

Constitution and Bylaws of the Missionary Church

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CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

The Missionary Church was organized in its present form as a result of the 1969 merger of the Missionary Church Association and the United Missionary Church. Both of these groups had their origins in revival movements that swept across North America in the late nineteenth century. Many of the earlier members were members of churches which had become caught up in a religion of form and tradition. The flames of revival sparked a renewed dynamic and vitality that was not welcomed by leaders of their former churches. And so, for their testimony, a number were excommunicated. Under God's leading, they came together through a series of mergers covering nearly one hundred years. The story of these years is recorded in *Merging Streams*.¹

The Constitution and Bylaws of the Missionary Church will be better understood by the reader who recognizes that a singular commitment of our early leaders was to the position that the Scriptures were to be the primary source of doctrine and life. In addition to this commitment to be a biblical church, we recognize the contribution of John Wesley's emphasis on "the warmed heart"; A. B. Simpson's fourfold emphasis on Jesus Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King; the Anabaptist concepts of community, brotherhood, and believer's baptism, and the evangelical emphases of the lost estate of mankind and redemption through Jesus Christ. The Missionary Church, then, is a unique blend of the thought and life of a people who have sought to build their church according to the Scriptures and who have appreciated their historical roots.

¹Lageer, Eileen, *Merging Streams*, Bethel Publishing Company, 1979.

ARTICLE I – NAME

This organization shall be known as the Missionary Church.

ARTICLE II – PURPOSE

The Missionary Church, in obedience to Jesus Christ her Lord, is committed to being holy people of God in the world and to building his Church by worldwide evangelism, discipleship and multiplication of growing churches, all to the glory of God (Matt 28:18-20; 1 Pet 2:9-10).

ARTICLE III – OBJECTIVES

In order to fulfill its purpose, the objectives of the Missionary Church are the following:

- A. to call its churches to their mission;
- B. to train and equip leaders;
- C. to plant and assist new congregations at home and abroad;
- D. to promote community among God's people; and
- E. to serve as an administrative and communicative body.

ARTICLE IV — ARTICLES OF FAITH AND PRACTICE

A. ARTICLES OF FAITH

Introduction

The Bible tells one grand, unified story — a true account of the lavish and relentless love of a holy God. It is a drama in four acts: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration. It calls us — not simply to be spectators — but to respond with living faith. God calls us to believe — placing our trust in him, personally committing ourselves to him, and accepting the truth of the gospel.

He calls us to embrace certain truths that define us as a believing community and then embody those truths in how we live. We must speak, then, of what we believe (Articles of Faith) and how we should then live (Articles of Practice). As the Missionary Church, we affirm the core truths of the gospel, and then we enact those truths as a family of churches in Christian community committed to love God fully, to love our neighbors truly, and to carry out the Great Commission for God's glory and the salvation of the world.

The Triune God

We believe in one God, eternally existing in three divine persons, equal in power and glory — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is the creator and sustainer of all things. His divine qualities — including love, holiness, justice, righteousness, faithfulness, infinite knowledge and power, self-existence, and omnipresence — all harmonize perfectly in the unity of his being.¹

¹ Gen 1:1; Exod 3:14, 34:6; Deut 6:4, 32:4; 1 Kgs 8:27; Neh 9:6; Ps 90:2, 103:8, 116:5, 147:5; Isa 6:3, 40:28, 57:15; Jer 23:23-24; Mal 3:6; Matt 28:19; John 1:1, 4:24, 10:30, 14:16; Acts 5:4-5, 17:28; 1 Cor 8:4; 2 Cor 13:14; Col 1:17; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 1:2, 12 and 11:3; 2 Pet 3:9; 1 John 4:10-16

The Father

We believe in God the Father, begotten² of none, the eternal Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Since God is the creator, all things and all people are from him and exist for him. As the author of salvation, he adopts into his family all who are born again by faith. He gloriously upholds and providentially rules over all things, to accomplish the redemption of his people and the restoration of all creation.³

The Son

We believe in Jesus Christ, the eternally begotten Son of the Father. He is the fully divine, living Word of God who also became fully human — conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. His sinless human life, humble obedience to his Father's will, sacrificial death and bodily resurrection made sufficient provision for the salvation of all people. In his ascension, he returned to his Father, where he reigns as Lord, Advocate, Great High Priest, and Coming Judge.⁴

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the triune God, proceeding from and sent by the Father and the Son. He is the personal expression of God's power — instrumental in all his works. He is the author and illuminator of sacred Scripture. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He is the agent of the new birth, the one by whom we are baptized into the Body of Christ. As the spirit of holiness, he indwells every believer and his Church, purifying and empowering his people for holy living. He guides them into truth, comforts and encourages them, and enables them to fulfill the Great Commission. He produces his fruit in the lives of believers and gives them spiritual gifts for the good of the Church.^{5 6}

The Bible

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the written Word of God, verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit and, therefore, true, reliable, and without error in all it addresses. We believe the Bible has been safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and transmitted to the present day without any doctrinal corruption. The Bible forever remains the unchanging and final authority for faith and living.⁷

Humanity

We believe that God created human beings — male and female — as co-equal bearers of the image of God. Gender is divinely designed, part of the goodness of creation. Human sexuality is a gift, intended to be expressed exclusively in a monogamous, lifelong marital union between one man and one woman. The Bible also affirms the sacredness of the single state and that some may have the gift of lifetime celibacy.

We believe in the historicity of the first man, Adam, who along with his wife, Eve, was uniquely created by a direct act of God as recorded in Genesis and not by a process of evolution. Made in his image, they are his crowning achievement. Adam and Eve were created without sin for perfect fellowship with God and were commanded to be fruitful and exercise

² The word "begotten" is the past tense of an old English word which means "to bring into being," or (in that sense) "to father" or "to sire." When we say that the Father is "begotten of none," we mean that no one brought the Father into being. When we say that Jesus is the "eternally begotten son of the Father," we mean that Jesus is the only example of a person who has always (for all eternity) been brought into being by God the eternal Father, and therefore is the only person of whom it can be said that he is truly the Son of the Father. Human fathers live in time and bring human sons into being at a point in time. The eternally existing Father brings his eternally existing Son into being. Human language is inadequate to fully describe this mysterious relationship between God the Father and God the Son.

³ Gen 1:1; Ps 90:2; John 13:3, 16:28; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 1:3-4, 4:6; 1 Pet 1:2-3; 1 John 2:23, 3:1

⁴ Isa 53:6; Matt 28:18-20; Luke 1:35; John 1:1, 14, 18; Acts 2:22, 24-32; Rom 1:3-4, 8:34; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Eph 1:19-22; Col 3:4; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8, 4:15, 7:25; 1 Pet 2:22, 24, 3:18; 1 John 2:1-2

⁵ See section on "Salvation and the Spirit-Filled Life."

⁶ Matt 28:19; John 3:5-6, 14:16-18, 26, 15:26, 16:7-14; Acts 1:8, 2:1-4, 13:2-4, 15:28; Rom 12:6-8; 1 Cor 2:10-12, 6:19-20, 12:4-11, 13; 2 Cor 6:16, 13:14; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 2:21-22; 2 Thess 2:13; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet 1:2, 1 John 2:20-27

⁷ Ps 119:9, 89, 105; Matt 24:35; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12; 1 Pet 1:25; 2 Pet 1:21. See also position paper VIII — Biblical Inerrancy

benevolent dominion over the earth. Humankind was created for love of God and neighbor. That love was intended to find expression in every individual and every human institution.

Through the misuse of their wills, however, our original parents succumbed to Satan's temptation, disobeyed God's command and thus brought sin into the world and became subject to physical and spiritual death. They became corrupt in their nature and have passed on that nature to all their descendants. As a result, all human beings — while still bearing God's image — are polluted in every aspect of their being. They are estranged from God by their sin and thus deserve God's wrath.

We believe that God desires all human beings to be restored to a right relationship with him. Redemption — the gracious design by which God intends to rescue humanity from the disastrous consequences of sin — has its origin in the love of God and is brought to fruition by his infinite wisdom and might.⁸

Salvation and the Spirit-Filled Life

We believe that Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our salvation. He voluntarily offered himself as our representative and substitute and suffered and died on the cross in our place — taking upon himself God's righteous wrath. We believe in his bodily resurrection on the third day, which powerfully declared him to be the Son of God. By his death and resurrection, Jesus once for all conquered sin, death, hell, and the devil.

We believe that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Salvation is a divine gift given to any who repent and believe. Repentance and faith are the divinely enabled human responses to the grace of God. By the power of the Holy Spirit, a sinner must turn away from sin and embrace God — thus appropriating the benefits of Christ's life, death and resurrection. All who truly believe and receive Christ are fully justified, reconciled to God, born of his Spirit, adopted as his children, and united with Jesus in his death and resurrection. They will one day see him in his glory and be glorified themselves, as God brings his redemptive work to completion.

We believe that God intends to transform his redeemed people by conforming them to the image of his Son through the infilling and sanctifying work of his Holy Spirit. Though this work begins with God's gracious initiative and can only be accomplished by his life-giving power, believers must cooperate and fully yield themselves to the Lordship of Christ. Believers are called to decisively surrender their wills, be renewed in their minds, and have their hearts purified as they continuously offer themselves as living sacrifices to God.

We believe that a living faith must express itself in a life of loving obedience to God and in loving service to others. Genuine faith will inevitably produce good works, which are born out of gratitude for salvation and ultimately done for God's glory. Christians are called to live by the power of the Holy Spirit as citizens of the kingdom, serving as God's agents of transformation for society, culture, and the created world.⁹

The Church

We believe that the invisible and universal Church is a spiritual body comprised of all believers, both living and dead — over which Christ himself is Head and Lord.

We believe that the local church is to be a loving community of Christ's followers who gather for worship, prayer, instruction in the Word, mutual encouragement and discipline. As the temple of the Holy Spirit, the Church is to display his holiness, bear his fruit, and be adorned by his gracious gifts. As a people called out of darkness, the Church will embody the pervasive, life-transforming power of God by equipping the saints for the work of ministry — bearing witness to the truth and exerting influence in every realm of the broader culture. The Church is called by Jesus to proclaim the gospel — locally, cross-culturally, and internationally — and to make disciples of everyone everywhere in the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ Gen 1:27, 3:13, 16-17; Exod 20:11; Isa 64:6; John 10:17-18; Acts 4:12; Rom 3:23, 5:12-17, 6:23, 7:7ff; Eph 1:5-6, 2:1-5; 1 Tim 1:15, 2:5-6; Titus 2:11-12; Heb 2:9; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 1:8

⁹ Ps 51:3-4; Prov 28:13; Isa 6:1-5, 55:6-7; Matt 1:21, 3:2, 8, 4:17, 16:24; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3, 15:18, 18:13, 19:8; John 1:12, 3:3, 5, 14-17, 5:24, 6:44, 16:8-11, 17:17; Acts 11:18, 13:38-39, 15:8-9, 16:31, 20:21, 22:10; Rom 2:4, 3:10-12, 19, 20, 23, 4:3-5, 5:1, 9, 6:19, 22, 8:16, 33, 37, 10:9-10, 12:1-2; 1 Cor 15:3-8, 19-23, 55-57; 2 Cor 3:18, 5:17, 7:1; Gal 2:20, 6:14; Eph 2:8-10, 5:26; Phil 2:12-16, 3:20-21; Col 2:6, 3:3; 1 Thess 4:3, 5:23; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:25; Heb 11:6, 12:14, 13:12; Jas 2:17; 1 Pet 1:2, 15-16; 2 Pet 1:4-9, 3:18; 1 John 3:2, 5:6

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper were instituted by the Lord Jesus himself — not as a means of salvation, but as outward signs of the salvation we have by faith. They are the divinely mandated means by which believers publicly affirm their faith in Christ. Water baptism symbolizes the spiritual union that every believer has with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, we believe that the biblical pattern is baptism upon profession of faith in Christ, and furthermore, that it should be administered by immersion whenever possible.

The Lord's Supper serves not only as a vivid memorial of Jesus' bodily sacrifice and shed blood, but also as a proclamation of his death until he returns. It symbolizes the believer's union with Christ and the spiritual unity shared by every believer. It provides a powerful inducement to self-examination, should be celebrated joyfully and regularly, and is open to all who are followers of Christ.¹⁰

The Last Things

We believe that the final years of human history will be characterized by worldwide persecution and divine judgment.

We believe that the return of Jesus will be personal, bodily, visible, and glorious. His second coming, the blessed hope for which we must be constantly prepared, is a source of encouragement and comfort, a motive for holy living, and an inspiration for ministry and mission.

We believe that when Jesus returns, he will subdue his enemies and establish his kingdom on earth and will reign in perfect righteousness.

For those in Christ, death is gain, because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

At the resurrection, we believe that every person will face one of two eternal destinies. We believe that no condemnation awaits those who are in Christ, because their sins were forgiven at the cross. They will have their lives and works judged only for reward, and will enjoy an eternal, embodied life in the presence of God and his angels, forever. Those who are not in Christ will be raised to appear before God for a final, irrevocable judgment. They will be consigned to a place of eternal, conscious punishment, separated from God in hell, with Satan and his angels.

We believe in the coming restoration of all things, where God — in accordance with his power and promises — will one day bring his purposes for all of creation to their glorious fulfillment. Here, God's handiwork — though disfigured by sin and subject to decay — will be fully restored in a new heaven and new earth. We believe that all of God's redemptive purposes will come to fruition, and death will be swallowed up in victory.¹¹

B. ARTICLES OF PRACTICE

Introduction

Having declared in our Articles of Faith what we believe, in our Articles of Practice we declare how we should accordingly live. God calls us not only to affirm our core beliefs as the Missionary Church but also to embody those truths in Christian community. As Christians, we have been called to "guard the good deposit" (2 Tim 1:14), that body of truth God has entrusted to our care (1 Tim 6:20; Jude 3). Yet God has also called us to "the obedience that comes from faith" (Rom 1:5).

Such obedience becomes possible only because God supernaturally produces in us a new manner of life, one governed by his Word and empowered by his Spirit. The Christian life is not a burdensome pursuit of legalistic righteousness

¹⁰ Matt 18:15-17, 16:13-18, 26:26-30, 28:18-20; Luke 22:15-20; John 13:35; Acts 1:8, 2:38-42, 46-47, 8:36-39, 20:7, 28, 32; Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 5:1-4, 10:16, 11:23-24, 12:12-27, 16:2; Eph 1:5-6, 22-23, 3:21, 4:11-16; Col 1:18, 2:12; Heb 12:23; 1 Pet 3:21, 4:11; 1 John 3:14, 4:2, 5:1-5; Jude 20-21; compare Mark 16:16

¹¹ Ps 2:7-9, 96:13, 98:9; Eccl 12:14; Isa 9:3-7, 11:6-9, 65:17, 66:22; Dan 7:13-14, 12:2; Matt 24:14-31, 36-51, 25:1-46; Mark 9:42-48, 13:10, 32-37; Luke 21:27-28; John 5:24, 28-29, 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; Rom 8:1, 29; 1 Cor 3:8-15, 4:2-5, 11:32, 15:24-25, 58; 2 Cor 5:10; Eph 1:3-14; Phil 1:21-23, 3:20-21; Col 3:1-4; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess 1:8-9, 2:1-10; 2 Tim 4:8; Titus 2:12-13; Heb 9:27-28, 12:5-8; Jas 5:7-8; 2 Pet 3:13; 1 John 2:28-3:3; Rev 1:7, 22:12-13; 6:1-19:21, 20:10-15, 21:1-22:7

(Matt 5:20). Instead, it is an abundant life in which, led by God's Spirit, we delight in becoming increasingly conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18).

When we are reconciled to God in Christ, we are made a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17). As we yield our lives to the loving sovereignty of his Son, God makes every facet of our experience — whether individual or corporate, public or private — an instrument for the exhibition of his glory. Having received the Holy Spirit, we are commanded to walk by the Spirit (Gal 5:16) and be continually filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18). Then our lives will demonstrate, in increasing measure, the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), the unmistakable evidence of his indwelling presence.

Being a follower of Christ is more than a matter of belief; it is also a way of life. "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus lived" (1 John 2:6). God intends for us to reflect his character as "imitators of God" (Eph 5:1). He commands us, "Be holy, because I am holy" (Lev 11:44, 45; 1 Pet 1:16), and he graciously empowers us to embrace a way of living that displays the image of his Son.

Exercising Personal Faith

God calls us to exercise personal faith. While the Christian life is lived in community — "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body" (1 Cor 12:13) — we are called to embrace that life personally. Responding to the gracious invitation of the gospel individually, we turn from sin and embrace God, thus receiving the benefits of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:13). We receive salvation as we personally repent and believe in Jesus, receiving eternal life and escaping eternal condemnation (Mark 1:15; John 3:16-18; Rev 3:20). Without such faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6).

Believers cannot grow to spiritual maturity without cultivating a relationship with God. We affirm the need for Christians to nurture their faith through Bible reading (Ps 1), prayer (Col 4:2), weekly gatherings with other believers (Heb 10:25), serving in ministry (1 Pet 4:10-11), sharing their faith (Phil 6), and other spiritual disciplines. We do not, however, consider such disciplines ends in themselves but rather means by which to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18).

Cultivating Holiness

God calls us to a life of holiness. While God himself is ultimately the one who makes us holy (Ps 51:10; 1 Thess 5:23; Heb 13:12), the Bible commands us: "Make every effort . . . to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Having been united with Christ by faith, we are called to follow Jesus (Matt 4:19), imitating him in our conduct (1 Cor 11:1) and in the attitude of our minds (Eph 4:23).

To be holy means to die to sin (1 Pet 2:24). We believe as Christians we have already died with Christ. We have been liberated from sin's dominion and freed to offer ourselves wholly to God (Rom 6:1-14). Nevertheless, we must continue to put to death sinful attitudes and behaviors (Col 3:5), putting off the old self and its corrupt way of life (Eph 4:22-23). God calls us to flee immorality (1 Cor 6:18), to resist the devil (Jas 4:7), and to disdain the enticements of the world — the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-16).

Holiness also means being set apart for God and his glory. By faith, we have been raised in Christ to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). We are to put on the new self (Eph 4:24), keep in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25), and surrender ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13). We are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2), making every effort to develop godly conduct and character (2 Pet 1:3-7), and endeavoring to love God wholly and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt 22:35-40). In brief, a life of holiness is a life of love.

While sanctification demands our willing surrender (Phil 2:12), it remains, from first to last, the gracious work of God (1 Cor 15:10). The will and the power to be transformed comes from him. "For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil 2:13). We work, but we do so in the power he provides (Col 1:29).

To fulfill our high calling, we must resist being conformed to unbiblical values and behaviors (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:17). Instead, our lives should be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) and increasing godliness. An authentic Christian life will bear faithful witness to Christ, exhibiting his characteristics of integrity, purity, generosity, and justice.

Since it contradicts the biblical principles of simplicity, transparency, and honesty (2 Cor 4:2; 2 Cor 5:11), Christians must not hold membership in secret, oath-bound societies. Nor should believers form any kind of partnerships that cause them to compromise their Christian principles (2 Cor 6:14-7:1).

Since we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and bought at great price, God calls us to glorify him with our bodies (1 Cor 6:19b-20). To willfully dishonor our bodies with sexual immorality is irreverent and inconsistent with our standing as servants of God and is therefore forbidden. God has called us to flee impurity, to exercise self-control, and to refrain from wronging or taking advantage of another (1 Thess 4:3-7).

We must, likewise, avoid the abuse of any substance — whether legal or illegal — that damages health, results in intoxication, or impairs sound judgment. God requires self-control in all things (Prov 23:1-2; Prov 23:20-21; Prov 25:28; 2 Pet 1:5-6).

While the Scriptures clearly forbid drunkenness (Prov 23:20-21; Prov 31:4-7; Eph 5:18; Rom 13:13; 1 Pet 4:3), they do not categorically require total abstinence from alcohol (1 Tim 5:23). While we affirm the principle of Christian liberty in this matter, we also recognize that the loving exercise of personal freedom cannot supersede the biblical imperative to “Make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister” (Rom 14:13). We recognize believers have varying convictions about the wisdom of abstinence and moderation. These convictions merit mutual respect and prayerful consideration.

Living in Community

God calls us to live in community. While every believer enters the Christian life through the exercise of personal faith, God’s Spirit makes them part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-14). The Bible envisions the life of faith not only as an individualistic endeavor but also as a corporate pursuit.

God calls us to a shared life. We share a rich life of fellowship (*koinonia*) in which we devote ourselves, not to the pursuit of self-interest, but to the well-being of others. God calls us to love one another (John 13:34), serve one another (Gal 5:13), forgive one another (Eph 4:32), encourage one another (Heb 3:13), pray for one another (Jas 5:16), submit to one another (Eph 5:21), and build one another up (1 Thess 5:11).

