

THE REFERENDUM PROCESS

Four items are being circulated to the Free Methodist Conferences around the world for a referendum vote. We will take a vote on each, on a common ballot, and report the same to the Constitutional Council.

- A. **The Historical Articles of Religion** - as proposed by the General Conference of Canada. (cf. SCOD Report, pp 5-9)
- B. **The Revised Membership Covenant** - as proposed by the North American General Conference. (cf. SCOD Report, pp 98-99)
- C. **The World Conference Constitution** - originated by the World Fellowship and approved for distribution by the General Conference of North America in 1989. (enclosed)
- D. **Amendment of paragraph A/152.1** of the *Book of Discipline* as approved by the Board of Administration after referral by the General Conference. (enclosed)

Enclosed, please find the ballot for use on these four items. Items C and D were not distributed in advance. This was an oversight. They are included here.

An announcement will be made regarding the scheduled time of this vote.

Please study C and D in preparation for this vote.

EXPLANATORY NOTES ON THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FREE METHODIST WORLD CONFERENCE

by Bishop Gerald E. Bates

This document began in the World Fellowship meeting in Seattle, Washington, in 1989 which met immediately prior to the 1989 General Conference. There was not sufficient time to put the materials into constitutional form; however, the principal content was presented to the 1989 North American General Conference where it was approved in principle. In the interim between 1989 and 1995 the World Fellowship put the material into Constitutional form which was approved by the 1995 General Conference and is now presented for ratification by the annual conferences. There are certain issues which should be mentioned:

In general the design of the World Conference is to provide a more responsive world organization which serves the realities of a denomination working in over forty countries of the world.

1. The World Conference as proposed, combines the functions of the World Fellowship and the Constitutional Council. The duties of the latter are to monitor fidelity to the Free Methodist Constitution which is uniform for every Free Methodist entity worldwide and to conduct referendums on constitutional issues.
2. Provisions are made in this constitution to expedite actions on constitutional matters. Formerly referendums were delayed when general conferences did not meet for extended periods of time.
3. Procedures for approving constitutional changes under the World Conference would require initiation by a 2/3 vote of a general conference or a 2/3 vote of the world conference. The proposed change would then be submitted to the general conferences where a 2/3 aggregate vote of all general conferences would be required for passage. The requirement of a 2/3 aggregate vote of all annual conferences is removed.
4. The World Conference is not a legislative body except in the sense that it has the right to initiate constitutional amendments which are then submitted to the referendum process as described above.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FREE METHODIST WORLD CONFERENCE

I. NAME

The name of this organization shall be the Free Methodist World Conference.

II. PURPOSE

The Free Methodist World Conference is an organization whose purpose is the co-ordination of the worldwide ministries and activities of the denomination.

In harmony with this purpose its responsibilities shall be:

1. To provide for worldwide fellowship among Free Methodist bodies;
2. To encourage the expansion of the Kingdom of God through the Free Methodist Church by evangelism in existing conferences and in new fields in harmony with Wesleyan doctrine and practices;
3. To assume defined legislative and judicial powers in matters relating to the Free Methodist Constitution as presented in the current edition of the Book of Discipline in Paragraph 251, Section 1, or its equivalent;
4. To assure the integrity of all Free Methodist institutions under the constraints of the Book of Discipline and this Constitution;
5. To advance the biblical formation, from a Wesleyan perspective, of all Free Methodist leaders.

III. AUTHORITY

A. Legislative

1. Proposed amendments to the Free Methodist Constitution initiated by a general conference and approved by a 2/3 vote of the Free Methodist World Conference, or amendments to the constitution initiated by a 2/3 vote of the Free Methodist World Conference shall be submitted as referendums to all general conferences. A 2/3 aggregate vote of all general conferences shall be required for approval. When authorized by a 2/3 vote of a general conference a board of administration may vote in its place. Votes taken by boards of administration shall be reported as the corresponding proportional number of votes by the general conference to which the board belongs.

