lived, and the ministry He modeled — set into motion a redemptive movement destined to fill the whole earth.

Jesus' approach to discipleship was primarily a relational one in which He poured His life into a few with the full expectation that they would follow His example. His aim was not merely the transmission of information, but the transformation of lives by empowering those who followed Him to do what He had been doing. His mission is now our mission. We believe this redemptive movement of multiplication applies to every believer and should permeate our Free Methodist culture at every level: the found reaching the lost, disciples making disciples, leaders developing leaders, churches planting churches, and movements birthing movements.

The Free Methodist Way is to see God's kingdom expand exponentially as ordinary people are equipped by God's power to do extraordinary things.

Cross-Cultural Collaboration

FROM THE BEGINNING, GOD’S INTENT WAS TO HAVE A PEOPLE FROM EVERY NATION, culture and ethnicity, united in Christ and commissioned to carry out His work in the world.

Today we celebrate the beauty of a multicultural and multiethnic church both in the U.S. and in over 100 countries around the world. In the U.S., we cling to the promise that we have been made one in Christ even as we dedicate ourselves to becoming a more diverse church that looks like the kingdom of God. Globally, we continue to send missionaries to other nations even as we rejoice that the nations are increasingly coming to us. Freely sharing our own gifts and resources, we are also challenged and inspired by the faithfulness, perseverance, ceaseless prayer, theological insights, and spiritual wisdom of our international brothers and sisters. Without question, we are better together.

The Free Methodist Way aspires to move beyond colonialism and ethnocentrism in favor of a collaborative partnership in God’s global work in anticipation of the day when a great multitude from every tongue, tribe, people and language makes up the eternal throng before the throne of God (Revelation 7:9).

God-Given Revelation

WE HOLD UNWAVERINGLY to our conviction that the Bible is the inspired Word of God and our final authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Drawing on our Wesleyan heritage of engaging with Scripture through the lenses of tradition, reason, and experience, we keep Scripture primary. While the church will always be tasked with authentically communicating and applying biblical truths with sensitivity to cultural dynamics, we do not subjugate the Bible’s timeless truths to cultural norms or social trends.

The Free Methodist Way is to fully align our lives and our movement on the unshakeable foundation of God’s Word.

Ethical Covenant for Free Methodist Pastors and Ministry Leaders

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul guides Timothy (1 Timothy 4:16) toward conduct as a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ with, “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” Reminding the apostolic protégé of both personal and public ethics, Paul instructs in the confrontation of false teachers, ministry diligence and public proclamation of Scripture.

As Free Methodist pastors and leaders, we covenant to be guided by these ethical and professional standards and recognize that living out these precepts, which flow from best practice in the Free Methodist Way, will increasingly bear spiritual fruit and organizational unity, whereas persistent misalignment may disqualify us from leadership and ordained ministry.

LIFE-GIVING HOLINESS

Full Surrender. I fully surrender to the loving reign of God over every aspect of my life, seeking the Spirit’s transformational power for myself, my family, relationships, church, peers, community and the world.

Perfect Love. With God’s help I will abstain from sinful and addictive behaviors that may harm my body, mind, spirit, finances and relationships, desiring to live out of Spirit-perfected love, that I may serve as a model of Christ to those I lead.

Holy Community. I will seek the help of my faith community when I struggle, especially in relationships in which I have been offended or have offended others, endeavoring to live in authentic reconciling love, trusting in their guidance and support even as I face trials and temptations with those sins which so easily entangle. I promise to keep sacred all which is shared in confidence, except in rare cases when sharing is discerned to be necessary to protect the innocent or vulnerable, for legal action/proceedings, or mandatory reporting is required by law.

LOVE-DRIVEN JUSTICE

Love Everyone. I value the image of God in all human beings.

Relational Justice. I refuse to act with bigotry, prejudice, misogyny or otherwise demean any people, and shall to the best of my ability foster an environment of mutual respect in organizations I lead and influence.

Kingdom Justice. I aim to promote a better society and healthier natural world for all people everywhere, opposing systemic, environmental and interpersonal injustice through prayer, gospel proclamation, public advocacy and community compassion, in a spirit of reconciling love, rejecting both vengeance and retaliation.

CHRIST-COMPELLED MULTIPLICATION

Proclaim Salvation. I will proclaim full salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, inviting all who respond to experience baptism and the Spirit-fueled life of perfect love in Christian community, and consider with deep care how all of my online and in-person communication may promote rather than hinder the witness of Christ.