The Scriptures instruct us to enter into commitments mindfully (Lev 5:4; Prov 19:2), to honor our word (Matt 5:37), to be honest and direct in our dealings (Eph 4:25; Matt 5:37), to be merciful toward others (Mic 6:8), to listen carefully (Prov 18:13), and to admit when we are wrong (Matt 7:5). We are also admonished to confront each other privately before bringing in other witnesses (Matt 18:16-20), to be forgiving (Eph 4:32), and to make restitution for damage done to another (Exod 21:33-36). Furthermore, we are encouraged to overlook personal offenses (Prov 19:11). In cases of criminal abuse, however, we affirm the legal responsibility for ministers to engage the appropriate civil authorities.

When Christians have disputes with one another, they should seek to settle those disputes via biblical mediation so as not to undermine their witness before the world (1 Cor 6:1-8). Courts have a responsibility to ensure civic order, but Christians have a biblical obligation to pursue mutual forbearance and love and to live at peace with everyone “as far as it depends on you” (Rom 12:18).

Christian community ought to be marked by compassion. The Christian life is a pilgrimage with many painful milestones along the way (Phil 1:29). The witness of Scripture is clear: “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Therefore, believers are exhorted to “mourn with those who mourn” (Rom 12:15), to bear each other’s burdens (Gal 6:2), and to comfort the afflicted (2 Cor 1:3-7).

God also calls Christians to pray together for healing, both for themselves and for others (Jas 5:13-16). God has provided for the ultimate removal of sin, sickness, and sorrow through the redeeming work of Christ (Isa 53:5; Matt 8:16-17), and he has promised that one day the painful effects of sin shall pass away (Rev 21:4). In the meantime, God commands his people to ask in faith and hope for healing now. Nonetheless, Christians are admonished to submit themselves to God’s will, recognizing that he may, for his own good purposes, choose not to heal presently (2 Cor 12:7b-10; Rom 8:28; 2 Tim 4:20). Since God is the giver of all good gifts (Jas 1:17), Christians may seek medical assistance without any implication that they lack faith.

God commands all creation to worship him. “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!” (Ps 150:6). He is worthy to receive all glory and honor and praise (Rev 4:11, 5:12). Yet he has chosen to make himself uniquely manifest among his people as they gather in his presence (Ps 22:3; 1 Cor 5:4; Matt 18:20). While we each have the privilege and responsibility to seek God individually (Mark 1:35; Matt 6:6), we ought also, unless circumstances render it impossible, to seek him in community. Regular times of worship have always characterized God’s people — in the Old Testament (Exod 20:8, 23:14-17), in the time of Jesus (Luke 4:16), and in the New Testament church (Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25).

In the Old Testament, God instituted the Sabbath as a day of rest and worship (Exod 20:8-11; Lev 23:3). God gave his people the Sabbath as a gift for their good (Mark 2:27), to ensure a healthy cycle of labor and rest. He also intended it for his own glory, with each Sabbath being “a Sabbath to the LORD” (Exod 20:10). Every Sabbath served as a call to worship, with each seventh day serving as a reminder that God was humanity’s Creator, Provider, and Redeemer (Exod 16:21-30; Deut 5:12-15).

When the Church was formed, Christians set aside Sunday as the Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:1-2; Rev 1:10). Weekly Sunday worship commemorated the resurrection of Jesus, who was raised to life on the “first day of the week” (Matt 28:1). While Christians do not keep the Lord’s Day legalistically, that is, according to Old Testament Sabbath laws (Col 2:16), they are nonetheless encouraged to reserve a particular day of the week where they can break from the rhythms of work for the purposes of rest, the celebration of the family, and worship. Regardless of the particular day, God’s people are exhorted to meet regularly with other believers whenever possible for mutual encouragement (Heb 10:24-25), for the public reading and proclamation of God’s Word (1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1-2), for corporate prayer (Acts 1:14, 4:24), for worship in song (Col 3:16), for the exercise of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12), and for the celebration of the ordinances of baptism (Acts 2:38-41) and the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:26-30; 1 Cor 11:23-26).

Living on Mission

Jesus calls us to a life of mission. Called to be his disciples, we are also commanded to make disciples of others (Matt 4:19, 28:19-20; Mark 8:31-38). He has commissioned us to take the gospel — the proclamation of Christ crucified, risen, presently reigning, and coming again (1 Cor 2:2; 1 Cor 15:1-4, 20-25; Acts 1:11) — to the whole world. Jesus is and always will be humanity’s only Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The gospel, for every generation and culture, “is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16).

Jesus calls us to join him on mission (John 20:21), and he promises to be with us “always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Furthermore, he pledged and provided the Holy Spirit’s power (Acts 1:8). While every believer has a personal responsibility to make disciples (Matt 28:19; 2 Tim 2:2), we are also called to labor together as partners in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and as members of one body with each part doing its work (Eph 4:16).

While the gospel is essentially a message of what God has done for us in Christ, living faith invariably produces in us the good works that God has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:8-10). Jesus calls his followers to be salt and light, like a “city set on a hill” (Matt 5:13-14). Good deeds pave the way for the proclamation of the gospel (Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:12). They are the inevitable fruit of saving grace (Eph 2:10) and living faith (Jas 2:26), and they provide unmistakable evidence that we have been truly transformed by the gospel’s power (1 John 3:16-18).

Building Healthy Families

God calls us to live as family. He adopts all those who receive Christ by faith (John 1:12; Gal 3:26-4:7) and makes them members of his household (Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15), thus comprising one spiritual family.

The natural realm mirrors that same order. The human family, though not immune from the effects of the Fall, remains divinely designed. Marriage has been instituted by God as a blessing. It embodies the divine ideal for the family, providing the most stable foundation on which it can stand (Gen 2:24). While this ideal is not always realized, God — our loving Father — nevertheless graciously favors his people with his presence and provision.

God has ordained the marriage covenant as a publicly affirmed union between one man (born male) and one woman (born female) until parted by death. This is the pattern that he commands for marriage (Matt 19:4-6).

While the principle of mutual submission is enjoined for all believers (Eph. 5:21), God has appointed the husband head of the wife (Eph 5:23; 1 Cor 11:3). Husbands are particularly called to love their wives sacrificially (Eph 5:25-29), live with them with consideration and respect (1 Pet 3:7), and not be harsh with them (Col 3:19). Wives, in turn, are called to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:6) and to show them appropriate respect (Eph 5:33).

Sexual relations are a gift from God to be enjoyed in the covenant of marriage (Gen 2:24-25; 1 Cor 7:3-5). Any sexual activity outside of marriage constitutes sexual immorality and is clearly forbidden in the Bible (Exod 20:14; Mark 7:20; 1 Cor 6:18; Gal 5:19; 1 Thess 5:22; Heb 13:4). Couples must not engage in pre-marital sex nor “live together” without the benefit of a marriage covenant. Co-habitation, however commonplace, counterfeits and distorts God’s beautiful and benevolent design for marriage.

The Scriptures command believers not to marry unbelievers (1 Cor 7:39; 2 Cor 6:14-17). Churches and parents, therefore, have an obligation to teach a biblical view of marriage and to warn believers against being yoked with unbelievers. Ministers are forbidden to knowingly officiate at the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever.

Furthermore, the Missionary Church forbids ministers to encourage, bless, or solemnize same sex “marriages” or unions (Matt 19:4-6).

Since marriage is a sacred, publicly affirmed covenant, ministers are forbidden to preside over ceremonies in which couples refuse to register with the civil authorities merely for the sake of convenience or financial benefit. They are also forbidden from knowingly officiating at marriages entered into solely for the sake of citizenship or other civil benefits.

Though Scripture commends the married state (Gen 1:18-24; 1 Cor 7:2-9), it also affirms the value of godly singleness (Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:25-38). Jesus himself remained celibate, and everyone — even those without the gift of lifelong celibacy (1 Cor 7:7) — experiences seasons of singleness. Jesus’s example demonstrates that a single person can live a completely fulfilled life.

Since God established marriage as a lifelong union, divorce never accords with his perfect will (Matt 19:4-6). Christians should bear with one another, forgive one another, and, whenever possible, seek reconciliation to preserve the marriage covenant (Rom 12:18).

Nevertheless, because of human sinfulness, God has graciously made concessions for divorce in certain cases. When a person is the wronged party in a case of sexual immorality (Matt 5:31-32; Matt 19:9) or when an unbeliever willfully abandons a believer (1 Cor 7:15-16) — the Bible permits, though it never mandates, divorce.

Those who seek divorce without biblical grounds should first be admonished and, if necessary, subjected to the disciplinary process of the local church.¹ Church discipline is intended to bring about repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Matt 18:15-20) and to serve as a warning for others (1 Tim 5:21; Acts 5:1-11).

While we acknowledge that divorce without biblical grounds is sin, we also affirm that God graciously forgives unrighteousness — divorce included — remembering that “mercy triumphs over judgment” (Jas 2:13).

Pastors should make clear, both in their public preaching and private counsel, that all forms of abuse are sin. Wherever appropriate, it should be made an occasion for church discipline. In cases of extreme abuse or physical danger, persons are admonished to seek a place of safety. Churches are encouraged to do whatever they can to provide refuge and support (Prov 24:11-12). Some cases may warrant either a temporary or long-term and potentially legal separation.

In all circumstances, Christians should seek biblically informed pastoral counsel before contemplating a divorce.

Some Scriptures place significant restrictions on remarriage after divorce (Deut 24:1-4; Luke 16:18). Nevertheless, we believe ministers may, at their discretion, solemnize a remarriage if the previously divorced persons had a biblical reason for their divorce, live demonstrably Christian lives, and intend a genuinely Christian marriage (Matt 5:32, 19:9;

¹ See Article XVII of the *Constitution of the Missionary Church*.

1 Cor 7:15). Ministers need to carefully consider other factors, including whether reconciliation with a previous spouse is possible and advisable, and whether the persons were believers at the time of their divorce (Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17).

Children are commanded to honor (Eph 6:1–2) and obey (Col 3:20) their parents. Following their heavenly Father, earthly fathers in particular are exhorted to gently shepherd their children, neither exasperating nor embittering them (Isa 40:11; Col 3:21). The Bible calls parents to bring their children up in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).

Because the home provides the primary place to disciple children in the faith, we urge churches to promote healthy families where parents teach Christian truth and cultivate and model Christian character. Since God loves children and desires to bless them and have them know him (Matt 19:13–14), we encourage the formal dedication of children to the Lord in a public service in the local church. We also encourage churches to commit themselves to disciple children by clearly communicating the gospel to them and diligently teaching them the Word of God (2 Tim 3:14-16).

Practicing Stewardship

God calls us to lives of faithful stewardship. Since God creates and sustains all things, everything ultimately belongs to him. As those who have been redeemed by the very blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19), Christians owe a debt they can never repay. Nonetheless, out of gratitude, they offer their very selves to him in worship (Rom 12:1-2).

All that we have — natural abilities, spiritual gifts, material possessions, time, and our physical bodies — are gifts from God (Jas 1:17). We hold these things in trust, as stewards rather than owners. We must use these resources for God’s glory and the good of others, as those who must ultimately give an account of ourselves to God (Rom 14:12).

This principle extends to the created world as well, as we honor our Creator by caring for his creation. While God gave human beings dominion over the earth (Gen 1:26), he also gave them the command to work and take care of the Garden (Gen 2:15). We care for creation as the image-bearers of God, who providentially sustains his creation now (Ps 104; Matt 10:29), and who will one day free it from the decay incurred in the Fall and bring it to its intended glory (Rom 8:20-21; Rev 21:1-4).

Faithful stewardship also entails glad generosity. The obligation to live generously is rooted in God’s generous nature and in his command that we imitate him (Eph 5:1-2). It is also undergirded by a biblical principle: “Whoever sows generously will also reap generously” (2 Cor 9:6). God’s people are directed to give to the needy (Deut 15:7-11; Prov 19:17; Eph 4:28) and to support those who give full-time attention to ministry (Lev 7:28-36; Num 18:8-20; 1 Cor 9:1-18; Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17). The biblical principle of “firstfruits giving” (Gen 4:4; Lev 23:9-14; 1 Cor 16:2) teaches us to make giving a priority. Giving should also be sacrificial (Lev 2:1, 3:1; 2 Sam 24:24) and proportionate to our income (1 Cor 16:2). God intends us to give, not merely out of duty, but in joyful worship, for he loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). The tithe — a law that was binding on God’s people in the Old Testament — continues to provide a valuable benchmark for New Testament believers today.

Our earthly citizenship is likewise a matter of stewardship. God has providentially placed his people within cultures so that they might exert a redemptive influence (Matt 5:14-16; Acts 17:26-27). Where citizens have been entrusted with the gift of participatory government, they may freely seek active political involvement. This may include engaging in civil discourse, voting, or seeking office at various levels of government. In doing so, believers may promote the common good and bring the light of the gospel and the influence of biblical principles into the public square.

We believe that God has established civil government for humanity’s benefit (Rom 13:1-4; 1 Pet 2:13-14), and that its duties of promoting and protecting good and restraining and punishing evil are divinely ordained. Christians are instructed to pray for all those who exercise civil authority over them (1 Tim 2:1-4). They are also called to render appropriate loyalty, respect, and obedience (Rom 13:5-7). Where the dictates of civil law contradict God’s revealed will in Scripture, Christians must choose to “obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29).

We believe that the Bible commands believers to love their enemies, to do good to those who hate them, to overcome evil with good, and to live at peace with everyone, whenever possible (Matt 5:43-48; Rom 12:21, 12:18). Though we affirm that Christians may defend themselves when necessary (Exod 22:2-3; Luke 22:36), and that they should seek to rescue the defenseless (Prov 24:10-12), they must never promote strife between individuals, groups, races, classes, and

nations. Furthermore, they should pursue harmony and reconciliation in every relationship — whether personal or public.

The persistence of strife and warfare, however, is a result of the fallen human condition. Since government has a mandate to protect life and preserve peace (Rom 13:2-4), we believe that a Christian may, with a clear conscience, participate in duly authorized armed forces (Luke 3:13-14). We also recognize that the practice of non-resistance has a long and distinguished history in the Church. Therefore, individuals may, for the sake of conscience, refuse to participate in armed conflict.

Finally, we believe a Christian's life should be so transparent in its honesty and integrity that one's word can be fully trusted without the swearing of formal oaths (Matt 5:36-37; Jas 5:12). Nonetheless, a judicial oath may be sworn or affirmed without violation of the Scriptures (Rom 13:1).

Seeking Justice

God calls us to live justly. Justice is an attribute of God himself (Gen 18:25; Deut 32:4; Isa 61:8). It ought, therefore, to characterize his children. Micah declares:

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.
And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.
(Mic 6:8)

Our personal dealings should exhibit a commitment to the Golden Rule: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7:12).

We also have an obligation to pursue justice in the public sphere. In every time and culture, Christians must recognize that God's Word alone determines what is just. We have a personal responsibility to embrace biblical values and to work toward their implementation in the broader culture. We do acknowledge, however, that while the Bible sets forth timeless principles and priorities, it rarely prescribes specific political policies. The pursuit of justice is a clear and necessary implication of the gospel and its inevitable complement. We affirm with the Scriptures that "faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jas 2:17).

Every person bears the image of God (Gen 1:27, 9:6; Jas 3:9). Therefore, we strenuously oppose abortion, euthanasia, as well as racism, sexism, and any other ideology or behavior that demeans, degrades, or defiles other human beings.

Personal and institutional racism is fundamentally an affront against the image of God in human beings. It also runs contrary to God's intention to create one universal, multiethnic, believing community comprised of members "from every nation, tribe, people and language" who join together in worship of God and the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10).

Sexual abuse and sexual harassment are particularly destructive forms of sexual sin since they degrade and damage other bearers of God's image.

Throughout the Scriptures, in both his words and deeds, God demonstrates his concern for the vulnerable, the helpless, and the defenseless. He cares for the orphan and widow (Ps 68:5), for the poor and oppressed (Ps 140:12), and for the sojourner² (Ps 146:9 ESV). He expects his people to do the same, defending and caring for the most vulnerable among us, including the refugee, the immigrant, the unborn, the elderly, the disabled, and the terminally ill (Exod 22:21-22; Prov 24:11-12, 31:8-9; Matt 25:31-46; Jas 1:27; 1 John 3:17-18).

Finally, we would do well to remember that we ourselves are sojourners here. Our ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20), and we look forward "to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb 11:10). Yet we are also called to "shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15) as we "seek the peace and prosperity" of the cities to which we have been called (Jer 29:7). Thus, we will pursue justice with great diligence. While some of the world's ills can be

² English has no suitable, single equivalent to translate the Hebrew. A *sojourner* (*ger*) is one lying outside a kinship or social group, a defenseless "outsider."

alleviated, we also recognize that, while we wait for the perfect to appear (1 Cor 13:10), believers will experience unjust suffering (John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 2:12, 4:5; 1 Pet 2:19-20; Rev 2:3). Evil will never be fully vanquished until our Savior comes in glorious power and puts every enemy beneath his feet (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Cor 15:23-25). “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev 22:20).

ARTICLE V — CONSTITUENCY

This organization is a religious denomination composed of all member churches, regional conferences, district conferences, and all agencies and institutions operated thereby or affiliated therewith. While the denomination operates as a mission agency in foreign fields and recognizes the universality of the body of Christ, yet it is committed to the policy of establishing indigenous churches. Accordingly, in those areas which are recognized as mission fields, it is expected that autonomous church bodies will be fully developed which will be fraternally related to the parent denomination.

ARTICLE VI — GENERAL CONFERENCE

The General Conference is the representative body through which the denomination acts to carry out its objectives and to which are delegated the highest supervisory, legislative, judiciary, and policy-making powers.

A. MEETING

The General Conference shall meet biennially at such time and place as the conference or General Oversight Council shall determine.

B. SPECIAL CONFERENCE

A special General Conference may be called by the General Oversight Council or at the request of three or more regional conferences at such time and place as the General Oversight Council may designate, provided that sixty days' notice is given. The membership of a special General Conference shall be composed of those who were members of the previous regular General Conference.

C. COMPOSITION

1. The General Conference shall be composed of the members of the General Oversight Council, Ministry Leadership Council, credentialed ministers, missionaries on home ministry assignment, the president of Bethel University, the Missionary Church Investment Foundation executive director, all full-time denominational, regional directors and lay delegates from each organized church. Based on average attendance for primary worship service, each church shall have one lay delegate per 200 average attendees.

Up to 200 in average attendance — one lay delegate
201–400 in average attendance — two lay delegates
401–600 in average attendance — three lay delegates, etc.

Lay delegates must be members of the local church they are representing.

2. The conference may extend the privilege of attendance and limited participation to conference appointed committees, fraternal delegates, visitors, and consultants.
3. Overseas national church representatives as they are able to attend will be recognized as fraternal delegates.

D. VOTING

Voting shall be done by the members of the conference who are present in the meeting in which the vote is being taken. Absentee or proxy voting is not permitted.

E. DUTIES

1. General Conference shall serve as the keeper of the organizational values and policies.
2. General Conference shall serve as the custodian of the Constitution, the bylaws, and all adopted position papers.
3. General Conference shall gather biennially (in session) to conduct all necessary denominational business, while focusing on the purpose, mission, and vision of the worldwide ministry of local Missionary Churches and the internal supporting organizational structures in which they participate. The major emphases of General Conference programs shall be inspiration, information, training, networking, and corporate action.
4. General Conference sessions shall be chaired by the denominational president. The moderator of the General Oversight Council shall serve as vice-chair.
5. Only such persons as are members of a Missionary Church congregation or are credentialed ministers in the Missionary Church shall be eligible for membership on denominational boards and committees.
6. General Conference shall elect four of the five denominational officers — the president, the vice president, the secretary, and the treasurer — for four-year terms from candidates presented by the Nominating Committee. The elected shall not serve for more than three full terms or a maximum of 14 years (in the case of someone fulfilling an unexpired term). The terms of the president and treasurer shall be staggered with the terms of the vice president and the secretary.
7. General Conference shall elect all nine members of the General Oversight Council for four-year terms from candidates presented by the Nominating Committee. (In addition, the president, the vice president, the secretary, and the treasurer shall serve as members by virtue of their office.) Terms shall be staggered, but the elected shall not serve for more than two full terms or a maximum of 10 years (in the case of someone fulfilling an unexpired term) consecutively.
8. General Conference shall elect all seven members of the Nominating Committee for six-year terms from two candidates presented by the General Oversight Council, and three candidates by the Ministry Leadership Council. Terms shall be staggered, but the elected shall not serve for more than one full term consecutively.
9. General Conference shall elect all nine members of the Constitution Committee for six-year terms from three candidates presented by the General Oversight Council, and four candidates by the Ministry Leadership Council. Terms shall be staggered, but the elected shall not serve for more than one full term consecutively.
10. General Conference shall certify the conference roll, effect its organization and determine its rules of procedure.
11. General Conference shall elect members to denominational boards whose election is not otherwise provided for by this Constitution, elect the heads of auxiliary organizations and any other officers or committees whose election is not otherwise provided for. The General Conference shall have the power to recall its appointed or elected officers.
12. General Conference shall receive and approve the reports from the general officers on the activities of the denomination; receive and approve reports from the responsible officers of the regional conferences, the denominational administrators and auxiliary organizations; authorize the establishment of new departments, institutions and agencies; approve major policy decisions affecting any part of the denomination; consider recommendations from boards, general officers, or regional and district conferences; serve as the final arbiter in the interpretation of this Constitution and in the adjudication of problems of major consequence which have not been satisfactorily resolved on lower levels; and to transact all business not otherwise provided for.
13. It shall be the prerogative of the General Conference to effect amendments to this Constitution according to provisions made therefore, and to adopt necessary bylaws.

