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## 5. INITIATIVES TO DEVELOP CONNECTEDNESS

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Thus far, this report has considered *institutional* means by which we remain connected as Free Methodists - funding the denomination and the gathering of General Conference. We have underlying institutional forms and functions that serve to make us look and act connectional. Clearly, however, for connectionalism to foster the authentic type of Christ honouring community that God intends, it must exist apart from mere institutional forms. Connectionalism must involve a *personal* element - people connecting with people; local church connecting with local church - working together as one body to accomplish both the mission God has given to local church and to The Free Methodist Church in Canada.

Connectionalism on this personal level cannot be legislated. It must be desired, endorsed, and participated in by local church congregations. Our Leadership Team can facilitate opportunities for persons from local churches to gather together in a suitable environment in which connectionalism can flourish and grow. However, they cannot create the heart in people for connectedness. Rather- and this is the central point - it is up to individuals, and especially each pastor and delegate, to spread the good news of connectionalism and encourage participation and programming to continue to strengthen our connectedness as Free Methodists. The role of delegates is primary in promoting connectional initiatives and opportunities among local church people. Each of us has to take responsibility to convince local congregations that we can do some things together that we could never do on our own. Connectionalism offers opportunities for spiritual growth and church growth that are not available when we go solo.

We are therefore recommending that the Leadership Team work to develop “gathering” events - events that gather pastors, delegates and lay people with the intention of doing two important connectional functions:

1. provide opportunity to celebrate together in fellowship and worship together. There has been a sense that previous events have not had worship as a primary agenda item. When our most common link is our fellowship in and worship of Christ, we ought to find ways to connect at this central point..
2. provide a forum for dialogue in a non-legislative atmosphere. The average person in the local church needs to be educated and informed about what the CMC is doing. Then they need to have opportunity to dialogue and be heard on issues facing the church.

This seems consistent with our vision to empower local churches. The former “Caucus Days” can act as a starting point. The appointment of regional coordinators to assist in planning and resourcing can take some burden off CMC staff and provide regional emphasis input. Hopefully, these gatherings will become popular places to be where leaders, lay persons, and local churches can resource each other and develop a clear sense of community in our mission to further the cause of Christ.

The following Recommendations attempt to offer some starting points to address these needs.

### **5.1 Connectionalism Recommendation: #6**

#### **Canadian Ministries Centre Initiatives**

Whereas greater opportunities need to be made for local church leaders and lay persons to meet together with other Free Methodists to fellowship, worship, and dialogue on issues affecting the church;

Whereas economies of scale put the CMC in a position to offer leadership and organization to such events,

**WE RECOMMEND THAT** the Canadian Ministries Centre, together with regional volunteers, continue to organize “gathering events” that will bring together pastors, delegates, and lay persons for the following purposes:

- a) to provide a time for significant fellowship and celebration in worship
- b) to offer an opportunity and an environment for team building and vision sharing
- c) to give the Leadership Team greater opportunity to communicate what is happening in the ongoing ministry of the CMC and Leadership Team
- d) to provide a forum for conversation and dialogue allowing input from the grassroots in an informal, non-legislative setting

### **5.2 Connectionalism Recommendation #7**

#### **Local Church Initiatives**

Whereas we need to further promote connectionalism at the grassroots level in order to bond new converts and new members to Free Methodism beyond the local church,

Whereas we recognize the limited role that can be played by the CMC in creating connectionalism,

**THEREFORE WE RECOMMEND THAT** Strategic Planning Networks, lay delegates, and Official Boards more actively promote “grass roots connectionalism” including:

1. encouraging congregations to promote and participate in our excellent Camping Ministries;
2. encouraging local churches to creatively look for ways to promote inter-congregational fellowship, mutually beneficial special ministry events, inter-congregational sports, etc.;
3. encouraging regional churches or churches of common size or interests to jointly sponsor ministry events, possibly through SPNs (e.g. Good Friday services, sacred concerts, sports events, prayer vigils, youth ministry events, specialized ministry conferences, etc.);
4. encouraging pastors and congregations to find ways to use the gifts and expertise of Ministry Centre leaders.