Multiply Disciples. I embrace Jesus' call to make disciples who make disciples, being careful to invite into leadership not those with whom I have the closest affection or personal relationship but those evidencing the gifting and call of God.

Grow Movements. I shall support and deploy leaders and groups to multiply ministries and churches throughout my community and the world, rejecting congregational maintenance in favor of participating in Spirit-led movement.

CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATION

Embrace Diversity. I seek to understand perspectives other than my own, to build relationships with and learn from people different from me and commit to developing and raising up disciples and leaders reflecting a broad range of those who comprise the community I serve.

Mission First. I refuse to place my personal comfort, remuneration or political convictions ahead of the mission of Jesus, and commit to collaborate with people, churches and organizations I serve, respecting the work of fellow Christian leaders regardless of their denominational, cultural or ethnic affiliation, with special care to foster mutual respect publicly and via social media.

Kingdom Collaboration. I embrace the global movement of Christ, encouraging the congregations I lead to pray, give and go globally, being mindful that my communication from the pulpit and online may have profound impact upon my sisters and brothers in nations and under political systems that differ from my own, always giving due credit to those who have influenced me.

GOD-GIVEN REVELATION

Scriptural Authority. I hold the Bible as the inspired Word of God and my final authority in matters of faith and practice and shall regularly, prayerfully search the Scriptures alone and with others in order to better align my thoughts, beliefs, and action with divine instruction.

Biblical Community. I endeavor to deepen my biblically sound theology through exploring Scripture in the context of the global community, seeking the wisdom of interpreters ancient and modern from each continent and various social locations.

Spirit-Fueled. I seek wholeheartedly a Spirit-fueled movement through embracing the Scriptural truth that God the Father's gift of biblical revelation is understood only through Holy Spirit endowed illumination empowering my life toward a real and present experience of the resurrected Jesus Christ.

EMBRACE THE WAY

Healthy Change. I shall engage the processes available for healthy theological and practical dialogue and introduce Spirit-led, biblically consistent change in my local church, conference and denomination with respect. I recognize the importance of keeping all conversation in the light by talking directly to those involved and practicing biblical conflict resolution.

Digital World. I embrace opportunities to promote the cause of Christ and the Free Methodist Church through various virtual and social media avenues, resisting the dark lures inherent in this media, acknowledging that my personal and professional behavior and communication online is guided by this ethical statement.

Living Harmony. I understand that I represent the Free Methodist Church, our diverse people and clear values, and will refrain from publicly communicating anything contrary to our doctrine, vision, values and practices and that should I be unable to do so as a matter of preference or conscience, I will voluntarily withdraw from the conference and/or church in a spirit of professional respect and Christian love.

ADDRESSING MISALIGNMENT

I understand that when concerns arise that Free Methodist pastors or ministry leaders may have violated through conduct, speech or use of social media, the clear spirit of this covenant, the annual conference will address the concerns in the following way:

The bishop, superintendent, district leader, or other appropriate overseer will have a conversation with the person(s) involved and seek resolution, calling them to wisely consider the spirit of this ethical covenant. If the person(s) refuses, they will be referred to the conference Ministerial Education and Guidance Board for further review and appropriate action as with other matters of character as outlined in Chapter 7 of the Book of Discipline.

Earnest Christians On a 21st Century MISSION



Contents

| | |
|--|-------|
| Why Free | 3 |
| Why Methodist | 3 |
| Vision | 4 |
| Core Values | 5 |
| Non-negotiables Leadership Initiatives | 6 |
| Expected Outcomes | 8-9 |
| Free Methodist Entities and Partners | 10-11 |

Why Free?

Historically, the Free Methodist Church was organized at Pekin, New York, August 23, 1860. The leader and first bishop of the new church was Benjamin Titus (B.T.) Roberts. He was a champion for equal rights (especially for women), writer, publisher, Christian educator, and holiness preacher. The influence of his character and ministry continue today.

In 1860, the “free” in Free Methodist emphasized certain basic freedoms found in the Scriptures:

- Human freedom, upholding the right of every person to be free, denying the right of anyone to hold slaves;
- Freedom and simplicity in worship;
- Free seats in church, so the poor will not be kept out or discriminated against;
- Freedom and openness in relationships and loyalties so the truth may always be spoken freely [avoiding vows of secrecy];
- Freedom of lay persons to be fully involved at all levels of decision making;
- Freedom from materialism in order to help the poor.