ARTICLE VII — OFFICERS

A. GENERAL OFFICERS

The general officers shall be president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and General Oversight Council moderator. No person may be elected to more than one office.

B. PRESIDENT

The president shall be an ordained man elected for a four-year term by the General Conference from candidates provided by the Nominating Committee. Terms for the president and secretary shall be staggered. The elected cannot serve for more than three full terms or a maximum of 14 years (in the case of someone fulfilling an unexpired term). He must be a good listener; able to maximize the talents, skills, and effectiveness of others; proficient in communication; possessing a record of integrity; and capable of leading others in framing, implementing, and guiding a ministry vision for the Missionary Church. The president shall serve as Chairman of the Ministry Leadership Council and Chairman of the General Conference. He shall be a member ex-officio (voting) of all regional conferences and all denominational boards and committees.

C. VICE PRESIDENT

The vice president shall be an ordained man elected for a four-year term by the General Conference from candidates provided by the Nominating Committee. Terms for the president and vice president shall be staggered. The elected shall not serve for more than three full terms or a maximum of 14 years (in the case of someone fulfilling an unexpired term). He shall perform such duties as are delegated to him by the president. In case of the death, resignation, or removal of the president, the vice president shall become the president until the next General Conference. In the event he is unable to assume the office of president, the General Oversight Council shall have the power to appoint the president.

D. SECRETARY

The secretary shall be elected for a four-year term by General Conference from candidates provided by the Nominating Committee. Terms for the president and secretary shall be staggered. The elected shall not serve for more than three full terms or a maximum of 14 years (in the case of someone fulfilling an unexpired term). The secretary shall be the recording and the corresponding agent for denominational matters not handled by other general officers or departments; the secretary shall give notice of the time and place of the General Conference in the official periodical of the denomination and in such other ways as may be necessary; notify the members of the General Oversight Council of the time and place of its meetings; keep a permanent record of the proceedings of the General Conference and the General Oversight Council; notify all who are to be informed of actions of the General Conference or General Oversight Council unless otherwise provided for; prepare for printing such notices, announcements, minutes, etc., as are recommended for publication by the General Conference or the General Oversight Council; issue credential certificates for newly ordained or licensed ministers and missionaries as certified by the regional conferences; keep a permanent record of all licensed and ordained ministers and missionaries of the denomination; and perform such other functions as may be necessary.

E. TREASURER

The treasurer shall be elected for a four-year term by the General Conference from candidates provided by the Nominating Committee. Terms for the treasurer and secretary shall be staggered. The elected cannot serve for more than three full terms or a maximum of 14 years (in the case of someone fulfilling an unexpired term).

This person shall have general oversight of the denomination's fiscal affairs and be the guardian of denominational assets. This person shall assist in the preparation of the annual revenue and expenditure budgets and oversee the borrowing and investing of funds. The treasurer shall serve as liaison with external auditors; report financial information to the controller, president, and General Oversight Council; and submit an audited report to the General Conference.

F. GENERAL OVERSIGHT COUNCIL MODERATOR

The General Oversight Council moderator shall be elected by a two-thirds majority vote of the General Oversight Council from among the members of the council other than the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer. The term of the General Oversight Council moderator is for two years. The elected shall not serve for more than four full terms.

ARTICLE VIII — GENERAL OVERSIGHT COUNCIL

A. COMPOSITION

1. The General Oversight Council shall be composed of thirteen members (nine members plus the president, vice president, secretary and treasurer of the denomination), requiring a quorum of nine members. Seven of the thirteen shall be ordained ministers and six of the thirteen shall be lay persons. With the exception of the President, no person may serve as a voting member of both the General Oversight Council and the Ministry Leadership Council concurrently. Denominational directors who are ratified by the General Oversight Council shall serve as advisory members.
2. As a group of servant leaders, the General Oversight Council members shall be characterized by proven spiritual maturity, personal integrity, leadership expertise and experience, and a high level of commitment to the Missionary Church.
3. General Oversight Council members shall be elected for four-year terms by General Conference from candidates provided by the Nominating Committee. Terms shall be staggered, but the elected shall not serve for more than two full terms consecutively.
4. All members of the General Oversight Council shall affirm the Articles of Faith and Practice in the Constitution of the Missionary Church.

B. DUTIES

1. The General Oversight Council shall assume the role and responsibilities of General Conference and act in its stead when Conference is not in session.
2. Members of the General Oversight Council shall be the trustees of the denomination. They shall assume all fiduciary responsibilities for the denomination including such duties as denominational budget approval, matters of stewardship, and general economic oversight. The council shall be authorized to receive and to hold in trust monies, gifts, and legacies; acquire, loan or borrow money; purchase, sell, improve, convey or exchange real estate or other property such as stocks, bonds, mortgages, and other securities; issue annuity agreements; serve as the trustees for estates and gifts in conformity with the laws of the several states. Any two of the denominational officers are authorized to sign appropriate documents and negotiate loans.
3. The General Oversight Council shall make plans for the General Conference and appoint the necessary committees.
4. The General Oversight Council shall establish regional boundaries.
5. In the event of malfeasance in office or unworthy conduct by any official elected by the General Conference, the General Oversight Council shall have authority to make a judicious investigation of the case and to take such steps as are necessary.
6. The General Oversight Council is the final arbitrator in all appeals related to due process referred to it.
7. The General Oversight Council shall ratify all nominees for election or appointment to the Ministry Leadership Council with the exception of the president.
8. The General Oversight Council shall ratify Ministry Leadership Council decisions regarding ministry policies, strategies, and organizational structures.
9. The General Oversight Council shall conduct an annual performance evaluation of the president.

10. If for any reason the vice president, secretary, treasurer or a member of the General Oversight Council, Nominating Committee or Constitution Committee can no longer serve, the General Oversight Council is empowered to appoint an interim person until the next General Conference.
11. The General Oversight Council shall meet a minimum of three times per year. It is suggested that one of these meetings be a joint meeting with the Ministry Leadership Council, the other group of servant leaders, for prayer and consultation.

C. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The general officers shall constitute an Executive Committee to which the General Oversight Council may delegate authority and unfinished business. When a vacancy occurs during the biennium, a replacement may be appointed at the next meeting of the General Oversight Council. It shall have authority to transact emergency business and such other matters not deemed of sufficient cause for the calling of a meeting of the council. Such transactions shall be reported promptly to the other members of the General Oversight Council by sending them a copy of the minutes of the session. The actions, except those related to due process, shall be subject to the approval of the General Oversight Council at its next session.

ARTICLE IX — MINISTRY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

A. COMPOSITION

1. The Ministry Leadership Council shall be composed of the president, director of Generate, director of World Partners, regional directors, two representatives of World Partners, and a Bethel University representative (either the president or an appointed representative). With the exception of the President, no person may serve as a voting member of both the Ministry Leadership Council and the General Oversight Council concurrently.

The director of Generate and the director of World Partners shall be nominated by the president. In consultation with the director of World Partners, the World Partners representatives shall be nominated by the president. If the Bethel University president does not serve, the Bethel University representative shall be nominated by the president in consultation with the president of Bethel University. All nominations shall be presented to both the General Oversight Council and the Ministry Leadership Council for ratification.

2. The president shall serve as chairman of the Ministry Leadership Council.
3. All members of the Ministry Leadership Council shall affirm the Articles of Faith and Practice in the Constitution of the Missionary Church.

B. DUTIES

1. As a group of servant leaders, the Ministry Leadership Council shall carry primary responsibility for leading the Missionary Church toward fulfilling its purpose and mission — an effective, worldwide ministry of local Missionary Churches, assisted by the denominational supporting structures of which they are a part.
2. The Ministry Leadership Council shall be mandated with the responsibility for planning and guiding ministry strategy, ministry implementation, ministry resources support, and ministry structural support across the spectrum of the denomination. Working in concert with regional and district structures, the Ministry Leadership Council shall be given the latitude to propose and pilot new regional and district structures for the purpose of growth and expansion, subject to General Oversight Council ratification.
3. The Ministry Leadership Council shall frame, propose, and implement ministry vision plans for effective, worldwide Missionary Church outreach and growth.

4. The Ministry Leadership Council shall meet a minimum of four times per year to fulfill its denominational ministry leadership role and responsibilities. Since the Ministry Leadership Council shall serve as one group of servant leaders for the denomination, it is suggested that one of these meetings be a joint meeting with the General Oversight Council, the other group of leaders, for prayer and consultation.
5. The Ministry Leadership Council shall determine the supporting role and responsibilities of the denominational office and World Partners. The denominational office and World Partners structure and staff shall be determined by the president and managed by the respective director.
6. The Ministry Leadership Council shall assist the president in:
 - Convening regular input and listening opportunities within each region to help guide the work of the Ministry Leadership Council and the denominational office staff.
 - Convening regular input and listening opportunities with each of the Pastor Peer Networks to help guide the work of the Ministry Leadership Council and the denominational office staff.

ARTICLE X — NOMINATING COMMITTEE

A. Composition

1. The Nominating Committee shall be composed of seven members elected by General Conference for six-year terms from two candidates presented by the General Oversight Council, and three candidates presented by the Ministry Leadership Council. Terms shall be staggered, but the elected shall not serve for more than one full term consecutively.
2. All members of the Nominating Committee shall affirm the Articles of Faith and Practice in the Constitution of the Missionary Church.

B. Recruiting of Nominees

1. The Nominating Committee shall be called together by the moderator of the General Oversight Council for the sake of organizing itself. This meeting shall take place no later than one year prior to General Conference.
2. The Nominating Committee shall solicit potential nominees from every region, church, and key Bethel University personnel. Any member of the Missionary Church may suggest a name for nomination.
3. The Nominating Committee may approach people directly whom it deems suitable for the varied offices to be filled.
4. The Nominating Committee shall confer with the General Oversight Council and the Ministry Leadership Council on potential presidential nominees.

C. Vetting of Nominees

1. Nominees shall be vetted according to the following criteria:
 - Extensive dialogue and screening shall be based on the biblical qualifications of servant leaders.
 - Nominees shall be from regions and churches that actively support the Missionary Church.
 - Nominees shall affirm the Articles of Faith and Practice of the Missionary Church.
 - Nominees shall be screened on the basis of leadership qualifications — call, character, involvement in missions, etc.
 - Screening shall also involve basic behavioral questions related to the role in which a nominee shall be asked to serve.
 - The Nominating Committee shall be encouraged to consider matters of regional representation in their nominee selections.

2. The Nominating Ballot

- The nominating ballot shall be posted three months in advance of General Conference.
- If there is a desire to nominate someone other than those listed on the ballot, one month shall be given to submit nominations.
- The supporting signature of 25 registered conference delegates must accompany any nominee so submitted.
- The nominees submitted shall then be vetted according to the above process.
- If the Nominating Committee finds the person qualified, the name shall be added to the ballot.
- If the Nominating Committee finds the person not qualified, the nominator shall be notified.
- If the nominator persists in seeking to add the name to the ballot, the Nominating Committee shall have the option of submitting the name without recommendation.
- The final nominating ballot shall be posted one month before General Conference.

ARTICLE XI — CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

A. Composition

1. The Constitution Committee shall be composed of nine members elected by General Conference for six-year terms from three candidates presented by the General Oversight Council, and four candidates by the Ministry Leadership Council. Terms shall be staggered, but the elected shall not serve for more than one full term consecutively.
2. All members of the Constitution Committee shall affirm the Articles of Faith and Practice in the Constitution of the Missionary Church.

B. Function

The Constitution Committee shall be responsible to review items referred to it by General Conference, the General Oversight Council, or the Ministry Leadership Council. It shall consider suggestions for improvements to the Constitution or position papers. It shall review duly approved recommendations from regions and seek to facilitate their consideration at General Conference. It has the authority to recommend amendments to the Constitution and Position Papers.

ARTICLE XII — DENOMINATIONAL DIRECTORS

All denominational directors shall be nominated by the president and ratified by the General Oversight Council and the Ministry Leadership Council. Each director shall be directly accountable to the president. The General Oversight Council and the Ministry Leadership Council shall approve the number of directors and the specific job description for each director.

The General Oversight Council and the Ministry Leadership Council may, unless otherwise provided in this Constitution, appoint committees and approve necessary guidelines and bylaws to conduct the ministries of the various departments.

ARTICLE XIII — BETHEL UNIVERSITY

- A. Bethel University shall exist as the university of the Missionary Church, Inc.
- B. The Bethel University Board of Trustees shall be self-perpetuating and vested with legal ownership for all liabilities. However, in the event of dissolution of the university, the net assets or liabilities shall accrue to the Missionary Church, Inc.
- C. At least one-half of the members of the Bethel University Board of Trustees shall be members in good standing of the Missionary Church. Additionally, the president of the Missionary Church, Inc. shall be a member ex officio of the college's board. All appointees of the Bethel University Board of Trustees shall affirm prior to each term of office the doctrinal statement of the university which shall conform to the Articles of Faith and Practice of the Missionary Church, Inc. The General Oversight Council or the General Conference of the Missionary Church, Inc., may by a two-thirds vote at any meeting remove any trustee of Bethel University.

- D. The president of Bethel University shall be a member in good standing of the Missionary Church. The president's election and periodic reappointment shall be ratified by the General Oversight Council of the Missionary Church, Inc. The president shall report annually, or as often as requested, to the General Oversight Council and to each General Conference furnishing full operational reports.

ARTICLE XIV — AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

MISSIONARY CHURCH INVESTMENT FOUNDATION

- A. The Missionary Church Investment Foundation is an incorporated subsidiary of the Missionary Church, Inc., to support its activities and ministries and organized:
 - 1. To create and administer a fund for the purpose of financing the construction or purchase of church buildings, equipment, parsonages and to finance other projects within the Missionary Church, Inc., including but not limited to schools, conference grounds, administrative buildings and homes for senior citizens, retired ministers, missionaries, their wives and husbands.
 - 2. To receive and hold real estate, monies, gifts, and legacies; to receive, borrow and loan money, to purchase, hold, sell, improve, rent, convey, mortgage and exchange real estate and personal property including but not limited to stocks, bonds and securities; to issue and grant annuity agreements.
 - 3. To make loans and issue certificates for the promotion of all aforesaid objects, all on such terms and conditions as the Board of Directors will authorize.
- B. The affairs of the foundation shall be administered by a Board of Directors. The total membership of the Board of Directors shall be not less than 12 persons with no less than eight appointed by the General Oversight Council upon the recommendation of the Board of Directors of the Missionary Church Investment Foundation, Inc. Of the appointed members, no more than five shall be ministers. The members ex officio shall be the president, the treasurer and one executive level director of the Missionary Church appointed by the General Oversight Council and the executive director of the foundation. All members of the board of directors of the Missionary Church Investment Foundation shall affirm the Articles of Faith and Practice in the Constitution of the Missionary Church.
- C. The executive director shall be recommended by the MCIF Board and approved by the General Oversight Council.
- D. The foundation shall give an annual report to the General Oversight Council and report to each General Conference of the Missionary Church. Its executive director shall be a member ex officio of the General Conference.
- E. The General Oversight Council may by a majority vote at any time recall any board member of the Missionary Church Investment Foundation.

ARTICLE XV — REGIONAL CONFERENCES

Regional conferences shall be organized by the General Oversight Council to oversee ministries within designated geographic areas.

A. JURISDICTION

- 1. Each region shall be governed by a regional board and, if applicable, regional conference which shall function in accord with authority delegated to it by this Constitution and the General Conference.
- 2. Regions shall include all of the churches and districts within the territory assigned by the General Oversight Council.
- 3. Mission districts may be established by the regional board within its geographic area.

B. DUTIES

1. Each region may establish bylaws and policies to govern its organization, officers and ministries in keeping with the Constitution of the Missionary Church.
2. It shall recommend the establishment of new districts within the region and the guidelines governing such per policies established by the General Oversight Council and Ministry Leadership Council.
3. It shall conduct conferences and ministries in the region as needed. It shall implement and promote the ministries of the denomination.
4. It shall receive the reports of the regional director and other officers, pastors, workers, boards, and committees; and submit to the General Conference such reports as may be required.
5. It shall be the prerogative of the region to make recommendations to General Conference.

C. OFFICERS AND COMMITTEES

1. Regional Director
 - a. The regional director shall be a man elected or affirmed for a term not to exceed four years as prescribed by the regional bylaws from among the ordained ministers of the Missionary Church.
 - b. The process of election or affirmation shall include conferring with the president on nominee(s) determination. The nominee(s) shall be ratified by the General Oversight Council and Ministry Leadership Council before the election or affirmation by the regional governing body.
 - c. The regional director shall recruit and equip other catalytic leaders, motivate and empower pastors and leaders to fulfill the regional vision, oversee churches and credentialed individuals, and report to the regional conference.
 - d. In case of necessity, he shall have the authority, in consultation with the regional board, to take such steps as are necessary in the change or transfer of ministers or to safeguard the region's churches and members.
 - e. He shall submit to the General Conference a full report of the work of his region, including a summarized statistical report.

2. Other Officers

The region shall select other officers, committees and leadership deemed necessary for the accomplishing of the vision and mission of the region, to fulfill the requirements of the Constitution of the Missionary Church and to meet legal requirements in the state or states where it exists.

3. Regional Board

- a. The regional board shall be composed of the regional director and other officers and representatives as required by the regional bylaws.
- b. It shall approve new churches for membership into the Missionary Church. It shall annually certify to the denominational office a list of all churches under the jurisdiction of the region. This responsibility shall be transferred to districts when fully organized. A certificate of membership in the denomination shall be issued by the proper denominational officers.
- c. It shall examine ministerial candidates and recommend the licensing and ordaining of ministers. It shall annually certify to the denominational office a list of all ordained and licensed ministers under the jurisdiction of the region. This responsibility may be transferred to districts when fully organized.

- d. The regional board shall serve as a pastoral relations committee. It shall be the duty of this committee to assist in the selection of a pastor; to give due consideration to the preferences of churches and pastors and to resolve any conflicts and problems arising from pastoral selections in the highest interests of churches, pastors, and the denomination. Each region shall determine what constitutes a pastoral election and the term of service. It shall be the duty of the committee to take steps in cooperation with the respective church board to fill vacancies that may occur during the year. This responsibility may be transferred to districts when fully organized.
- e. The regional board shall be the trustees of the region. It shall hold in trust all regional properties and have authority to receive and hold in trust monies, gifts, and legacies; acquire, loan or borrow money; purchase, sell, improve, convey or exchange real estate or other property such as stocks, bonds, mortgages, and other securities, and serve as the trustees of estates and gifts in conformity with the civil laws of the several states and in keeping with authority delegated by the region.

ARTICLE XVI — DISTRICT CONFERENCES

Districts within a region shall be recognized by the regional board in accordance with policies established by the Ministry Leadership Council and General Oversight Council.

A. JURISDICTION

- 1. Each district shall be governed by an annual district conference and may establish bylaws and policies to govern its organization, officers and ministries in keeping with the Constitution of the Missionary Church and its regional bylaws.
- 2. Districts shall include all of the churches and the district institutions within the territory assigned by the region.

B. ORGANIZATION

- 1. Meeting. Each district conference shall meet annually at such time and place as it may decide. It shall be presided over by the district director or his appointee.
- 2. Special Conferences. Special district conferences may be called by the district board.
- 3. Membership. The district conference shall be composed of all ordained and licensed ministers resident in the district; all conference officers; at least one lay delegate from each organized church and such additional lay representation as each conference shall determine; and members of standing conference committees at the discretion of the respective conferences.
- 4. Voting. Voting shall be done by the members of the conference who are present in the meeting in which the vote is being taken. Absentee or proxy voting is not permitted.