2. When a general conference or its board of administration does not assemble, vote and report back to the executive committee of the World Conference within four years of the time the World Conference has submitted the amendment proposal, it shall surrender its right to vote on the said issue and the 2/3 aggregate vote shall be based on the general conference or boards of administration that report within the four years allowed.

B. Judicial

1. The Free Methodist World Conference shall be charged with maintaining fidelity to the provisions of the Constitution which are for all general conferences as defined in paragraph 251, Section 1, or the equivalent text in current editions of the Book of Discipline, to decide matters of comity, and interrelations of general conferences, and to supervise referendums under the conditions defined by AUTHORITY, Sections 1 and 2.
2. The World Conference has the following judicial authority over the general conferences. Its duties shall be:
 - a. To review the legislation, orders, and policies of all the general conferences to determine whether any act appears to be in conflict with the provisions of the Free Methodist constitution which are for all general conferences as defined in Paragraph 251, Section 1 or its equivalent of the current Book of Discipline. When the World Conference rules that an act is in conflict with such provisions, the implementation of said act shall automatically be suspended. Upon request by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Administration (or its equivalent) of the general conference whose action is called in question, further action in the case shall await the opportunity of said general conference at its next session to reconsider the act. If the act should be rescinded, the process shall immediately terminate. If no such request is made within one year or if it should be made and a general conference not rescind the act in question, the act and the findings thereon of the World Conference shall be submitted to all general conferences for vote. If the findings of the World Conference should be approved by a majority of the aggregate votes cast thereon in all of the general conferences, the act in questions shall thereby be annulled. Otherwise, the act shall be sustained and the suspension of the act shall terminate.

A general conference or general conferences whose case or cases come before the World Conference shall, after having presented their arguments, refrain from voting on the issue in which they have direct interest.

If the general conference whose action has been called into question should refuse to abide by the referendum, the World Conference shall be empowered to provide, at its discretion, for the reorganization of the loyal elements of the Free Methodist Church within the area of that general conference, and to declare all other ministers and members to be withdrawn from the Free Methodist Church.

- b. To decide any matter that may arise between general conferences involving boundaries, recognition of credentials, and other matters of comity. If no solution satisfactory to the involved conferences should be reached, the recommendation of the World Conference shall prevail. If within six months either conference shall appeal, the World Conference shall arrange a referendum vote to decide the issue.
 - c. To supervise the voting of the general conferences and their respective districts on all matters to be voted on by more than one general conference, including additions or amendments to the provisions of this constitution which are for all general conferences, and when the vote has been completed to declare the results.
- 3. The Executive Committee of the World Conference shall be charged with carrying out the voting of referendums and shall report the results to the World Conference.
 - 4. The World Conference shall meet at least once each four years, preferably at the time and place of meeting of a general conference. Special meetings may be called by a two-thirds majority of the Executive Committee.
 - 5. A mail vote of the Executive Committee may be authorized by the officers.

IV. STRUCTURE

A. Organization

1. Delegates shall be elected from the general conferences as follows:
 - a. From general conferences: Each general conference shall elect delegates on the basis of total full membership as follows:
 - 2 delegates - up to 5,000 total membership
 - 4 delegates - up to 5,001 to 15,000 total membership
 - 6 delegates - up to 15,001 to 25,000 total membership
 - 8 delegates - over 25,000 total membership
 - b. In election of delegates due consideration shall be given to the balance of lay and ministerial representation as well as adequate representation of women.
 - c. Delegates from general conferences shall include ex officio, within the quota, the bishops or equivalent officers from each general conference. They shall be counted as ministerial delegates.
 - d. In determining representation to the World Conference as well as financial responsibility and other statistical purposes membership shall be defined as full members.
 - e. In addition to the above quotas there shall be two voting delegates from each area fellowship. Two honorary members from each fellowship permitted. In electing the delegates from the area fellowship preference shall be given to electing from annual conferences or other Free Methodist bodies not related to a general conference within the geographical area.
 - f. Provisional general conferences may elect one ministerial and one lay delegate.
2. The officers of the World Conference shall be president, vice president, and secretary-treasurer.
 - a. The officers shall be members of the World Conference Executive Committee.
 - b. A nominating committee may be elected to submit nominations for offices to the World Conference.