The biblical principles on which these freedoms are based are as important today as ever.

Why Methodist?

Motivated by love for God and people, we embrace the practices and disciplines of life that allow God’s grace to make us like Jesus.

We embrace spiritual disciplines that “train” us to love God and others. We walk together with others who encourage us and hold us accountable. We are intentional in “practicing” the ways of Jesus in serving, healing, and helping all who are in need. And we join with others to influence the world around us with God’s grace and power.

Vision

The Free Methodist Church has a unique history with a unique vision of how best to love God and make disciples. Namely, we focus on full salvation or holiness — living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit and loving practically, tangibly and profoundly.

In view of our mission, we embrace this full salvation and activating love, resulting in our vision, which is:

Simply put: to bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people who multiply disciples, leaders, groups and churches.

We lead people into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ who makes them whole, and forms them into a Kingdom of God movement committed to wholeness of individuals and society.

For this reason we labor to:

- Address poverty
- Eliminate slavery
- Raise the dignity of all people
- Promote equality of women in all places
- Facilitate freedom in Christ for all persons.

Our Core Values

Grace expressed through love

- God's grace and kindness reaches toward every person, and so do we.
- God's grace makes us gracious and loving toward others, as Jesus was.
- God's grace saves us through faith that works through love.

Holiness expressed through transformation

- God calls us to be holy, as God is.
- God's holy people live set-apart for God's plans and purposes.
- God's people live like Jesus when the Spirit of Jesus renews them in the image of God's own likeness.

Effectiveness through equipped and engaged disciples

- Jesus calls disciples to follow him.
- Jesus' disciples live in purposeful relationship with Jesus as their Lord.
- Jesus' disciples enter into what Jesus is doing, and bear much fruit.

1. This chart represents the denomination’s commitment to placing mission ahead of method
2. Leaders are responsible for achieving the expected outcomes.
3. These are the parameters and outcomes expected in every Free Methodist Church.

| Non-negotiables | Nine Strategic Priorities | Expected Outcomes |
|--|---|--|
| <p>We may NOT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● live in violation of the Scriptures● live in violation of the Articles of Religion, the Constitution, the Membership Covenant, or the Mission of the Free Methodist Church <p>Our pastors may NOT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● live in violation of ordination vows● lead the church in ways which detract from our mission | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Embrace All2 Disciple Deeply3 Cultivate Health4 Develop Leaders5 Multiply Ministries6 Go Global7 Honor Fruitfulness8 Engage Urban9 Partner Strong | <p>See elaboration on pages 8-9.</p> <p>Every Free Methodist Congregation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Prayer-Saturated● Worshipping● Discipling● Evangelizing● Reproducing● Culture-Engaging● World-Mission-Engaging● Purpose-Driven |

Leadership Initiatives

Placing **mission** ahead of method, our pastors and churches are **free** to strategize and minister in ways which fulfill our **Expected Outcomes**.

Nine Strategic Priorities

- 1 Embrace All:** We will improve our reach to the poor and disenfranchised and create a normalcy for multicultural ministry by rewarding and celebrating churches that minister to the hurting, broken and people unlike themselves.
- 2 Disciple Deeply:** We will place the same priority on discipling and serving as we do on our services of worship. By valuing and measuring holiness, service and obedience, we will increase the fruitfulness of the good news in our communities.
- 3 Cultivate Health:** We will work to improve the health of every local church by creating measurable expectations and regular assessments. We will create and utilize training materials that focus on church health.
- 4 Develop Leaders:** We will raise up godly and competent leaders who support our vision and passionately make disciples. We will identify these leaders within our churches and provide opportunities for recruitment, internship and service.
- 5 Multiply Ministries:** We will increase multiplication of disciples, leaders, groups, churches and ministries by highlighting exemplary leaders and by changing the way our churches view and report growth.
- 6 Go Global:** We will increase the global and local influence of our churches by encouraging engagement with worldwide ministries and helping churches to better impact their communities.
- 7 Honor Fruitfulness:** We will increase the number of growing and fruitful Free Methodist churches by encouraging and aiding successful leaders and their ministries. We will tell the story of these ministries to the rest of the denomination.
- 8 Engage Urban:** We will increase Free Methodist church planting and ministry in U.S. urban centers, developing lasting ministries and local leaders that multiply themselves throughout our cities.
- 9 Partner Strong:** We will encourage partnerships with like-minded ministries. These mutually beneficial relationships give us a unified voice on social and spiritual issues, as well as more focused skills to fulfill our mission and vision.