C. DUTIES

- 1. The district conference shall elect or ratify a district director and other officers and committees as may be deemed advisable and in accordance with its bylaws.
- 2. It shall conduct conferences, camp meetings or conventions in the district as practicable, and it shall take such steps as are necessary to implement and to promote the ministries of the denomination.
- 3. It shall receive the reports of the district director and other officers, pastors, workers, boards, and committees; and submit to the Regional Conference such reports as may be required.
- 4. It shall have authority to make bylaws for its government in accord with the Constitution and the acts of the Regional Conference and the General Conference.

D. OFFICERS

1. District Director

- a. The district director shall be a man elected for a term not to exceed four years by the district conference from among the ordained ministers of the Missionary Church.
- b. The process of election or affirmation shall include conferring with the regional director on nominee(s) determination. The nominee(s) shall be ratified by the Regional Board before the election or affirmation.
- c. The district director shall have supervision of all the churches and workers within his jurisdiction; arrange for conventions or conferences within the district; arrange for meetings in each church in the interests of denominational programs; emphasize the duties of churches to their pastors; and uphold this Constitution.
- d. Between district conferences, he shall have the authority, in consultation with the district board, to take such steps as are necessary in the change or transfer of ministers or to safeguard the district's churches and members.
- e. He shall annually submit a full report of the work of his district to the regional director.
- f. The district director shall shepherd ministers in their personal spiritual growth, in their continued development of leadership skills, in their relationships with those whom they serve and in their ministry of developing devoted followers of Christ.

2. Other Officers

The district shall select other officers, committees and leadership deemed necessary for the accomplishing of the vision and mission of the district, to fulfill the requirements of the Constitution of the Missionary Church and to meet legal requirements in the state or states where it exists.

3. District Board

- a. The district board shall be composed of the district director and other officers and representatives as required by the district bylaws.
- b. It shall approve new churches for membership in the Missionary Church and shall certify such to the denominational office. A certificate of membership in the denomination shall be issued by the proper denominational officers.
- c. It shall examine ministerial candidates and recommend the licensing and ordaining of ministers and certify such to the denominational office which shall issue credentials. It shall annually certify to the denominational office a list of all ordained and licensed ministers under the jurisdiction of the region.
- d. The district board shall serve as a pastoral relations committee. It shall be the duty of this committee to assist in the selection of a pastor; to give due consideration to the preferences of churches and pastors and to resolve any conflicts and problems arising from pastoral selections in the highest interests of churches, pastors, and the denomination. Each district shall determine what constitutes a pastoral election and the term of service. It shall be the duty of the committee to take steps in cooperation with the church board concerned to fill vacancies that may occur during the year.
- e. The district board shall be the trustees of the district. It shall hold in trust all district properties, and have authority to receive and hold in trust monies, gifts, and legacies; acquire, loan or borrow money; purchase, sell, improve, convey or exchange real estate or other property such as stocks, bonds, mortgages, and other securities, and serve as the trustees of estates and gifts in conformity with the civil laws of the several states and in keeping with authority delegated by the district.

E. MINISTERS

1. Definition

Ministers are men and women called of God to serve the church in an official leadership capacity who normally have special education for such a ministry, whose leadership roles are certified through licensure or ordination, and who receive financial remuneration for their services. This includes ministers such as pastors, evangelists, Christian education or youth ministers, chaplains, or persons directly involved in the theological training of people for ministry.

2. Qualifications

a. Ministers shall meet the following biblical qualifications:

- (1) Spiritual maturity and Christian character as evidenced by the fruit of the Spirit as given in Galatians 5:22-23 and by the qualities required for Christian leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9;
- (2) Gifts of leadership confirmed by the church of which they are members (Eph 4:11-14); and
- (3) A servant spirit which enables them to submit to the authority of God as they lovingly exercise that authority in ministering to the people of God (John 13:1-17; 1 Cor 4:1-2; Phil 2:1-11).

b. Ministers shall meet the following educational qualifications:

- (1) A high school diploma or its equivalent; and
- (2) Additional education as set forth in the description of licensed and ordained ministers. (Note: Special consideration may be given after consultation with the candidate, the regional director, and the president or his representative and approval of the regional board.)

c. Ministers shall meet the following denominational qualifications:

- (1) Completion of the Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church;
- (2) A commitment to hold and to teach the denominational "Articles of Faith and Practice";
- (3) A commitment to support the programs of the Missionary Church;
- (4) A commitment to communicate by word and example a Christian worldview and lifestyle as reflected in the Missionary Church Constitution and Manual;
- (5) Membership in a local Missionary Church unless otherwise approved by the regional board due to extenuating circumstances; and
- (6) All credentialed ministers are required to attend regional conference annually unless there are extenuating circumstances which are reported to and approved by the regional director prior to conference.

d. It is the policy of the Missionary Church not to license or ordain a person who has been divorced, divorced and remarried, or married to a person who has been divorced. In cases where there are biblical concessions (see "Building Healthy Families" in Articles of Practice), application may be made to the board of the region in which the minister resides, and upon a 75% vote of that body, a recommendation may be sent to the General Oversight Council which shall appoint an Extenuating Circumstances Committee, which shall investigate the case thoroughly and give approval or disapproval.

3. Ministerial Categories and Procedures for Credentials

a. Candidates for License

(1) Description

Candidates for license shall demonstrate readiness to pursue their studies with all diligence until completed; to prepare for ordination; and to give themselves wholly to the ministry in the Missionary Church, when educational and other requirements are completed.

(2) Procedure

It is recommended that interested persons begin the candidate process one year before they plan to seek license in order to allow sufficient time to fulfill requirements for license.

- (a) Establish membership in a local Missionary Church;
- (b) Counsel with their pastor and regional or district director as to the nature and condition of their call from God to the ministry;
- (c) Receive an official recommendation from the board of their local church; and
- (d) Submit a completed Application for Ministerial License Part I to the regional director for consideration by their regional board.

(3) Rights

As long as ministerial candidates continue their status they shall have the right:

- (a) To preach the gospel;
- (b) To be a non-voting member of the regional and district conference; and
- (c) To transfer from one region to another, subject to the policies and guidelines of the regions.

(4) Duties

Persons having status as ministerial candidates shall be responsible to report annually to the regional board as to their progress in their studies.

b. Specialized Licensed Ministers

(1) Description

The term “specialized minister” is used to describe paid staff ministers employed by churches of the denomination who are not holding a regular license or ordination status. Individuals holding this license are not pursuing ordination and generally are employed to oversee specific areas of ministry in a local church. This designation does not include ministry support positions, such as secretarial or custodial staff.

This license is not transferable to another church or ministry.

(2) Qualifications

- (a) Applicants must have completed a minimum course of study consisting of at least one course in each of the following: Old Testament, New Testament, biblical or systematic theology, biblical interpretation, homiletics or communication, leadership, Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church and a minimum of 12 semester hours of college-level work in their field of specialization.

In special circumstances and with the approval of the regional or district director, individuals with two or more years of experience and 12 semester hours of college-level work in their field of specialization may apply and, if approved by the regional or district board, be granted a specialized ministry license upon completion of the Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church. Such individuals will be given three years to complete the additional required courses.

- (b) Persons holding this license must have served for a minimum of 12 months on a professional basis in the field of specialization.
- (c) Persons holding this license must be members of a Missionary Church.

(3) Procedure

- (a) Counsel with their senior pastor as to the nature of their gifts and proposed ministry;
- (b) Receive an official recommendation from their senior pastor and local church board;
- (c) Submit an application to the regional or district director; and
- (d) Be examined by the regional or district board.

(4) Renewal

A specialized ministry license is effective for one year only, and authority to carry on the office and work of a minister under such a license shall cease unless it is renewed annually by the regional conference. This license may be renewed by providing satisfactory service in a ministry assignment, including loyalty to and compliance with the rules of the Missionary Church and of the region, including the proper filing of reports. If specialized licensed ministers fail to file their annual report, unless such failure is due to illness, injury, or a similar emergency, their license shall not be renewed.

(5) Rights

As long as ministers qualify for and receive a specialized ministry license, under the supervision of a senior pastor they shall have the right:

- (a) To preach the gospel, to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, to perform all parts of divine worship, and to solemnize the rite of matrimony wherever local laws will permit;
- (b) To serve in a ministry relationship under the supervision of a senior pastor within a local Missionary Church subject to the guidelines of the regional or district conference;
- (c) To be eligible for election to any office not restricted to ordained ministers or lay persons, and
- (d) To be voting members of the regional conference and General Conference.

(6) Duties

Specialized licensed ministers shall be responsible:

- (a) To devote themselves without reservation to the Christian ministry, following the leadership of the Holy Spirit;
- (b) To report annually to the regional conference and the denomination on the appropriate report form, and to the regional director as required;
- (c) To place their credentials on file voluntarily with their regional director if they cease to serve in an approved ministry; and
- (d) To surrender voluntarily their credentials if they are guilty of an offense which would disqualify them from service as a minister.

c. Licensed Ministers

(1) Description

Licensed ministers are those whose ministerial calling and gifts have been formally recognized by a regional or district conference, through the granting of a ministerial license, authorizing them for and appointing them to actual service in the ministry, subject to supervision and evaluation, as a step toward ordination.

(2) Procedure

- (a) Applicants must have completed a minimum course of study (See Appendix 1) as approved by the Ministry Leadership Council; and
- (b) The applicant shall be reviewed and recommended by the regional or district board.

(3) Renewal

A ministerial license is effective for one year only, and authority to carry on the office and work of a minister under such a license shall cease unless it is renewed annually by the regional board until such time as the holder of the license is ordained to the ministry. Ministers may be granted renewal of ministerial license by meeting the following requirements:

- (a) Satisfactory service under their previous appointment, including loyalty to and compliance with the rules of the Missionary Church and of the region, including the proper filing of reports. If licensed ministers fail to file their annual report, unless such failure is due to illness, injury, or a similar emergency, their license shall not be renewed; and
- (b) Confirmation through the annual report that they are pursuing the completion of the educational requirements for ordination (See Appendix 1). The educational requirements for ordination must be completed within seven years of service under a ministerial license.

(4) Rights

As long as ministers qualify for and receive a ministerial license, they shall have the right:

- (a) To preach the gospel, to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, to perform all parts of divine worship, and to solemnize the rite of matrimony wherever local laws will permit;
- (b) To serve in a pastoral relationship with a local Missionary Church subject to the guidelines of the regional conference;
- (c) To be eligible for election to any office not restricted to ordained ministers or lay persons;

- (d) To be voting members of the regional or district conference and General Conference; and
- (e) To transfer from one region to another, subject to the policies and guidelines of the regions.

(5) Duties

Persons holding a ministerial license shall be responsible:

- (a) To enroll in the ordination course of studies and to pursue it with all diligence until completed (See Educational Requirements for Credentialing);
- (b) To serve their region and denomination faithfully in whatever capacity they may be called;
- (c) To report annually to the regional conference and denomination on the appropriate report form, and to the regional director as required;
- (d) To place their credentials on file voluntarily with their regional or district director if they cease for a period of more than one year to serve in an approved ministry; and
- (e) To surrender voluntarily their credentials if they are guilty of an offense which would disqualify them from service as a licensed minister.

d. Ordained Ministers

(1) Description

Ordained ministers are ministers whose calling, gifts, and usefulness have been demonstrated and enhanced by proper training and experience, and who have been separated to the service of Christ by the regional or district conference and by the solemn act of ordination and thus have been fully invested with all the functions of the Christian ministry.

(2) Qualifications

Licensed ministers of the Missionary Church who have an abiding conviction of God's call to be ministers may be ordained as ministers by meeting the following requirements in order:

- (a) Satisfactory service for two years subsequent to completion of the educational requirements for ordination, except for those who have been under supervision and in approved ministry during the years spent completing the educational requirements. At least one of the years must have been in the Missionary Church within the region or district in which they are to be ordained;
- (b) Completion of the educational requirements for ordination (See Appendix 1);
- (c) Examination and recommendation by the regional or district board relative to their qualifications for the ministry and for ordination including their personal religious experience, ministerial call and evidence thereof, matters of education, doctrine, and practice, particularly their personal commitment without reservation to each of the Articles of Faith and Practice and their loyalty to the Missionary Church, and circumstances of personal, family, and business life which bear upon the ministry; and
- (d) Public service of ordination in which they shall witness to their Christian experience, affirm their conviction of a divine call to the ministry, their commitment to the doctrines and principles of the Missionary Church, and their loyalty to the Missionary Church, after which they shall be separated to the Christian ministry by the church through the laying on of hands.

(3) Rights

As long as ordained ministers maintain their spiritual life, moral character, and faithful ministry which first qualified them for ordination, and as long as they are neither under discipline nor expelled from the ministry, they shall have the right:

- (a) To preach the gospel and to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, to perform all parts of divine worship, and to solemnize the rite of matrimony;
- (b) To be eligible for election to any office in the church for which ordained ministers are eligible;
- (c) To serve in a pastoral relationship with a local Missionary Church subject to the guidelines of the regional or district conference;
- (d) To be voting members of the regional or district conference and General Conference; and
- (e) To transfer from one region or district to another, subject to the policies and guidelines of the regions and districts.

(4) Duties

Ordained ministers shall be responsible:

- (a) To devote themselves without reservation to the Christian ministry, following the leadership of the Holy Spirit;
- (b) To report annually to the regional or district conference and the denomination on the appropriate report form, and to the regional or district director as required;
- (c) To place their credentials on file voluntarily with their regional or district director if they cease for a period of more than three years to serve in an approved ministry; and
- (d) To surrender voluntarily their credentials if they are guilty of an offense which would disqualify them from service as an ordained minister.

(5) Dual credentials

Ministers in the Missionary Church cannot hold credentials concurrently with the Missionary Church and any other denomination or credentialing body except to preserve pension or retirement benefits.

(6) Transfers from other denominations

If ministers having been ordained by another denomination desire to join a regional or district conference, they shall make application to the regional or district director, giving full particulars as to previous ordination, reasons for withdrawal and intention to join the church, and acquaintance and agreement with the Constitution as validated by an examination. This information shall be conveyed to the regional conference, which shall take one of the following courses:

- (a) recognize the previous ordination and accept the candidates at once as ordained ministers of the church.
- (b) provisionally recognize their previous ordination until such time as the regional conference can fully recognize them as ordained ministers or advise their reordination;

(c) delay action in view of further investigation; or

(d) deny the application.

4. Licensed Lay Workers

All Christians are endowed with spiritual gifts according to the will of the Holy Spirit. The church recognizes that some lay people possess gifts which qualify them for acts of ministry which are such that necessitate formal recognition (i.e. hospital visitation, prison ministry, etc.). Therefore, the church recognizes the status of those licensed as lay workers.

a. Qualifications

Licensed lay workers must:

- (1) Be members of a local Missionary Church for at least two years;
- (2) Demonstrate spiritual maturity and Christian character;
- (3) Demonstrate a servant spirit and gifts appropriate to the area of ministry for which they are applying for recognition; and
- (4) Complete a course of studies that equips them for their area of ministry.

b. Procedure

- (1) Counsel with their pastor and regional or district director as to the nature of their gifts and proposed ministry;
- (2) Receive an official recommendation from their local church board;
- (3) Submit an application to the regional or district director; and
- (4) Be examined by the regional or district board.

c. Renewal

- (1) A lay worker's license is effective for one year only and authority to carry on the area of ministry shall cease unless it is renewed; and
- (2) Renewal may be granted if satisfactory service in the area of ministry is being rendered and all qualifications and duties continue to be fulfilled.

d. Rights

Licensed lay workers are given recognition to serve only in the area of ministry for which they are approved.

e. Duties

Licensed lay workers shall submit an appropriate annual report to their local church board and regional or district board.

5. Chaplains and Parachurch Workers

- a. Chaplains and parachurch workers shall conduct their personal lifestyle in a manner which upholds the doctrines and practices of the Missionary Church, and keep themselves above reproach in all matters of conduct and finance.
- b. They shall be accountable to the leadership structure and guidelines of the organization in which they serve.
- c. They shall make an annual report to the president of the Missionary Church.

6. Evangelists

- a. Definitions: Evangelists are persons gifted and called by God to proclaim the gospel through itinerant preaching, sacred music, drama, or other specialized ministries focusing on winning people to Christ and discipling believers for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-13).
 - (1) Missionary Church ministers duly credentialed by their regional conference, sensing God's call to a full-time evangelistic ministry, may be certified as either denominational or regional evangelists.
 - (2) It shall be their duty to do the work of evangelists and to give evidence of their ministry by proclaiming the Word and discharging all the duties of the ministry (2 Tim 4:2-5).
 - (3) They shall uphold the doctrines and practices of the Missionary Church and keep themselves above reproach in all matters of conduct and finances.
 - (4) Regional and denominational evangelists are to minister within the structure of a board of directors or a local church board, who will give oversight, direction, support and accountability.
- b. Classifications: Evangelists ministering in the Missionary Church will be classified as either regional or denominational evangelists.
 - (1) Criteria for Regional Evangelists
 - (a) They must be members of a Missionary Church.
 - (b) They must be credentialed by the Missionary Church.
 - (c) They must make application to the regional director and be approved by the regional board for certification as regional evangelists.
 - (d) Once approved, they shall report annually to the regional conference and the denomination on the appropriate report form and to the regional director and the president quarterly.
 - (2) Criteria for Denominational Evangelists
 - (a) Regional evangelists and credentialed ministers who spend at least fifty percent of their time in the ministry of evangelism, whose services are available to Missionary Churches, and who are not in full-time employment of another organization may apply to the president of the denomination for approval as denominational evangelists.
 - (b) They must be approved, affirmed in their calling, and recommended by the region in which they live.

- (c) Approval for certification shall be made by the General Oversight Council upon recommendation by the president.
 - (d) Once approved, they shall report annually to the regional conference and to the denomination on the appropriate report form, and quarterly to the regional director and president.
- (3) Qualifications for benefits to be received by regional and denominational evangelists are outlined in the policy manual of the Missionary Church.

7. Discipline of Ministers

All members in the church are expected to conduct their lives according to the standards set forth in Scripture. Those who hold positions of ministerial leadership in the church are held to an even stricter accountability (Jas 3:1; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:7-9). Such conduct includes moral purity (1 Cor 6:9-10), personal honesty (Eph 4:25), and biblical fidelity (2 Tim 3:14-17; Rom 16:17-18). Ministers are to be consistent examples of authentic Christianity as they seek to emulate the character of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:28-29; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:18). Furthermore, ministers shall promote the unity of the church (Eph 4:3; 1 Cor 3:16-17) rather than seeking to divide it (Titus 3:10-11).

- a. Purpose of Discipline. The church is commanded to discipline its members when they continue in open and habitual sin (Matt 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5:1-13). Church discipline has multiple purposes including the following:
 - (1) Encouraging the sinning member to repent, thus restoring him/her to fellowship with Christ and the church (2 Cor 2:6-11, 7:8-10; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15).
 - (2) Warning other members against such sin (1 Tim 5:19-20).
 - (3) Upholding and maintaining the moral purity and blameless testimony of the church (1 Cor 5:6-7).
- b. Process of Discipline. No accusation shall be entertained against a minister unless it is brought by two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19). Should any minister depart from the standard of Scripture and engage in conduct which conflicts with biblical principles of holiness, the steps of discipline outlined in Matthew 18:16-18; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; Titus 3:10; and elsewhere in Scripture shall be followed.
 - (1) The following steps shall be taken in the process of enforcing church discipline.
 - (a) Those making a formal accusation shall do so in writing to the minister, the minister's local church governing board and the regional director.
 - (b) If contacted, the local church governing board shall make a thorough review of the matter. If they deem a thorough investigation advisable, they shall contact the regional or district director within 24 hours of their decision.
 - (c) When contacted by the local church governing board, the regional or district director shall make a thorough investigation of the matter. If he determines guilt, he shall take appropriate steps of admonishment or discipline which may include temporary suspension from ministry.
 - (d) In the event no satisfactory adjustment is made, the regional or district director shall bring the matter to the attention of the regional or district board for appropriate action in consultation with the local church governing board. If the offense is of sufficient magnitude so as to call into question the moral purity and blameless testimony of the minister or church, the regional or district board may suspend the minister's credential. Action shall be taken by the regional or district board within three months.

- (2) In the event that a credentialed person becomes separated from his/her spouse, in order to guard the integrity of the ministry and to deal redemptively with the persons involved, he/she will be given an immediate leave of absence from duties. Within the next eight weeks the following steps shall be completed to resolve the situation:
 - (a) A committee shall be appointed by the appropriate licensing board;
 - (b) This committee shall examine the case, attempt to effect a redemptive solution, and recommend appropriate action; and
 - (c) The appropriate licensing board shall take action.