- c. Officers may serve for two terms or until their successors are elected. A term is defined as the period between ordinary meetings of the World Conferences.

- 3. The Executive Committee shall meet every two years and shall be composed as follows:

President of the World Conference
Vice President of the World Conference
Secretary-Treasurer of the World Conference
Three members-at-large selected so as to allow
equitable representation worldwide.

A nominating committee may submit nominations.

- a. The President shall be the chairman.
- b. The Executive Committee shall submit a budget to the World Conference for approval.
- c. The Executive Committee is amenable for its actions to the World Conference.

- 4. The Executive Secretary. The Executive Secretary shall work under the direction of the World Conference Executive Committee and shall implement the policies and decisions of the World Conference, supervise the work of the general office, be responsible for the production of literature, the exchange of views and information as requested, carry forward such studies and surveys as may be authorized by the World Conference and helpful to member bodies, and, on authorization of the Executive Committee, visit the member areas as may be necessary in carrying out the instructions of the Executive Committee. He shall be employed by the Executive Committee and shall be amenable to the committee through its president.

- 5. The commissions of the World Conference shall be:

- a. Outreach: missions and evangelism
- b. Special Ministries: development, women's ministries
- c. Education: Christian education, higher education, ministerial training, scholarships
- d. Administration: budget and finance
- e. Doctrine

6. In each general conference or provisional conference, the board of administration shall speak officially for its conference and shall be the responsible party in all negotiations with the World Conference and the Executive Committee. The chairman of each board of administration shall be responsible for official correspondence with the World Conference. It shall be the duty of the chairman to keep the board of administration of his conference fully informed of the proceedings of the World Conference. Copies of all official correspondence shall be properly filed and available to the Bishop or highest administrative officer(s) of the conference and to the board of administration.

V. NEW MEMBERS

- A. Any body of churches not organically related to the Free Methodist Church, but wishing to become a fraternal member of the World Conference may be admitted as follows:
 1. A valid request by the governing board of the body making application;
 2. A statement of agreement of compatibility with Free Methodist doctrine and practice;
 3. Approval by majority vote of the World Conference.
- B. Such relationship shall be for a period of four years. It may be extended for additional four-year periods by vote of the World Conference.
- C. Fraternal members of the World Conference shall be processed according to their appropriate level of development (provisional annual conference, annual conference, provisional general conference) and be recommended by the World Conference for membership in a General Conference.
- D. Fraternal members may have one non-voting observer at the World Conference until such time as they are assigned to a general conference.

VI. APPROVAL AND AMENDMENT

- A. The constitution of the World Conference must be approved by an aggregate two-thirds vote of the general conferences of the Free Methodist Church.
- B. Provisions of this constitution may be amended by two-thirds vote of those present and voting at a quadrennial meeting, provided always that such action

is in harmony with the constitution as defined in paragraph 251, Section I or the corresponding paragraph of the Books of Discipline of the general conferences, and subject to approval by an aggregate two-thirds vote of the general conferences.

VII. AREA FELLOWSHIPS

- A. Area fellowships may be organized where the geographical situation, mutual interests and the need for spiritual counsel and encouragement make it advisable. The area fellowships are to act in harmony with the purposes and in work of the World Conference as set forth in this constitution except for the legislative and judicial functions defined under section 111, Authority. The area fellowships shall operate under constitutions suited to their own needs and situations.
- B. The constitutions of the area fellowships shall be approved by the World Conference.

RIGHTS OF FULL MEMBERS

Par. A/152

Revision proposed and authorized by the General Conference of North America, approved by the Board of Administration on October 25, 1995.

Whereas, the present Paragraph A/152 is inaccurate (Par. A/152.1), and

Whereas, greater clarity will make the paragraph more meaningful,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

Paragraph A/152 be amended to read:

The rights of full members are:

1. To vote and hold office.
2. To participate in due process as defined by the *Book of Discipline*.