Our Expected Outcomes

Healthy Biblical Communities of Holy People will be:

1

Prayer-Saturated Congregations

- speaking to God on behalf of a lost world
- praying first, acting second
- interceding for individuals, rulers and nations to yield to the ultimate victory of Christ
- listening to the Holy Spirit and obeying Him

2

Worshipping Congregations

- celebrating the saving grace of God in singing
- encountering God in prayers
- reading and obeying the Word
- preaching the Word
- observing the sacraments

3

Discipling Congregations

- connecting all who wish to know Christ to groups or cells
- nurturing believers toward Christ-like, obedient love
- enfolding believers, welcoming them into membership
- bringing disciples into a life pattern of holy living through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit
- taking and sending disciples into the world to serve

4

Evangelizing Congregations

- befriending spiritually lost people
- presenting and explaining the gospel in culturally relevant ways
- inviting spiritually lost people to trust Christ as Savior

Reproducing Congregations

5

- developing the next generation of pastoral and lay leaders
- establishing cells as core group for new church plants
- planting new congregations

Culture-Engaging Congregations

6

- seeking justice for all
- showing mercy to the poor
- empowering the disenfranchised

World-Mission Congregations

7

- engaging in Free Methodist (FM) World Missions
- giving vital resources
- sending cross-cultural evangelists
- providing diverse support teams

Purpose-Driven Congregations

8

- organizing for essentials only
- focusing on mission and vision to shape all ministry
- surrendering to Christ's mandated Great Commandment and Great Commission (see page 11)

Free Methodist Entities and Partners

Free Methodist Global Ministries

From the earliest days Free Methodists have responded to a God who loves the whole world by becoming His messengers of love to the whole world. Free Methodists go as missionaries and partner with the international church in missions. The spectacular fruitfulness of this effort has resulted in a burgeoning Free Methodist global church reaching more than 80 world areas. We celebrate the maturity of the international church which has resulted in 16 General Conferences, all sharing a common constitution, the articles of religion, and a passion to work together for the good of God's Kingdom. Every Free Methodist Church is expected to be on mission with God; to be a part of the "Missio Dei." We seek both locally and globally to penetrate the darkness with the gospel of Jesus in ways that produce much good fruit.

FM World Missions serves Free Methodists as we make disciples of Jesus Christ among the peoples of the world.

The worldwide Free Methodist family includes more than 1 million members. Only 7 percent of Free Methodists are in the United States.

International Child Care Ministries (ICCM)

ICCM advocates for the spiritual, educational, physical and social development of children by partnering with the global Free Methodist Church through sponsorships, scholarships and creative initiatives. In this way, we serve more than 20,000 children in 31 countries and provide for such needs as education, meals, clothing and basic medical care. Children receive an opportunity for a better life, and the church is built up as well.

Auxiliary and Affiliated Organizations

A number of auxiliary and affiliated organizations also serve to advance the mission and vision of the Free Methodist Church – USA. A current listing may be found at fmcusa.org/ministries.

Finally, a growing number of collaborative and partner ministries help facilitate the global reach of the Free Methodist Church – USA. They include educational institutions, social service agencies, justice ministries, leadership networks and holistic service organizations through which Free Methodists embrace the world. For more information, visit fmcusa.org/partners.

Christ’s Mandated Great Commandment and Great Commission

“God authorized and commanded me to commission you: Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age” [Matthew 28:18-20].

Board of Bishops USA



Bishop David Kendall



Bishop Matt Thomas



Bishop David Roller

770 N. High School Road | Indianapolis, IN 46214
(800)342-5531 | fmc_bishops@fmcusa.org

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).



FREE METHODIST CHURCH USA

© 2014. This brochure is produced at the direction of the Board of Bishops by Free Methodist Communications, a ministry team dedicated to connecting Free Methodist churches and people with each other, with our God-given identity and unique mission, and with the needs of the world.

For more information and Free Methodist Church – USA ministry resources and to discover opportunities to interact with our church and people visit our website: fmcusa.org