(1 Tim 3:2, 4-5 and 4:12; Titus 1:7)
 - (3) The entire process shall be carried out and enforced in a spirit of Christian love, care and sensitivity (Gal 6:1).
- c. Removal of Disciplinary Status and Possible Reinstatement. When repentance is evident and after a minimum period of suspension, during which time the disciplined minister demonstrates genuine intent to “walk in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:24-25), application may be made for removal of disciplinary status. In no case will the possibility of restoration to ministry be considered prior to removal of disciplinary status. Once disciplinary status is removed, application for reinstatement may be made, though in certain cases, restoration to ministry may not be possible.
- (1) “Minimum period of suspension” shall be defined as:
 - (a) In the case of sexual immorality (e.g., adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, etc.), two years
 - (b) In the case of other inappropriate sexual behavior, six months
 - (c) In the case of other moral deviation, six months
 - (d) In the case of deviations from the doctrine and practices of the Missionary Church, six months.
 - (2) This application must be made to the region or district which acted to suspend the credential previously.
 - (3) The entire process shall be carried out and enforced in a spirit of Christian love, care and sensitivity (Gal 6:1).
- d. Agreement of Ministers to Submit to the Process of Church Discipline. Every person who holds any credential with the Missionary Church explicitly consents to submit to the process of church discipline outlined above.
- e. The Right of Appeal under Due Process. A disciplined minister has the right, under this Constitution, to appeal a decision. This process is outlined in Article XVIII, “Due Process Procedure.”
8. Voluntary Surrender of Credentials
- Any minister who voluntarily surrenders his credentials and seeks reinstatement of said credentials must do so within the jurisdiction of the region where the credentials were originally surrendered. In the event the minister has moved to another region, the regional board of the former region may refer the consideration to the new region.

9. Inactive Ministers

Ordained ministers who have discontinued active ministry shall be put on an inactive list. After three years of such inactivity, the regional board shall recall the ministers' credentials, unless valid circumstances have caused such inactivity.

Unordained ministers who have discontinued active ministry shall have their credentials recalled by the regional board after one year of inactivity. They may still request to have their names on an available list.

Reinstatement to either ordained or licensed status is possible if ministers resume active service. They must make application to the regional board who will appoint a committee to interview them. The regional board will take final action upon the recommendation of this examining committee. Credentials will be restored if such action is favorable.

10. Missionary Status

Licensed and ordained missionaries shall be members of the regional conference in which they hold local church membership during the time they are on active duty, on furlough, or on definite leave of absence. In all other cases, they are members of the regional conference in which they hold residence just as other licensed and ordained ministers. No missionary, regardless of status, can be a voting member of two regional conferences.

11. Reporting

All ministers shall submit an annual report to their respective regional director. All missionaries shall submit their report to the director of World Partners.

12. Retired Ministers

Retired ministers are encouraged to hold their membership in a Missionary Church in the locality in which they reside. When credentialed ministers in the Missionary Church retire, having completed at least 25 years of approved ministry, they shall retain their credentials. In circumstances where an individual entered ministry later in life and was unable to complete 25 years of active ministry and was serving continuously until retirement, special consideration may be given by the regional board.

Ministers who are both retired and inactive may attend their regional and district conference, if a member of one, and submit an annual report but are not required to do so.

ARTICLE XVII — LOCAL CHURCH

A. MEMBER CHURCHES

1. Definition

a. A member church within the Missionary Church shall adopt the Constitution and Bylaws of the Missionary Church and meet the qualifications for one of the member church classes as defined by policies established by the Ministry Leadership Council and General Oversight Council, including:

- (1) Forming – A church in the early stages of development that is under the direction of a regional director, or his designee, and intends to be recognized or organized.
- (2) Recognized – A church which is under the direction of and has been approved by the regional board, or its designee, but has not yet chartered as an organized church.
- (3) Organized – A church that has completed the Procedure for Chartering a Missionary Church.

- b. If membership in a local church falls below 15 baptized members (16 years or older), supervision and governance of that church shall revert to the regional or district board. This arrangement shall continue as long as the regional or district board deems necessary.
- c. The same requirements for chartering a member church within the Missionary Church, Inc., must continue to be met in perpetuity for organized churches to remain in good standing.

2. Procedure for Chartering a Missionary Church

- a. The pastoral leadership shall be duly credentialed by the denomination after being recommended and approved by the regional or district board.
- b. There shall be at least 15 baptized believers (16 years or older) in the church.
- c. The church shall be fully informed of and in agreement with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Missionary Church, Inc., and the Missionary Church Articles of Faith and Practice.
- d. The church shall be informed of and agree to the responsibilities of a Missionary Church in proportionately contributing their share to the ongoing ministries of their region, district, and the denomination.
- e. The pastor and a steering committee shall serve as the examining committee to recommend applicants for charter membership.
- f. At a duly called meeting of the church, the approved applicants for charter membership shall by a 75% majority vote approve an action to join the Missionary Church agreeing to the responsibilities mentioned above.
- g. At a duly called meeting of the church, the regional director or his representative may receive charter members and preside over the organization of the church.
- h. In addition to the pastor, the church shall be organized with a leadership team of at least three non-familial officers, deacons, elders, or their equivalent who are responsible for fiduciary and spiritual oversight.
- i. The newly organized church shall submit an application to the regional board for approval as an organized church.

3. Use of Property

The buildings and properties of the Missionary Church are not to be used for activities that oppose our core beliefs as articulated in our Articles of Faith and Practice.

4. Discipline

Any local church which fails to live up to the spirit of this Constitution, or which for other sufficient reason disturbs the fellowship of the denomination, shall be admonished by the regional or district director or by other persons appointed for the purpose by the regional or district board; and if the church fails to comply with the demands laid before it, it may, after full investigation and on recommendation of the regional or district conference by a two-thirds vote, have its charter removed by a two-thirds vote of the Ministry Leadership Council.

5. Fiscal Year

Each subsidiary of the Missionary Church, per federal law, is required to have the same fiscal year (January 1-December 31) as the Missionary Church, Inc.

6. Dissolution Clause

Each subsidiary of the Missionary Church is required to have a dissolution clause in its articles of incorporation and bylaws in compliance with federal 501(c)(3) nonprofit regulations.

7. Disassociation

Churches desiring to disassociate as member churches of the Missionary Church, following the regional or district director or his representative meeting with the membership, shall at a duly called meeting of the church by a 75% vote of all members present approve an action to disassociate from the Missionary Church.

B. MEMBERSHIP WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH

1. Definition

- a. Regular Membership. Regular members are persons who give clear testimony to and evidence of saving faith in Christ, have been subsequently baptized by immersion and have been examined and publicly received by a local Missionary Church. Candidates who as believers have been baptized in another manner may be admitted to membership if they are willing to be immersed as the Lord may lead.

Other requirements for membership in the Missionary Church shall be those set forth in Article IV.B.7.

Voting privileges are extended only to members 16 years of age or older.

- b. Dual Membership. The requirements for dual membership shall be the same as for regular membership and may be granted under the following conditions:
 - (1) Members who are living in an area where there is no Missionary Church are permitted to become members of a church in the community where they are living and at the same time retain their membership in the Missionary Church home church, if it is acceptable to the receiving church and the home church. Ministers and licensed Christian workers who are serving outside the Missionary Church are permitted to become members of a church in that community upon approval of the regional or district board.
 - (2) Students and teachers at Bethel University and who attend or serve in a Missionary Church may be accepted for membership while retaining their membership in a home church.
 - (3) Members of or approved workers in non-Missionary Churches elsewhere, desiring membership in a Missionary Church, but whose membership should continue in a home church for reasons known and accepted by the local Missionary Church may be granted the privilege of dual membership.

2. Commitment

Members shall commit themselves to the pursuit of the Christian life in conformity to the statements of doctrine and lifestyle of the Missionary Church and the following Covenant of Membership:

COVENANT OF MEMBERSHIP

Having been led to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into this covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We covenant, by the aid of the Holy Spirit:

- (1) To work together in Christian love; to join in mutual labors for the kingdom of Christ; to strive loyally for the advancement of this church in holiness, knowledge, and love; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines;

- (2) To contribute cheerfully and regularly, as God prospers us, to the support of this church and its worldwide ministries;
- (3) To maintain private devotions and family devotions where possible, to endeavor to bring early to a saving knowledge of Christ all over whom we have the care and influence, to walk circumspectly in the world, to be just in our dealings and faithful in our engagements;
- (4) To care for one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress, to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech, to be slow to take offense and always ready for reconciliation; and
- (5) To witness faithfully to the saving and keeping power of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ so that in every way we bring lost men and women to a saving knowledge of Him.

3. Discipline of Members

All members of Christ's church are expected to conduct their lives according to the standards set forth in Scripture. Such conduct includes moral purity, personal honesty, and biblical fidelity. Members are to be consistent examples of authentic Christianity as they seek to emulate the character of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, members shall promote the unity of the church rather than seeking to divide it (Rom 8:28-29, 16:17-18; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:22-23; Eph 4:3 and 25, 5:18; 2 Tim 3:4-17; Titus 3:10-11).

a. Purpose of Discipline. The church is commanded to discipline its members when they continue in open and habitual sin. Church discipline has multiple purposes including the following:

- (1) Encouraging the sinning members to repent, thus restoring him/her to fellowship with Christ and the church.
- (2) Warning other members against such sin.
- (3) Upholding and maintaining the moral purity and blameless testimony of the church.

(Matt 18:15-18; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 2 Cor 2:6-11, 7:8-10; 1 Tim 5:19-20; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15)

b. Process of Discipline. Should any member depart from the standard of Scripture and engage in conduct which conflicts with biblical principles of holiness, the steps of discipline outlined in Scripture shall be followed. Hence, some or all of the following steps shall be taken in the process of enforcing church discipline:

- (1) Private reproof of the sinning member.
- (2) Reproof before two or three witnesses.
- (3) Public reproof before the church.
- (4) Termination of membership and possible disassociation and severance of fellowship.

The entire process of church discipline outlined above shall be carried out and enforced in a spirit of Christian love, care and sensitivity.

(Matt 18:16-18; Rom 16:17; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Gal 6:1; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15; 1 Tim 6:3-5; Titus 3:10)

c. Enactment of Discipline. It is hoped that the preliminary steps of discipline outlined in sections b.(1), (2) and (3) above will result in repentance on the part of the sinning member. However, if there is no indication of repentance after these steps are taken, the sinning person's membership shall be terminated in accordance with section b.(4) above. Such termination of membership shall be decided by the Governing Board after due consideration and prayer. The reason for termination shall be stated in a pastoral letter and delivered to the terminated member.

- d. Agreement of Members to Submit to the Process of Church Discipline. Every person who makes application for membership or who maintains membership in a local Missionary Church explicitly consents to submit to the process of church discipline outlined above in section 3.a, b and c.

4. Inactive Members

A member failing to share in the fellowship and responsibilities of his/her church for a period of one year without just cause shall, after due personal counsel, forfeit his/her membership.

5. Transfer of Membership

Members in good standing moving from one locality to another where there is a Missionary Church shall at their request be given letters of transfer. In case of a pastor moving from one Missionary Church to another, the memberships of the pastor and such members of his family as accompany him and are members in good standing in the Missionary Church from which they move shall automatically transfer to the new church of which he becomes pastor.

C. LOCAL CONFERENCE

1. Membership

The local conference shall be composed of the voting members of the local church. Such members must be sixteen years of age or over.

2. Meetings

Local conference meetings shall be held at least once a year. Special meetings may be called by the regional or district director or the church board.

3. Voting

Voting shall be done by the eligible members present in a meeting duly called for the transacting of the business at hand. Absentee or proxy voting is not permitted. (For a pastoral vote, an expression may be obtained from adherents, but this is not to be a part of the official vote.)

4. Bylaws

Each local conference shall adopt its own bylaws in accordance with this Constitution and the acts of the General Conference and its regional conference.

D. OFFICERS

An officer in the church shall hold to sound doctrine as defined in this Constitution in Article IV.A., shall model the characteristics of spiritual maturity and Christian life including conformity to the standards in Article IV.B., shall evidence a God-given gift for leadership, shall have developed both the heart of a servant and the skills of a leader, and shall know how to exercise authority for the building up of the church and for the glory of God.

Not all mature Christians have gifts of leadership and all officers do not have identical gifts or characteristics. Leadership functions include guidance of the church in establishing goals and objectives, helping members identify and use their gifts for the good of both the person and the church, keeping satisfaction of personal and group needs in balance, teaching, counseling, and administering discipline.

The officers of each church may be pastor, deacons, elders, Sunday school superintendent or Christian education director, trustees, chairman, if other than pastor, secretary and/or treasurer and other officers as may be needed. These officers shall be members of the local church.

The above standard shall be applied to other leaders as defined in the local church bylaws.

1. Pastor

- a. Selection. The manner of pastoral selection shall be left to the decision of each region, with the provision that the local church, the pastor, and the region/district shall be involved in the negotiations.

The pastor shall be chosen from among persons approved as ministers in the Missionary Church.

Other than in situations of need, only men may serve as a pastor in a church with one pastor or as a senior pastor in a church with multiple staff. (See Position Paper IX: "The Role of Women in Ministry")

- b. Duties. A pastor shall be an example to the flock of God by keeping himself free from all worldly entanglements and above reproach in all matters of conduct and finance. It shall be his duty to preach the Word; to exercise prayerful and diligent oversight of the church, watching for the souls thereof as one that must give account; and to seek earnestly the salvation of the lost, that in all things he may be approved unto God. The pastor shall be recognized as head of the local church and shall be responsible for the public services and general promotion of the church activities. He shall be an advisory member of all committees. It shall be his prerogative, with the approval of the church board, to arrange for all special meetings and to engage the necessary help for the same.

2. Ministry Staff

Full or part-time ministry staff may be hired provided the person has been approved as a minister in the Missionary Church or has been approved by the regional or district board for the ministry position.

3. Chairman of the Local Conference

- a. Selection. The pastor shall serve as chairman of the local conference unless the local church bylaws allow for another of its members to serve this function.
- b. Duties. The chairman of the local conference shall preside at all meetings of the local conference. The chairman of the local conference shall serve as chairman of the church board unless the local church bylaws specify otherwise.

4. Elders

- a. Selection. There may be one or more elders in each congregation as the local conference may determine. The process of selection shall include nominations from the membership of the local conference, review by the leadership and election by ballot by the local conference. Term limits shall be for a specified time as determined by the local conference. Their qualifications shall be such as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.
- b. Duties. The elders shall assist the pastor in the spiritual duties of the church, primarily in matters such as spiritual advice, leadership accountability, church discipline, and making disciples.

5. Deacons

- a. Selection. There shall be one or more deacons in each congregation as the local conference may determine. They shall be chosen from the congregation which they are to serve and shall be elected by ballot for such term as may be determined by the local conference. Their qualifications shall be such as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.
- b. Duties. The deacons shall assist the pastor in the spiritual duties of the church, provide the emblems for the Lord's Supper, and administer the relief program of the church.

6. General Sunday School Superintendent

- a. Selection. The general Sunday school superintendent shall be a person of deep piety and shall be in full sympathy with the doctrines and policies of the denomination. The superintendent shall be a member of the church and shall be elected by ballot for such a term as may be determined by the local conference.
- b. Duties. The superintendent shall have general oversight of the Sunday school. The superintendent shall submit to the local conference an annual report of the school. In all matters of special importance, the superintendent shall consult the pastor before decisions are made or actions taken.

7. Trustees

- a. Selection. Trustees shall be elected by ballot at the annual business meeting of the local conference for such term of office as may be determined by the local conference, subject to civil law.
- b. Duties. A chairman shall be elected in such manner as the local conference shall determine, and a secretary who shall keep an accurate record of all meetings. The trustees shall hold in trust the property and shall be responsible for its care and maintenance, unless other provisions are made for holding the property. They shall make an annual report to the local conference.

8. Church Secretary

- a. Selection. The church secretary may be elected by ballot at the annual business meeting of the local conference or may be appointed by the church board from the members of the board.
- b. Duties. It shall be the duty of the secretary to keep a record of the proceedings of each local conference meeting and also of each church board meeting. The secretary shall keep a church register and shall issue transfers, letters and certificates as authorized by either the local conference or the church board.

9. Treasurer

- a. Selection. The local conference shall have the option of either directing the church board to appoint the church treasurer from the church membership, or including the office of the church treasurer in its regular elections.
- b. Duties. It shall be the duty of the treasurer to receive and to hold all monies of the church except that from organizations in the church which have their own treasurers; to issue receipts where necessary; to pay all obligations regularly as directed by the church board; and to give a report of the treasury to each local conference meeting or the church board as required.

E. CHURCH BOARD

1. Membership

The church board shall include the pastor and any of the following: chairman of the local conference, deacons or chairman of the board of deacons, elders or chairman of the board of elders, director of Christian education, chairman of the trustee board, church secretary, church treasurer, and as many others as the local conference may decide. Members of the church board shall be members of the local church.

2. Meetings

The church board shall meet at least once each quarter. Special meetings may be called by the chairman or at the request of three members of the board.

3. Duties

The duties of the church board shall be the transaction of business, prayer, and consultation relative to the work of the church. The board shall make arrangements for the support of the pastor and such workers as may be engaged by them. It shall pass upon all applicants for church membership.

The church board, exclusive of the pastor, shall represent the church in negotiating for a pastor.

F. AUXILIARY ORGANIZATIONS

There may be organized in each local congregation a Sunday school, men's organization, women's organization, Missionary Youth Fellowship, and such organizations as authorized by the local conference. Auxiliary organizations shall be subject to the bylaws and regulations of the local conference and the respective regional conference.

ARTICLE XVIII — DUE PROCESS PROCEDURE FOR MEMBERS AND ENTITIES OF THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

An appeal from a decision of any entity of the Missionary Church begins at the level appropriate for the appeal. The right of appeal includes the right of the body hearing the appeal to endorse or overturn a previous ruling.

An appeal from the decision of the pastor shall begin with the local church board.

An appeal from the decision of the local church board begins with the district board if the church is within a district and with the regional board if not within an organized district.

An appeal from the decision of the district director begins with the district board or regional board.

An appeal of the decision of the regional director begins with the regional board.

An appeal from the decision of a district within a region begins with the regional board.

An appeal from the decision of the regional or district board outside a region begins with the General Oversight Council.

General Time Lines and Administrative Details:

1. Within 14 days, the decision of the pastor may be appealed in writing to the church board.
 - a. Within five days, the chairman of the church board or his designee shall meet and review the appeal with those making the appeal. When the pastor is chairman of the church board, the board shall appoint one of its members, other than the pastor, to review the appeal.
 - b. A hearing shall be set up within 21 days of the notification of appeal.
2. Within five days of notification, the decision of the church board may be appealed in writing to the regional board, if the church is not in a district, or district board through the secretary of the region or district. The regional or district director or his designee will set a hearing before the regional or district board or an appropriate committee no later than its next regularly scheduled meeting.
3. Within five days of notification, the decision of a district board in a region may be appealed in writing to the regional board through the secretary of the region. The regional director or his designee will set a hearing before the regional board or an appropriate committee no later than its next regularly scheduled meeting.
4. Within five days of notification, the decision of the regional or district board, not in a region, may be appealed in writing to the General Oversight Council through the president of the Missionary Church who will contact the regional or district director and review all appropriate materials involved. Within 30 days, a teleconference or hearing will be arranged with the General Oversight Council.

5. The General Oversight Council shall serve as the final arbitrator in all cases referred to it. Appeals to the General Oversight Council are discretionary appeals.
6. In paragraphs 1.b. through 5. above:
 - a. Those making the appeal may be represented by counsel.
 - b. Minutes shall be kept.
 - c. The decision shall be given in writing within 10 days to the parties involved in the appeal.
7. In matters of faith and practice not specifically addressed by the Constitution, where a member or entity of the Missionary Church appears, in the judgment of the body having jurisdiction, to deviate from the traditional position of the Missionary Church, that body has the right to rule.

ARTICLE XIX — PARLIAMENTARY AUTHORITY

The rules contained in the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* shall govern the General Conference in all cases to which they are applicable and in which they are not inconsistent with this Constitution and any special rules of order the General Conference may adopt.

In the same manner each regional conference, district conference, local conference, and all other constitutionally delineated entities of the Missionary Church shall be governed by *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*.

ARTICLE XX — AMENDMENTS

This Constitution and Bylaws of the Missionary Church may be amended at any regular General Conference by a two-thirds vote of the conference, provided that all recommended amendments be published at least 30 days prior to the date set for the General Conference. Published at least 30 days prior to General Conference means notification of regional directors, ministers, missionaries, delegates and churches. There shall be one reading of all amendments in a meeting prior to the one in which they shall be voted upon.

Recommendations for amendments may be submitted by the Constitution Committee, the General Oversight Council or the Ministry Leadership Council.

Recommendations for amendments from departmental boards must come through the General Oversight Council.

Recommendations for amendments from local churches, districts, or regions must come through the regional governing body. Such action of the regional governing body must receive a two-thirds vote.

POSITION PAPERS

POSITION PAPERS AND THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution of the Missionary Church is the basic statement of denominational beliefs and practices. Constitutional items are protected against rash and hurried action by the body by means of a set time for advance notice and a two-thirds affirmative action by the body.

Position papers serve various purposes. These papers usually enlarge on specific sections of the Constitution or address some other position of the church that needs to be elucidated for the constituency. Some are for application or amplification of our basic doctrinal positions. Some documents tend to be developed as the direct result of a social issue in need of clarification. Some position papers apply biblical principles where no specific Scripture may directly mention that issue. All position papers address situations that are relevant to the day in which we live and add to the denominational stance amidst a broader ecclesiastical dialogue.

The position papers clarify or amplify the body of the Constitution. They require a two-thirds majority vote of General Conference for adoption. Some of these papers are used as a part of the credentialing process for prospective ministers.

I — AN EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY FOR THE MISSIONARY CHURCH

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

Human beings were the zenith of God's creative activity. The first pair was charged with the superintendence of God's created order in a manner which would demonstrate responsibility to both the Creator and the creation (Gen 1:27-31). Clearly, since humans are to have dominion over the created order, they must seek to understand it. Therefore, the quest for knowledge is a necessary activity. In like manner, if humans are to be responsible to God, they must know something of God's character, who God is and what he requires.

Education is the discovery and implementation of truth, truth about God and truth about creation, in such manner that persons become all that they are meant to be, accountable stewards who are fully aware of responsibilities to God, others and the world.

THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION

The content of education defines the proper subject matter of the educational process. The church has historically thought of education as the study of a two-fold revelation, designated as special revelation and general revelation.

Special Revelation

Special revelation is the Bible, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as commonly received. The Bible reveals propositional truth about God, man, and the universe, truth which cannot be discovered from any other source. The Bible informs about origins and presents human activity within the circle of God's sovereignty. The Bible makes human existence meaningful and assures a destiny with purpose. Biblical absolutes are intended to provide the foundation stones for all structures of society. Therefore, the study of the Bible, both as an end in itself and a means to an end (the proper interpretation of the meaning of the universe) is a legitimate pursuit.

General Revelation

General revelation comes from observance of the universe. By observing, categorizing and experimenting with the created order, knowledge is gathered about God, others and the world. Therefore, study of every facet of the universe, including mankind as relation to it and responsibility toward it, is a legitimate pursuit.

The Integration of Faith and Learning

Special revelation and general revelation have a relationship that is both hierarchical and complementary. The relationship is hierarchical in that special revelation always takes precedence over general revelation and provides a framework for what is learned from the study of general revelation. Exploration of the universe will yield insight into its form and function, but only the Bible reveals the purpose of the existence of the universe. The relationship is complementary in that neither will yield information which contradicts the other when properly understood. The study of both is essential for a balanced understanding of the nature and meaning of things. An adequate worldview cannot be developed apart from such a holistic approach to education.

THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

Meaningful education enrolls the student at the cradle and graduates the student at the grave.

The Home and Education

The first and foremost responsibility for education rests with parents. Both the Old and New Testaments elevate the home to the level of an educational institution. God said to Israel:

“These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:6-7).

The New Testament ideal is found in Ephesians 6:4:

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children. Instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”

While both of these passages seemingly refer to religious education, they also imply that a spiritual context is essential to all learning. It is in the home that the child first learns about others and the world around him. Interpersonal relationships, formative attitudes, habit patterns and value systems are directly related to home training. The church properly responds to this awareness when it makes available to parents the support and resources necessary to fulfill the task.

The School and Education

Since it is logistically difficult for most homes to provide an adequate education, parents have chosen to band together in a community to provide a formal setting for their children’s education. In the Western world this has assumed the form of compulsory public education. Some parents, out of concern to teach a specific value system or religious heritage, have provided alternate education programs, the private school and homeschooling. It is the right of parents to choose public, private or home schooling without interference from the state.

All Christians have a biblical responsibility as citizens to seek to use existing structure to influence community schools to reflect their desired philosophy of life and value system. In a pluralistic society, Christians should request that traditional biblical values be fairly presented in the marketplace of ideas.

Higher Education

Contemporary complex social structures and the sheer mass of knowledge about the universe require a longer period of formal schooling than was necessary in former generations. The same biblical concerns which bring the church into involvement with education in the home and school will properly carry that concern into higher education. The need for an integration of faith and learning never ceases. Higher education is only a difference of degree, not a difference of kind. The more intense and specialized curricula of higher education must be placed in the correct context, a balanced worldview which gives correct place to God, others and the universe. Hence, the church should encourage her people to pursue higher education.

From within the context of the church, the Holy Spirit calls certain individuals to specific roles (Eph 4:11-16). Both the Old and New Testaments, and the church through the centuries, have recognized that God calls and anoints some to special leadership roles. Appropriate programs in Christian liberal arts colleges, Bible colleges and theological seminaries are essential if those who are called by the Holy Spirit are to receive proper training. Such programs of study will be designed to allow those called of God to develop their fullest potential for leadership roles at all levels of the church.

The Local Church and Education

In addition to providing support for the home and sponsoring institutions of formal education, the church should provide programs and opportunities for all of her adherents to learn more about God, the Bible, and Christian living. Every activity and organization of the church should have education as one of its goals. The discovery and implementation of truth is always a proper concern of the church. When seen in this light, everything the church does has an element of education.

EDUCATION AND THE GREAT COMMISSION

The Great Commission as given by the Lord makes teaching an obligation of the church (Matt 28:19-20). It is essential for educational activity to accompany evangelism. The nurture which follows is, by definition, a process which begins at the new birth and continues throughout life. The discovery and implementation of truth to every arena of life, and especially the application of a Christian value system, are essential to discipleship.

— Adopted by the 1991 General Conference

II — THE GIFT OF TONGUES

Introduction

A revival of speaking in tongues influenced North America and other parts of the world in the last century, and the effects of this revival continue today. This movement has had a broad scope geographically, culturally and socially. So it is not surprising that there has also been a wide variation in the experiences and degrees of involvement in this phenomenon, as well as in the acceptance or rejection of the people and groups who espouse this teaching. Some who speak in tongues teach and insist that the gift of tongues is the evidence or sign that one is filled with the Holy Spirit. Some who do not speak in tongues teach and insist that the gift of tongues is not for this age, but was only for the time of the apostles and the birth of the church. Others find themselves somewhere inbetween.

The Missionary Church believes the entire record of the Bible concerning the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of tongues must be understood against this larger backdrop.

A Spirit-Filled Life Will Be Characterized by Both the Fruit of the Spirit and Proper Use of the Gifts of the Spirit

We believe that every Christian should be filled with the Spirit. This truth must continue to have strong emphasis in our teaching and preaching. The Spirit-filled life has been a basic tenet of the Missionary Church from its beginning, and our Constitution states what we believe concerning the work of the Spirit in people's lives: The divine work of making men holy begins in repentance and regeneration, yet through a subsequent crisis experience the believer is to die to self, to be purified in heart, and to be filled with the Holy Spirit so that he may be separated wholly unto God to serve him in righteousness and holiness. After the crisis experience, the believer is to be perfected in holiness in the fear of God and to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Historically, the Missionary Church has stood for a warm-hearted, vital experience of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. We have endeavored to hold to a correct interpretation of the Christian life as presented in the Scriptures. We believe there is an experience of the Spirit's fullness subsequent to the conversion experience. The vitality of this Spirit-filled life is dependent on a continual day-by-day abiding in Christ in complete abandonment to his will. This life will be characterized by both the fruit of the Spirit and a proper use of the gifts of the Spirit. We still maintain this position.

Possessing Spiritual Gifts Is Not Evidence for the Fullness of the Spirit

Gifts can obviously be counterfeited. The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23 are sobering: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" If some of the greater gifts, such as prophecy, can be exercised so as to be regarded by Jesus as a work of iniquity, we should not be surprised when other gifts also become a counterfeit of Satan.

So while we recognize the gifts of the Holy Spirit as taught in Scripture to be valid gifts for the church today, no particular gift or gifts are the necessary or required evidence of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, nor are they considered as the evidence of Christian maturity.

Although there are several instances in Scripture where people spoke in a tongue following an infilling of the Holy Spirit, this is not normative throughout Scripture. We believe these instances are descriptive of what happened during a unique time of historical transition, chronicled in the book of Acts. However, the absence of explicit commands in the New Testament letters linking the practice of tongues to Spirit-filled living indicates that these instances are not intended to be prescriptive for all Christians in the church era. Furthermore, to insist that speaking in tongues is evidence of the Holy Spirit's fullness invalidates the experience of all those believers whose lives have given abundant evidence of the power of the Spirit but who have never spoken in tongues.

The Gifts of the Spirit Are for “The Common Good” in the Body of Christ

Every Christian has at least one gift. “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit “just as he determines” (1 Cor 12:11). Christians should not expect to receive or to exercise any one particular gift, several gifts, or all the gifts. With this fact in mind Paul asked, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?” (1 Cor 12:29-30). It is clear, grammatically and contextually, that the intended answer to these questions is, “No.” Therefore, Christians need each other.

Gifts are always related to service and are not to be used as a measure of Christian experience. We agree with A. B. Simpson when he said, “...our possession of these gifts does not affect our personal salvation and sanctification, and our standing with **God as subjects** of His grace.”¹ Gifts are not to be exercised selfishly, but are for the profit of the whole body.

The Gift of Tongues Must Be Practiced with Orderliness, Unity and Love

Speaking in tongues is referred to in scripture both in corporate and private worship. The guidelines for speaking in tongues in a corporate setting are found in 1 Corinthians 14 and state 1) that no more than two or, at the most, three may speak in a tongue during a service, and 2) there must be one present who can interpret. Paul says that in the church he would rather speak five intelligible words than ten thousand in a tongue. Private speaking in tongues refers to a private conversation with God. Paul sees limited value in this, however, since the benefit consists only in the personal edification of the speaker—not the edification of the entire body (1 Cor 14:2, 4).

The gift of tongues is not intended to be divisive. However, due to the passion people have for their positions, both the acceptance and the rejection of tongues have often caused division in churches, homes, and other groups. Pride and division in the Corinthian church created problems in the unity of the body. The instruction clearly shows that loveless Christianity, unbiblical judgment of others, rifts in a congregation, and refusal to listen to the teaching of Scripture are not of the Holy Spirit.

Christians Should Be Known by Their Fruit Rather Than by Their Gifts

The Missionary Church considers the biblical distinction between the gifts and the graces of the Spirit important. The gifts of the Spirit are clearly presented in 1 Corinthians 12. The graces of the Spirit are bound together by love (1 Cor), and the desire for spiritual gifts (1 Cor) must be preceded by earnest pursuit of love. The graces of the Spirit are also identified as fruit (Gal). It is evident that one may possess a gift or several of the gifts of the Spirit without enjoying the necessary graces of the Spirit. A gift, such as prophecy, can be exercised without the grace of love and thus be little more than noise (1 Cor).

The graces or fruit of the Spirit make it possible for the Christian to exercise the gifts of the Spirit in a manner that will bring glory to God and will bring his blessing upon and enhance the testimony of the church of Jesus Christ. Since Paul presents love as “the most excellent way,” it suggests that love is the true essence of all the graces of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:31b). The truth of 1 Corinthians 13 indicates that this is so. All of the other graces or fruit spring out of love: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

Christians should be known by their fruit rather than by their gifts. The most visible evidence of the fullness of the Spirit in the life of the Christian is love: love for God, love for the body of Christ, and love for a lost world.

Summary

The believer must have a passion for the Person of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of gifts. The Bible clearly teaches that the Christian life is a relationship with a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is made real to us by the Holy Spirit.

The Missionary Church believes that the consuming passion of the Holy Spirit is to present and glorify Christ (John 15:26). Anything that detracts from the central theme, Jesus Christ, lessens the effectiveness of the church. Like Paul, we are “resolved to know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Seeking manifestations more than seeking

¹ A. B. Simpson, *Gifts and Grace* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), p. 1.

Christ is a danger to be avoided. To quote A. B. Simpson again, “When we seek anything less than God we are sure to miss his highest blessing and likely to fall into side issues and serious errors.”²

Pastors should teach the Spirit-filled, victorious Christian life—not as an option for the Christian, but as a necessity. Our congregations need to know the deepened experience of the grace of God in their lives. We must not lose sight of what God has already done for us or deny his past blessings. We counsel our people to be “led by the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:14) and “eagerly desire the greater gifts” (1 Cor 12:31, 14:39).

— Revised by the 2003 General Conference

III — THE ASSURANCE OF THE BELIEVER

We recognize there are committed Christians who hold differing views concerning the assurance of the believer. Because of our commitment to the Great Commission and our Purpose Statement, we will not make the differing views of the assurance of the believer an issue of division or disunity. We will proclaim the holiness of God, the love of God for all persons, and the call to holy living, regardless of differing views on the assurance of the believer. Regional directors and credentialing committees are to use this position paper in the credentialing process.

The Scriptures teach that the Christian believer may have the blessed assurance of being saved. He need not live in uncertainty as to his relationship with God. He can know beyond doubt that his sins are forgiven and he is a child of God.

Assurance of Acceptance

First, the believer may be assured by the witness of the Spirit, that inward evidence of acceptance with God. “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom 8:16). “Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:24). The Spirit bears witness after faith has been exercised in the promises of God (Cf. Heb 11:5-6).

Other evidences are also given by which the believer may be certain about his saved relationship. The first Epistle of John, which centers on knowing, conditions that certainty on such evidences as conforming one’s life to the Word of God (2:3-5); doing what is right (2:29, 3:7-10); loving fellow Christians (3:14-15); possessing an uncondemning heart (3:19-21); and living victoriously over sin and Satan (5:18).

Assurance of Security

There is another aspect to assurance, the certainty of being kept. We may enjoy assurance of present acceptance, but what about the future? Can we have the assurance of perseverance? Sometimes defeated people are discouraged from beginning the Christian life for fear they will not “hold out.”

There is no question about the gracious purpose and the power of God to keep his own from falling, and to present them before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy (Jude 24). God’s enabling power far exceeds even our asking. He “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph 3:20). God is greater than every degree and kind of opposition. Paul therefore asks, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). No outside enemy or force is strong enough to sever us from the love of God. “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:37-39).

Condition of Security

We need not worry, therefore, about God’s ability or loving purpose to make us final victors. But this outcome is not automatic or inevitable. Throughout the New Testament it is consistently taught that the keeping power of God becomes effective through the exercise of faith. The elect “through faith are shielded by God’s power” (1 Pet 1:5). The writer to the

² A. B. Simpson, May 1908, C&MA Annual Report; see also A. B. Simpson, “Spiritual Sanctity,” as recorded in Richard Gilbertson, *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit: The Views of A. B. Simpson and His Contemporaries* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), p. 322.

Hebrews, addressing them as “holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling,” calls for steadfast faith: “We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first” (Heb 3:1, 14).

Let us observe that the scriptural condition for salvation is believing. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). See also John 3:16, 18; 5:24; 6:40, 47. But the word “believes” used in all of these passages is in the present tense, and it means “to believe and to continue to believe.” It is the continuous or progressive present, and implies not only an initial act of faith but a maintained attitude. Assurance of security, therefore, is for the believing one. We are saved by faith and we are kept by faith.

False Security

Nowhere in the New Testament is it suggested that a Christian can presume on his saved relationship. Nowhere is the idea conveyed that he has “arrived” and all he needs to do is “coast in” because of an initial act of faith. Nowhere is encouragement given to the backslider that since he was once saved he will always be saved. Nowhere is there any support for the antinomian heresy that a Christian can indulge in sin with impunity. On the contrary, followers of Christ are exhorted to “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation” (Matt 26:41); “be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the lawless men and fall from your secure position” (2 Pet 3:17); “be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10); hold “on to faith and a good conscience” in order to avoid shipwreck (1 Tim 1:18); “be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good” (Titus 3:8); “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Heb 10:23); “stand firm in the Lord” (Phil 4:1).

The Christian is warned of mortal dangers through salt losing its saltiness (Luke 14:34-35); through failing to remain in Christ (John 15:6); in being moved from the hope held out in the gospel (Col 1:23); in wandering from the faith (1 Tim 6:10); in escaping from the trap of the devil (2 Tim 2:24, 26); in ignoring such a great salvation (Heb 2:3); in turning away (apostatizing) from the living God (Heb 3:12); in being hardened by sin’s deceitfulness (Heb 3:13); in deliberately keeping on sinning (Heb 10:26-31); in wandering from the truth (Jas 5:19-20); in being overcome by the world (2 Pet 2:20-22); in forsaking one’s first love (Rev 2:4, 5).

This is the clear teaching of the New Testament. God’s sovereign provision is coupled with human responsibility. The declarations of Scripture are always linked with demands, the indicatives with imperatives. Security is for the one who is believing. We are kept by the power of God through faith. The classical passages on God’s keeping power, John 10 and Romans 8, both condition security on human faith evidenced in obedience. The promise of eternal life and protection from enemies is for those who listen to the voice of Christ and follow him (John 10:27-28). The promises in Romans 8:29-39 are for those who love God (vs. 28), a love which will be demonstrated by keeping the commandments of Christ (See John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:9-10; compare Matt 28:19-20).

Truth in Balance

These complementary truths, divine sovereignty and human responsibility, have not always been kept in balance. In fact, men, seizing upon one to the exclusion of the other, have tried to erect entire theological systems on only one of them. For example, Calvin, who was preceded by Augustine, erected his system on the principle of the sovereignty of God with five main points: (1) unconditional election; (2) limited atonement; (3) total moral inability and depravity; (4) irresistible grace; and (5) the final perseverance of the saints. Calvin held that God predestinated some, including babies, to be saved; others to be damned. The difference in destinies was found not in any human response to or rejection of the gospel but in the inscrutable will of God. Some of his followers have carried these principles to fatalistic extremes. They have opposed any evangelistic or missionary effort as an affront to God’s sovereignty. Many so-called Calvinists today hold greatly modified views of the system even though they still hold to the capstone of the structure “Once in grace, always in grace” or “Once saved, always saved.”

Arminius, who belonged to the generation following Calvin, attempted to counter the Calvinistic system by insisting upon (1) election conditioned upon God’s foreknowledge of individual response to the gospel; (2) atonement with the world in view; (3) moral good only through regeneration based on the faith of the individual; (4) possibility of resisting grace; (5) perseverance through the help of the Holy Spirit by the response of faith. Historically the Missionary Church has been in agreement on these five points. However, some of those who followed Arminius went much further. They built their system on the principle of human freedom to the exclusion of divine sovereignty and came out with a revised form of the heresy of Pelagianism. They denied human depravity, affirmed man’s inherent goodness, stressed human effort and volition, and ended up with salvation by works.

Final Arbiter

The final arbiter of truth is the Word of God, to which the Missionary Church is committed. The Word sets forth both the truth of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God in his sovereignty chose to create man a free being to exercise choice within his sovereign purpose.

Admittedly, the operation of both transcends human understanding, but the greatest theologian of all time, the Apostle Paul, holding to both could only bow in praise before the unsearchable wisdom of God. In the 9th chapter of Romans, he sets forth in unrelieved clarity God's initiative, purpose, and work in saving man by sovereign grace. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy." "Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?" But in the chapter which follows, man's responsibility is set forth with such emphasis that the initiative for his salvation seems to rest solely with him: "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Then the Apostle places still more responsibility on man: "And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

Then in the 11th chapter of Romans, these two great principles are repeatedly joined. The fact is stated, but the method transcends human understanding. The great theologian can only express wonder and praise as he marvels at the transcendent ways of God: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgment, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

To sum up, the Scriptures teach both divine sovereignty and human responsibility. They teach, on the one hand, the adequacy of God's provision in grace to save us, and on the other hand, the need of exercising and maintaining faith to make the provision of salvation effective. Through faith the believer may enjoy the assurance of both present acceptance and God's keeping power. But a lapse of vital, operative, obedient faith can lead to tragedy. New Testament Christians are warned that there is no escape from the consequences of persistent backsliding and that the possibility of apostasy is a biblical reality. Throughout the New Testament, Christians are urged to maintain a steadfast faith in and fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

— Revised by the 2005 General Conference

IV — ABORTION

Abortion has been catapulted into the forefront of the ethical problems confronting Christians today. The issue has been nurtured in a general climate of moral relativism, a growing sexual permissiveness, and a threatening population explosion.

The moral issue of abortion is more than a question of the freedom of a woman to control the reproductive functions of her body. It is rather a question of those circumstances under which a human being may be permitted to take the life of another.

We believe that all life is a gift of God, so that neither the life of the unborn child nor the mother may be lightly taken. We believe that in Scripture God himself has conferred divine blessing upon unborn infants and has provided penalties for actions which result in the death of the unborn.

The Missionary Church believes that abortion for reasons of personal convenience, social adjustment or economic advantage is morally wrong. Consequently, we urge our pastors and people to become well informed concerning alternatives to abortion.

At the same time, we recognize certain medical conditions which pose a serious threat to the life of the mother and which may necessitate therapeutic abortion. In these cases, the decision for abortion should be made only after there has been medical, psychological and spiritual counseling of the most sensitive kind.

We also recognize certain traumatic conditions such as rape and incest which may result in pregnancy and which can create a serious threat to the psychological well-being of the mother and any existing family. We do not believe that the scriptural answer is to end the new life which may have resulted from such traumatic circumstances. Rather, we do strongly urge that total and continual Christian understanding and support be shown by the membership of the local church to the mother and any family involved during the pregnancy and following the birth.

Furthermore, the Missionary Church believes that local congregations and individual members must accept responsibility, under God, for the acceptance and loving care of all those born into this world as a result of our strong stand against abortion and that ministries should be offered to such persons within and without the church fellowship.

— Adopted by the 1981 General Conference

V — LEADERSHIP IN THE CHURCH

Leadership is a term with many connotations. When we add the modifier “Christian,” the connotations increase. Some of these meanings come from the culture of which we are a part, and some come from Scripture. It is important that we learn to distinguish between these two sources.

There is a tendency on the part of Christians to want to define an ideal model of leadership by studying leaders in the Bible, but we must recognize that the patriarchal culture of the Old Testament and the Greco-Roman culture of the New Testament were quite different from the culture of the latter 20th century Western world. This is not to say that there are no biblical guidelines for leadership. It is only to say that the result of the biblical principles of leadership applied to our situation may look different than when applied to other cultures at other times.

For example, in the New Testament we find no highly developed church structures as we do today in the West. Organization and leadership within the early church were relatively simple. For that reason, we find no models for the leadership of our large, urban churches with their professional staffs or for denominations with national and international dimensions. To say that we find no models, however, is not to say we find no principles; and it is to those principles that we need to give careful attention as we seek to develop models for our present situation.

The first New Testament principle to be noted is that every church leader demonstrates exemplary Christian character (1 Tim 3, Titus 1:5-9). In pagan societies even to this day, character is not as important as the pragmatic ability to get results. Whoever can control spiritual power most effectively is looked to as a spiritual leader, regardless of his or her personal character or ethics. In the church, however, what a person is is more basic than what he can do. A leader is to be a living demonstration of the highest qualities of Christian life and thought and a living proof that biblical ethics work. These qualities and the living proof are not required only of leaders. Every Christian, whether in a leadership role or not, should be marked by them. The ideal is “every man mature in Christ” (Col 1:28). The point is that the basic qualification for leadership is a significant degree of spiritual maturity based on sound doctrine and continuing spiritual growth. A significant factor in this maturing process will be a lifestyle which puts into practice biblical values and which resists the molding pressures of contemporary non-Christian cultural values.

A second principle related to Christian leadership is that service is more important than status. Jesus made it clear that his followers were not to seek position or power for themselves (Matt 20:20-28; John 13:16). There is one Lord; and the words meaning “rule” (Greek words with the root arch) are never used in the New Testament in reference to relationships among Christians. So the Christian leader is not a ruler; he is a servant, although not primarily a servant of the people he serves. He is primarily a servant of God from whom he receives his guidance and direction.

For the leader to function only on the level of the group is to abdicate the role of the leader. This balance between being a servant and being a leader is demonstrated for us by Jesus himself. The accounts of the cleansing of the temple and the washing of the disciples’ feet picture for us the balance which should be found in a leader, as one who exercises authority and yet ministers to the people with the heart of a servant.

A related principle is that leadership is more a matter of function than office, of doing the ministry than of being a minister. Leadership in groups almost always begins as a ministry function and gradually becomes institutionalized into an office. The tendency, then, is to begin to think of holding the office rather than of performing the function of a servant-leader. Seeking an office for personal satisfaction or as the base for exercising authority is contrary to the biblical concept of servant-leadership.

A third principle relates to the existence of various types of leaders, ranging from the prophetic type, characterized by the ability to motivate people to obey the Word of God, to the priestly type, more akin to our modern concept of management. The latter type of leader will organize and run the programs conceived by the former, and some leaders will have varying degrees of these characteristics. The danger is that tension may arise between the two functions or between the people

carrying out the functions, or that one function will tend to predominate at the expense of the other. For this reason, some prefer to distinguish between leadership and management.

However we may define the terms, we need to recognize that the body needs all of its members and both types of leadership.

A distinction is also made between professional and lay leaders. The concept of professional church leaders is not as clear in the New Testament as the general concept that leadership is a legitimate function in the church. Professionalism has grown as the church has developed institutional identity. The cultural factors become significant when dealing with this aspect of leadership. The church in a tribe with a subsistence-level economy would not have the option of professional leaders although it would certainly need leaders. The house churches in places where there is government suppression of Christianity, as in China, do not have the option of professional leadership as we know it, but the criteria for leaders would still apply.

This does not make professional clergy unbiblical; but it does mean that we need to begin with a concept of leadership in the church which comes from biblical principles and which recognizes that some of our common concepts and patterns of leadership are more a product of twentieth century Western society than a project of biblical principles or patterns.

A fourth principle underlying leadership in the church involves the recognition by the leader and by the church that a qualification for leaders is the possession of the appropriate leadership gifts of the Holy Spirit. This is why a leader needs more than just the general qualities of mature Christian character. All members of the body should possess these, and persons who are not in leadership posts are not exempt from the need to reach such standards. Neither are they second-class members of the church. It is simply a matter of recognizing that God in his sovereignty has given various gifts to the members of his body and that they need to be recognized not on a hierarchical basis but on the basis that all gifts are for the building up of the church. A leader, then, is one who has God-given leadership gifts and uses them within the church with the spirit of a servant.

The fifth principle is that Christian leadership involves skills which need to be developed through careful study and practice. Those skills may vary with the cultural expectations of leaders and with the complexity of the organization involved, but diligence in order to be “a workman who has no need to be ashamed” applies to leaders as well as to every other member of the church.

These skills will include varying combinations of such things as guiding in the development of purposes, goals and objectives; motivating the church in the pursuit of these ends; instructing the church in God’s Word; helping the members of the church identify and use their gifts for the good of the church and the fulfillment of the person; keeping group and personal need-satisfaction in balance; counseling; encouraging; organizing and managing the activities and ministries of the church; administering discipline; serving musically; and doing evangelism and church planting in unreached areas.

A caution needs to be raised about the tendency to confuse certain personality types with gifts of leadership. Stereotypes of leaders are sometimes formed on less than valid biblical criteria, and anyone who fits the stereotype is thought to be a potential leader. Adherence to the above principles will help to avoid the error.

A second caution relates to the tendency for leaders to seek to avoid the risks involved in leadership by shunning the role entirely or by trying to transfer responsibility to the church or to a committee or board. It is clear from Scripture that God’s people have not always been willing to follow God’s appointed leaders. Jeremiah’s case is an outstanding example of this resistance. This can prove to be a severe test for the servant-leader.

In summary, the criteria for leadership in the church are: (1) spiritual maturity as defined by the Scriptures, (2) a servant spirit committed to the service of the church, (3) a sense of divine call, (4) appropriate spiritual gifts, and (5) developed leadership skills.

— Adopted by the 1985 General Conference

VI — GAMBLING

The Missionary Church reaffirms its opposition to gambling and lotteries, including those run by government. These are socially, morally and economically destructive. They are rooted in covetousness and violate the biblical work ethic.

We believe that gambling in any form is potentially addictive. It is a social evil that feeds upon greed and sells a set of fantasy values that exploit people. It especially harms the poor who can least afford to forfeit their financial resources on the promise of instant wealth. The tragic end result is often deepened poverty and increased welfare rolls, to say nothing of the emotional damage and disillusionment experienced by the vast numbers of planned losers.

Gambling undermines the economic base of a nation in that it reduces the purchasing power of people. Money gambled by wage earners cannot be spent to purchase goods and services of constructive and productive businesses.

Compulsive gambling may cause the individual's character to be further weakened and to disintegrate. It may lead to indolence and self-delusion, the break up of families, crime, loss of jobs and even suicide.

Since we deplore the exploitation of the weaknesses of humanity, the Missionary Church calls upon all who are in positions of influence and decision-making to seek other means by which to raise revenue. We further call upon the churches and schools to conduct programs that will inform people of the evils of gambling.

— Adopted by the 1985 General Conference

VII — PORNOGRAPHY AND OBSCENITY

DEFINITIONS:

Pornography: From the Greek words *porne* (harlot) and *graphos* (writing). Webster's Dictionary defines pornography as: (1) originally a description of prostitutes and their trade; (2) writings, pictures, etc. intended to arouse sexual desire.

Obscenity: From the Latin word *obscenus* ("ob" means to, "caenum" means filth). Webster's Dictionary defines obscene as: (1) offensive to modesty or decency, lewd, impure; (2) foul, filthy, repulsive, disgusting.

WHEREAS the multi-billion-dollar pornography industry in America has grown and continues to grow in epidemic proportions and is invading and affecting every segment of society; and

WHEREAS the lifestyle advocated by the pornography industry is in direct conflict with the holy living that is taught in the Word of God; and

WHEREAS family, church and community values and relationships are being seriously affected by this industry; and

WHEREAS the Supreme Court in 1973 reaffirmed that a community does have the right to establish and protect its standards; and

WHEREAS there is an alarming increase in teenage pregnancies, child prostitution, sexual assaults upon women and children, and the demeaning of persons in direct proportion to the degeneration of biblical moral values;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that members and adherents of the Missionary Church unite their efforts and energies with organizations such as the National Consultation on Pornography, Inc., National Federation of Decency by Law, and other like agencies to defeat all forms of pornography.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that we urge our people to become aware of the magnitude of the problem and become involved in community plans to exercise a positive voice through actions such as the boycotting of products, publications, TV programs and places of business that promote this cancer on our society; and finally

BE IT RESOLVED that our people write to the president of the United States—

1. Thanking him for his own stand against the pornographic industry in this country.
2. Requesting him to order the Justice Department to enforce obscenity laws which are already on the books.
3. Assuring him of our prayers and support in this effort.

— Adopted by the 1985 General Conference

VIII — SCRIPTURE AND INERRANCY

The Nature of God's Word

God desires to be known and has taken great pleasure in revealing himself to us. He lovingly speaks to us in a symphony of voices (Ps 19:1-2; Heb 1:1), but ultimately and supremely he has spoken to us by his Son (Heb 1:2). As the Son of God, Jesus is the Living Word (John 1:1-18), the full revelation of the Father (Heb 1:3; Col 1:15, 2:9; John 14:9). All of Scripture points to Jesus (John 5:39-40) and is summed up in him (Luke 24:27; 2 Cor 1:20). Indeed, a primary purpose of the written Word of God is to reveal the Living Word of God, and to bring people to salvation through faith in Christ (2 Tim 3:15). While some caricature evangelicals as guilty of worshiping a book, we recognize that the intent of Scripture is to lead us to worship the triune God.

Nevertheless, our Lord Jesus directs us back to the Bible, declaring that its very words “proceed from the mouth of God” and provide vital spiritual sustenance (Matt 4:4). Therefore, along with Christ and the apostles, we consider the Bible to be “God-breathed” (2 Tim 3:16). The Spirit of God so directed the human authors of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, so that these books and only these books are the written Word of God (2 Pet 1:20-21). Since all Scripture ultimately comes from the mouth of God who cannot lie (Heb 6:18), it is incapable of speaking untruthfully. This is what inerrancy means — the Bible is without error in all that it affirms. It is never unintentionally mistaken nor intentionally deceitful about anything it teaches as true. Being inerrant, the Bible is also infallible — utterly and unfailingly reliable in its ability to convey God’s intended message to us. Furthermore, God not only guided the human authors so that their inspired words are his enduring Word (1 Pet 1:25), he has also providentially overseen the entire process by which Scripture was preserved, transmitted, and translated. While we no longer have access to the original inerrant documents, God — in his gracious sovereignty — has ensured the availability of many reliable translations in several languages. These are based on an abundance of manuscripts in the original languages that faithfully convey what was first written. Therefore, we can have full confidence in the truthfulness of the Bible we read today.

The Final Authority of Scripture

Scripture’s inerrancy is not limited to matters pertaining to Christian faith and practice. Rather, the Bible speaks truthfully in every category of human knowledge it touches upon, including history and the sciences. Since God’s knowledge goes far beyond ours (Isa 55:8-9; Rom 11:33), he graciously accommodates his self-revelation to the limited understanding of the Bible’s human authors — without compromising truth in the process. For example, the Bible regularly employs anthropomorphisms¹ (Exod 33:21-23; Ps 34:15), and sometimes describes the universe in terms of ancient cosmologies² (1 Sam 2:8; Ps 104:5). As human knowledge in every realm continues to increase, it will never contradict God’s Word, properly interpreted. Even as scientific advances continue apace, we affirm that Sacred Scripture will always accord with what God has written in his “book” of nature, when each is rightly read. For, God ultimately is the source of all truth. Of course, God still communicates with us by his Spirit in various ways. He may speak to us internally through our private impressions, our consciences, and personal experiences. He may also speak to us providentially, as we learn wisdom from the experiences of others in the church and the world. Additionally, he may speak directly via revelatory gifts (1 Cor 12:8-11). But the written Word of God sits in judgment over every purported revelation, possessing unique and incontrovertible authority.

¹ Anthropomorphism = attributing human appearance or characteristics to God

² Cosmology = beliefs regarding the origin and structure of the universe

The Matter of Biblical Interpretation

Our confidence in the Bible ultimately comes from the same Holy Spirit who originally guided its composition (2 Pet 1:21; John 14:26, 16:13). As the final guarantor of Scripture, the Spirit who dwells within Christ's church and each Christian continues to bear witness to its veracity. Beyond assuring us that what we read is indeed the Word of God, the Spirit still speaks to us afresh through the Word today (Rev 3:22). While the truths of Scripture are set forth in readily understandable human speech, it is, nonetheless, a divine book whose deepest meaning must be disclosed by the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:12-14).

It is our responsibility, however, to discern the meaning of any Bible passage by engaging in proper biblical interpretation. It takes hermeneutical skill and careful exegesis to determine what Scripture affirms. God was pleased to speak through a variety of human authors, and the modern interpreter should seek out the original sense of each author as much as possible, being sensitive to context, language, grammar, figures of speech, and literary genres evident in the text. We must correctly handle the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15) so that we do not distort the meaning of Scripture. And yet, even when we are confident that we have discovered the intended message of a biblical text, only the Bible itself is inerrant and infallible; our human interpretations are not.

Biblical assertions can be inerrantly true without being exact. The human authors of Scripture sometimes describe things merely as they appear. They, for example, speak of the sunrise and sunset just as we do today. They sometimes use hyperbole and round numbers and — on occasion — irregular grammar and spellings. They report (without supporting) false statements,³ choose to highlight different things in parallel accounts, and feel free to quote loosely in certain citations. Like modern historians, they sometimes organize their narratives thematically rather than observing a strict chronology. Nevertheless, all that they have written is trustworthy. To conclude that a Bible writer is in error for not being precise — in a mathematical, scientific, or literary sense — is to impose an unreasonable standard on the Bible. We must not fault ancient writers for failing to express themselves like moderns. If our contemporary standards of precision were neither the aim of the biblical authors nor the expectation of their original readers, we should not put such a burden on the text.

Bible passages also vary in their degree of interpretive difficulty. Even the Apostle Peter admitted that the Scriptures contain some things that are “hard to understand” (2 Pet 3:15-16). In these cases, it is especially necessary that Scripture should be used to interpret Scripture, with difficult or unclear passages read in light of those more easily grasped. Moreover, when we come to texts that appear to have inconsistencies, or that seem contradictory to other passages, an a priori⁴ commitment to inerrancy compels us to conclude that these “problem” texts must be trustworthy regardless of our present ability to harmonize them. For, it is reasonable to conclude that all the diverse parts of “God-breathed” Scripture do somehow cohere in a unified, wholly consistent message. Thus, we approach any passages that remain difficult to interpret, and any containing alleged errors and discrepancies as yet unresolved, with the conviction that these cannot undermine the clear and absolute truth claims of the Bible. God's Word is not opaque in its essential message. He has seen to it that the main truths of Scripture are plain. Therefore, we can be confident that this very accessible message from our Creator and Redeemer, preserved in the Bible, will remain true and relevant from one generation to the next.

Our Obligation to Biblical Inerrancy

In the final analysis, we come back to Jesus. We embrace biblical inerrancy primarily because it was our Lord himself who declared, “Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Jesus, the Head of the Church, had absolute confidence in Scripture, so we must not nullify or set aside any of its words. Therefore, with living faith, the Missionary Church honors Christ's lordship by holding, along with him, that the Bible is without error in all that it affirms.

We are convinced that rejecting biblical inerrancy has serious consequences, especially the erosion of confidence in the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the Bible. We must steadfastly resist any tendency to relativize its message or to allow it to be superseded by the fashionable wisdom of the age. The loss of an inerrant Bible would make the church even more vulnerable to false teachers inside and outside its ranks who undercut biblical truth, formulate new truths,

³ For example, Genesis 3:4 — “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman.

⁴ a priori = knowable prior to actual observation and experience

preach “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4), or proclaim “another gospel” (Gal 1:6-9) supposedly more palatable to today’s world.

The Missionary Church urges its people to match our high view of Scripture by placing an equally high value on studying, savoring, trusting, and obeying all that it teaches. These sacred words “are not just idle words for you — they are your life” (Deut 32:47). “They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. By them your servant is warned; in keeping them is great reward” (Ps 19:10-11). The Scriptures, then, should be preached in their fullness within our churches and out in the world. They should be read devotionally in our homes. They should sit in judgment on both our beliefs and our behaviors. They should be loved for their sweetness, honored for their wisdom, and obeyed for God’s glory. May each of us testify with the psalmist: “I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word” (Ps 119:16).

— Adopted by the 2023 General Conference

IX — THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

The important role of women in ministry is clearly affirmed in both the Old and New Testaments (see Judg 4-5; Esth 1-9; Acts 18:18-28, 21:8-9; and Rom 16:1-2) and is a vital part of the heritage of the Missionary Church. We believe that it is consistent with both scripture and our heritage that the Missionary Church clearly affirm her understanding with regard to that role.

As members of the body of Christ, all women have been given spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12). Furthermore, God has uniquely gifted certain women for administrative and leadership roles. We recognize that it is God’s will that these women engage in church and para-church ministries, such as serving on boards and committees, teaching Sunday school classes that may include men, speaking in services, and serving on ministerial staffs.

We affirm the essential equality of men and women with regard to their standing before God and the inherited blessings of salvation (1 Cor 11:11; Gal 3:28). At the same time, there is a functional difference reflected in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. This difference does not deny the essential equality of men and women, just as God being the head of Christ does not deny the essential equality of the Father and the Son (1 Cor 11:3).

We believe that the New Testament words “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor-teacher” refer, with differing implications, to the same office (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Eph 4:11; compare 1 Tim 2:12). These New Testament references indicate that this office should be filled by men. The position of the pastor in a church with one pastor or the senior pastor in a church with multiple staff is the contemporary equivalent of this New Testament office. In addition, denominational and district executives who serve as overseers of the church generally or local churches specifically shall be men. In situations of need and for the duration of that need, a woman may serve in the role and perform the ministries of a pastor-teacher. In 1 Timothy 2:12 in the Greek, Paul says that a woman should not “continue” as the official teacher of a congregation nor “continue” having authority over men. He does not forbid her doing such altogether.

We believe what the New Testament teaches about the role of women in ministry is God’s continuing will for his people in every era.

— Adopted by the 1989 General Conference

X — ORDINATION

We understand that the New Testament does not provide an absolute definition of ordination. However, we recognize the need to have a system for credentialing ministers that satisfies denominational and governmental requirements. We refer to this credentialing procedure as licensing and ordination.

Licensing is our recognition of the calling, giftedness and preparation of a person for a life of vocational ministry.

Ordination is the consecration of a person to ministry upon full proof of calling, giftedness and preparation as affirmed by the church.

We believe the responsibility and authority that accompanies ordination is primarily moral and spiritual and merits appropriate respect and submission from those served.

— Adopted by the 1999 General Conference

XI— OUR VALUES

It is appropriate that we declare where we stand to our constituency, to a younger generation, and to the world at large. We expect this declaration to influence our concerns, shape our policies, fashion our strategies and determine short- and long-range goals.

WE STAND ...FOR the essentials of the Christian faith as expressed in our Statement of Faith—
...AGAINST the denial of God’s Word as final authority in matters of faith and practice.

WE STAND ...FOR the free exercise of religion—
...AGAINST state intervention in the affairs, governance and hiring practices of churches and Christian organizations.

WE STAND ...FOR the sanctity of human life—
...AGAINST abortion, infanticide, euthanasia and the general eradication of the unique God-given dignity and worth of all human beings.

WE STAND ...FOR pursuing renewal through commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ, the infilling of the Holy Spirit for power, lives of sacrifice and separation from the sins of this world—
...AGAINST personal and structural injustice, whether it is religious, political, or economic.

WE STAND ...FOR the right to share our convictions and the gospel of Jesus Christ freely among all peoples—
...AGAINST any effort to deny individuals the right to adhere to and propagate the faith of their choice.

WE STAND ...FOR Christian education where the biblical view of our world and life is central—
...AGAINST education that is intolerant of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

WE STAND ...FOR government based on the equal rights of all citizens regardless of race, gender, or faith—
...AGAINST racism and anti-Semitism anywhere, anytime.

WE STAND ...FOR strengthening marriage and the family as God’s basic social unit—
...AGAINST the growing practice of divorce, premarital sex, extramarital sex and domestic abuse.

WE STAND ...FOR the pursuit of a pure and righteous life—
...AGAINST homosexuality, and lesbianism; incest; prostitution; pornography in all forms; drug and alcohol abuse; Satanism, humanism, and materialism.

WE STAND ...FOR a vigorous prophetic/redemptive witness by the church to the state on clearly moral issues—
...AGAINST politicizing the church or encouraging the church to speak beyond its area of competence.

WE STAND ...FOR a generous response to the needs of the oppressed, poor and hungry through acts of Christian compassion—
...AGAINST any “liberation theology” that advocates revolution and ideological subversion of the Bible and/or basic Christian doctrines to Marxist dictates.

WE STAND ...FOR the support of religious liberty around the globe, the legitimacy of all nations to provide for their national security and the non-violent resolution of international conflicts—
...AGAINST those voices on both the left and the right that would make churches and church organizations instruments of political activism with a primary commitment to a political ideology.

Having so declared we now give ourselves to the fulfillment of this declaration to the glory of God the Father. We do so convinced of his help, guided by the holy Scriptures and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

Adapted from “A Declaration” which was adopted at the 1987 convention of the National Association of Evangelicals.

— Adopted by the 1989 General Conference

XII — ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME

Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a growing epidemic that may surpass the ravages of any plague in human history. In this decade, tens of thousands of North Americans have contracted AIDS and more than a million North Americans are carriers of the AIDS virus. For those who have contracted AIDS, currently there is no known medical cure, and thus the disease is fatal. The evidence is not clear concerning the long-term results of those who are carriers of the AIDS virus.

We extend Christian compassion to all who have acquired this disease by whatever means (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; Luke 10:25-31). We urge the provision of spiritual, emotional, and even physical care for them to the same degree that patients with other life-threatening diseases receive. Christians, following the example of Christ, should seek to minister to HIV infected persons. In keeping with our historical precedents (e.g., the furtherance of medical missions, retirement homes, inner city missions, etc.) we urge our local churches to become involved with the development of new ministries to provide compassionate care for persons with AIDS. They need the hope and peace that only the gospel of Jesus Christ can give them.

We are concerned for both the confidentiality of the infected and the protection of the uninfected. Failure by one who is HIV positive to inform any person who may be exposed to the virus is as morally reprehensible as is discrimination against an identified HIV positive person. We believe that the interests of the uninfected (including an uninfected spouse) have priority over the confidentiality of persons who are HIV positive and persist in high-risk behavior. Furthermore AIDS is first and foremost a public health concern, not a civil rights issue. Hence, any proposed legislation that would confer special "civil rights" on persons afflicted with AIDS but threatens the health of others is totally unacceptable.

The Missionary Church reaffirms the sanctity of marriage and deplors nonmarital sexual intercourse, homosexual practices, and intravenous drug abuse. While we acknowledge that there are innocent sufferers of the disease, the fact remains that the two primary groups of individuals with AIDS in North America to date are practicing homosexual men and drug addicts who share needles.

Family life teaching and sexual education is a God given responsibility of parents. The church's task is to assist both parents and youth in understanding their sexuality in the context of biblical values. Sexual education alone, however, will not stop the spread of AIDS. Our society needs to understand and acknowledge that there are compelling emotional, philosophical, medical, sociological, historical and biblical reasons for practicing abstinence before marriage and fidelity within marriage. Since God has designed sexual intercourse for monogamous heterosexual marriage alone, and since this form of sexual practice will ultimately help to solve this problem, the Missionary Church calls her people and her world to teach and live by biblical sexual morals.

In conclusion, the Missionary Church recommends the following three responses:

1. Confront the disease as Christ and his disciples dealt directly with the issues of their day (Matt 8:2-3 and 9:35-36).
2. Care for those stricken, with the love of Christ and the good news of hope, forgiveness and salvation (Matt 22:39; Gal 6:2; Matt 7:12).
3. Promote the biblical lifestyle which minimizes the spread of this infection (1 Thess 4:3-4; 1 Cor 6:13, 18-20).

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— Adopted by the 1989 General Conference

XIII — SPIRITUAL WARFARE: THE CHRISTIAN AND DEMONS

The Bible frequently pictures the Christian life as a warfare. The principal antagonists are God and Satan; but men (as creatures created in God's image) and angels (both good and evil) are deeply and actively involved. Christians, as God's children by redemption, are the special objects of Satan's attacks.

Occult practices are as old as Satan's invasion of the Garden of Eden, but a renewed and alarming participation in them is evident in our contemporary, Western world. The spiritual vacuum created by powerless religion has provided fertile ground for such activities to flourish. This trend calls for a fresh look by the church at the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, whether we want to be or not.

The mention of angels and demons raises a special problem for most Western Christians, however, because spirits are not functional beings in the worldview of the typical Western Christian. While the reality of angels and demons may be affirmed as part of one's theological belief system, they are perceived as being confined largely to a supernatural realm with relatively infrequent contact with people on earth, especially Christian people. As science has provided explanations for many of the phenomena of life, the gap between the "spirit world" and the "real world" has become larger and larger. Significant segments of our society have given up a belief in spirit beings altogether, and the impact of this is seen in the secularization of society and the liberalization of theology.

On the other side of the spectrum are the peoples in the Two-thirds World whom we are commissioned to reach with the gospel and for whom spirits are very functional beings in everyday life. While they may ascribe more activity to spirits than they ought to, their worldview is often nearer to the worldview of the Bible than is ours.

Because of this worldview shift, not only are angels and demons not perceived as very real, neither is the Holy Spirit. Many Christians are more apt to control their emotions and modify their conduct in the presence of important people than in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Person and work of the Holy Spirit has become a source of great confusion in the church. There is a need to recognize a truly biblical view of the world in which spirits are functional beings. This is critical because Satan, supported by his host of fallen angels, is seeking to "devour" us (1 Pet 5:8); and, if we do not recognize the enemy, we will not resist him effectively.

The Scriptures are unmistakable, however, in their teaching that this war was won decisively on our behalf by Christ at the cross (John 19:30; Col 2:15; Heb 2:14). Provision has been made for the Christian to "extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph 6:16). We have authority to "overcome all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19). We can be "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom 8:35-39).

The Scriptures are also clear in their warnings and admonitions to God's people concerning relations with Satan, demons, and occult practices. In Old Testament times, Israel was told clearly that occult practices, practices which look to spiritual sources other than God for knowledge or power, were "detestable" to God (Deut 18:9-13). Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:20 gives insight on idolatry as practiced by the Gentiles when he says that behind the idols are demons.

In his time on earth, Jesus demonstrated how we are to do battle with the enemy, and the New Testament writers all include warnings concerning the attacks of Satan. Paul admonishes us to "take [our] stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph 6:11). Peter commands us to "be self-controlled and alert: because our enemy the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). James tells us to "resist the devil" (Jas 4:7). John cautions us, "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God" (1 John 4:1).

According to the Gospels, Jesus had much to say about Satan and demons, and a significant proportion of the record of his ministry is an account of his dealings with these enemies. Either Jesus was wrong in his belief in demons, or he was accommodating himself to the wrong views of the people of that day, or he was right. Since he was right, there is no good reason to suppose that Satan and the demons have changed their methods of operation significantly or that the power of God over them has changed. We are still to be on our guard against them and resist them, not ignore them.

Every provision has been made for Christians' protection if they use the armor (Eph 6:10-18) and the weapons (e.g., prayer, the Bible, the blood, praise/worship) available to them. But, if they fail to do so or if they "give the devil a foothold" (Eph 4:27), they are subject to demonic oppression.

The primary tactic of demons in seeking this control is deception. Satan used it on Eve (Gen 3:1-7; 2 Cor 11:3), and he has been using it ever since. Deception is clever lying, and the deceived person is unaware that he is acting on the basis of a lie. God's truth is the primary defense against such deception; hence the need for diligent Bible study. Discernment often comes through other Christians; hence the need for faithful participation in the life of the church.

Satan's ultimate objective is to deprive God of his glory. That, of course, is impossible. No one can add to or subtract from the glory of God. Satan can limit the degree to which God's glory is proclaimed and demonstrated on earth, however, by influencing God's children to live beneath their privileges in Christ and by hindering them in their witness and proclamation. The Christian who is not living all of life to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31) is to that extent fulfilling the purpose of Satan.

Satan's first approach is to create doubt about the character of God or the Word of God just as he did with Eve. He will also try to keep believers from growing in their knowledge of the Word and from living in obedience to it.

He will also try to create a thirst for power in some area of life or for knowledge about the future which causes them to turn to a source other than God or his Word to satisfy this thirst. Sometimes seemingly innocent experimentation or careless participation in questionable activities become openings to the occult.

Sometimes, however, Satan goes beyond that approach to a show of power. He uses attacks on the bodies and minds of people and demonstrations of his power over certain natural forces and objects to produce fear and bondage (Job 1-2). Satan knows that his power has been limited by God (Job 1:10; Luke 22:31; Rev 12:12). He is unable to possess or exercise ownership over a Christian. He is, however, able to attack in other areas; and unless one knows how to resist him, he establishes a "foothold" from which to harass. Because he uses deception so effectively, these footholds are often not recognized or not identified for what they really are.

Demonic footholds are reclaimed by confession, repentance, renunciation (where occult activity may be involved), and cleansing through application of the merits of the blood of Christ. Sometimes demons must be commanded to leave in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every believer has access to the spiritual power necessary to resist the devil (or demon) and make him flee. Power to resist is not a gift; it is the privilege of every child of God. It is probable, however, that in any congregation there will be only a few who carry on a direct ministry to those who may be experiencing problems in this area.

The congregation, on the other hand, in its expression as the body of Christ, should be prepared to provide encouragement, support, and a base of accountability to those engaged in such ministries. It should also provide a healing community in which those going through deliverance or those rebuilding after deliverance may experience Christian love, receive strength, and find counsel.

The victory of Christ is to be manifest in the life of his people, however, not only in defense against Satan's attacks; it is also to be expressed as a vital element in the proclamation of the gospel to the unreached peoples of the world. The demonstration of spiritual power and authority in confronting demon forces among animistic people groups is an integral part of declaring the message of the kingdom of God and of planting the church where it has not yet been planted. Jesus demonstrated defensive tactics for Christians, as in his wilderness temptation (Luke 4:1-13). He also demonstrated offensive ministry strategy (Luke 4:31-44) and said that the works he did his followers would do also (John 14:12). His final commission was, "As the father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21).

It may therefore be expected that confrontation with demonic forces will be more open and intense in those areas of the world where the church has not yet been planted. However, we should not be misled into thinking that similar open and intense spiritual warfare is not a present reality in the Western world.

Members of our churches are therefore called upon to be diligent, in cultivating Christian disciplines, such as Bible study, prayer, mutual accountability, stewardship, public worship, fasting, and acts of mercy. These disciplines are means of appropriating the "whole armor of God" (Eph 6:10-18 AV) for spiritual defense and mastering the "weapons of our warfare" (2 Cor 10:3-5 AV) for effective ministry.

— Adopted by the 1989 General Conference

XIV — SECRET SOCIETIES

The Christian's supreme loyalty must be to Jesus Christ who is Lord (Rom 14:9; Acts 2:36). In all associations the Christian must be free to follow Christ, obey the will of God and should not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever (2 Cor 6:14-18). In light of biblical teachings, the Christian needs to understand the demands of discipleship regarding membership in secret societies.

Those organizations which demand a secret oath, affirmation, or password as a condition of membership are considered to be secret societies. Most secret societies are religious in nature. Frequently, prayers are offered, hymns are sung, members engage in acts of worship, and chaplains are chosen to lead in worship and to conduct funerals. However, the worship of these societies is often Unitarian, not Christian; the religion is moralistic, not redemptive; and the ends are humanistic, not evangelical (Acts 4:12). In contradiction to the teachings of Christ and the New Testament, these societies require secret pledges and vows which bind the future actions of those who join. Swearing unreserved loyalty to any secret society is in direct conflict with the Christian's commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord. The Christian must be free to follow the will of the Lord in all things.

Therefore, members of our church shall refrain from membership in all secret societies and those who unite with the church must resign from membership in any lodge or secret order previously joined.

— Adopted by the 1991 General Conference

XV — EUTHANASIA AND ASSISTED SUICIDE

The intent of this position paper is to address euthanasia and assisted suicide. It is not intended to address every issue of human suffering related to death.

We believe that human life is a gift from God and has absolute, not relative, value. Death is a significant transition that everyone faces. Suffering that may precede death can be very grievous. It also affords the opportunity for personal reflection and reconciliation.

The ultimate test of our life's priorities may well be how we deal with suffering in the face of death. Such was the case for our Savior in the garden of Gethsemane. He was "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death" (Mark 14:34) and zealously prayed to be spared from suffering that would only intensify. At the same time, he affirmed his commitment to the larger purpose of the Father, whatever suffering that might involve. The absence of suffering is good, which is why Jesus prayed for it. At the same time, it is not the highest good, which is why he was willing to endure substantial suffering.

The Missionary Church opposes any intervention with the intent to produce death for relief of pain, suffering or economic consideration, or for the convenience of the patient, family or society. We believe that secular arguments for physician-assisted suicide are superseded by a biblical view of a sovereign God who places a limit on human autonomy. We further believe there is a profound moral distinction between allowing a person to die, on the one hand, and taking of a life on the other (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17).

In order to affirm the dignity of human life, the Missionary Church advocates the development and use of adequate pain management to relieve suffering, provide human companionship and encourage spiritual support and intercessory prayer.

While for the believer to die is gain (Phil 1:21), it is wrong to impose upon God's prerogative by advancing that day. Rather, we look to our Lord Jesus Christ to sustain us until we meet him face to face (1 John 3:2).

"Physician-Assisted Suicide": a position paper of the National Association of Evangelicals, 1997.

"Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: Theological Perspectives": a position paper of Trinity Seminary: The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, n.d.

"Euthanasia": a position paper of the Christian Medical and Dental Society, approved by the CMDS House of Delegates, May 1, 1992.

— Adopted by the 1999 General Conference

XVI — SANCTIFICATION

Introduction

To sanctify is to set apart for holy use, to separate out from the profane for the sacred (Hebrew, *qadesh*; Greek, *hagiazō*). As with justification, sanctification is the work of God. It is a work of grace based on the merit of Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 6:14, “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Through the work of Christ, God separates the believer from sin for the purpose of holiness, which is accomplished as the believer follows after the Spirit putting to death the misdeeds of the body (See Rom 6:22, 8:1-14).

The entire Christian life depends on the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “...from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2 Thess 2:13-14). Peter also wrote that we are “God’s elect...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood” (1 Pet 1:1,2). What then is involved in this sanctifying work of the Spirit in the believers? The full breadth of that work includes two dimensions. The first is initial sanctification that is positional in Christ and occurs when a person receives Jesus Christ as Savior. The second is the experiential dimension that is expected and commanded of Christians. For example, note Paul’s words in Philippians 2:12, “...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.” The moment one receives Christ as Savior the believer dies to sin and becomes alive to holiness (Rom 6:2-4). Then Paul commands Christians to keep on counting themselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:11). Christians should stop letting this age squeeze them into its mold but should continue permitting themselves to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom 12:2). Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt 16:24).

I. Initial Sanctification

To understand the full implication of what the work of sanctification includes, we must first appreciate the biblical truth involving our identification with Christ in his death on the cross. He not only died as our Redeemer, but he also died as our substitutionary Representative, paying the price for our sins. In Christ therefore, God sees every believer as being crucified with his Son and hence as a saint positionally sanctified in him (Rom 6:6-7; 1 Cor 1:30, 6:11; Gal 2:20). Paul writes that God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin on behalf of us in order that we ourselves might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor 5:21). The idea is that the Christian’s position in the mind of God is that of a person who died with Christ and is positionally sanctified. In God’s sight the Christian is viewed as never having sinned. Thus even the carnal Christians in Corinth (1 Cor 3:1) could be truthfully called saints earlier in Paul’s letter (1 Cor 1:2). However, one cannot read the New Testament or observe the lives of some Christians without concluding that not every Christian who is indwelt by the Spirit is “filled with the Holy Spirit,” that is, living according to his controlling leadership. It is a fact of the Bible that every Christian is indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19-20) but not all are controlled by him. (See Rom 7:14; Heb 5:11-6:12.)

II. Experiential Sanctification

Positional sanctification, consequently, must be translated into one’s own personal life experience by the help of the Holy Spirit via the Word of God (John 17:17). This is that to which Paul refers when he writes to the Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” While this experiential dimension of sanctification begins at conversion, substantial progress in holiness occurs when a believer willfully makes a complete commitment to the Lord’s control (Rom 6:12-13; 12:1). Experiential sanctification involves three aspects.

A. The Decisive Aspect. The decisive aspect is commanded by Paul of the Roman Christians in Romans 6:12-13 and exhorted in 12:1. He describes this aspect as the presenting of one’s bodily members to God by a determined effort of will. This placing of one’s bodily members at God’s disposal can begin at conversion, as it did for the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:44-46). However, more often than not it begins with a resolute decision subsequent to salvation to make Christ Lord of every area of one’s life. This decision usually follows a period of education and spiritual growth until one comes to realize that there is more to the Christian life than what has been experienced to that point in time. This is what Jesus had in mind when he said in Matthew 16:24 that, if anyone wished to come after him as a disciple, he would have to deny himself and take up his cross, thus putting himself at God’s disposal. Some call this decision “dedication,” “consecration,” or “a crisis experience.” This is the point when, to the best of one’s ability and with all the light available at the time, a person gives all of one’s self

and bodily members over to God's control and God then "baptizes" or "fills" the individual with his Spirit. (Compare Acts 1:5 and Acts 2:4.)

B. The Progressive Aspect. From then on, the progressive aspect of sanctification continues at a more rapid pace. In Romans 6:11 Paul commands the Christians to count themselves dead repeatedly to sinning of all kinds and alive unto God every time they are tempted to sin. In Romans 12:2, believers are to stop letting this age conform them into its likeness and they are to continue letting the Lord transform their living by the renewing of their minds. As Jesus stated in Matthew 16:24, they are to continue following and obeying him and his teachings. The intent is that the longer we live this progressively holy life, the more our lives will become conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, God's Son (Rom 8:29). We are to continue being filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18).

The Spirit-filled life is a life lived under the control of the Holy Spirit using the Bible as one's guide. This does not mean that a Spirit-filled Christian will never yield to temptation and sin. However, if one should sin, confession should be made immediately and personal forgiveness accepted by faith (1 John 1:9-2:2). It is to be remembered that the fruit of the Spirit does not come automatically to people still involved with sin dwelling in their members (Rom 7:14-25). The fullness of the Spirit does not make obedience to God an automatic thing nor the demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit something easy to exhibit on all occasions. However, this does not mean that the ideal should not be one's aim. New circumstances may call for renewed dedication of one's body to God as a living sacrifice when the Spirit leads and as the Christian matures in Christ. All of this involves lifelong growth and development in Christ-likeness through the continual sanctifying work of the Spirit by the truth of his Word (John 17:17).

C. The Completed Aspect. Finally, the sanctifying work of the Spirit is completed in one sense at the time of physical death when the spirit of the Christian enters into the Lord's presence (Heb 12:22, 23). However, sanctification will be completed in the final sense when the Christian's body is resurrected and glorified (1 Cor 15:51-54; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2). Then the believer will attain complete sanctification for all eternity.

Summary

To reiterate, the Holy Spirit enters and indwells the life of an individual at his/her conversion, and sainthood begins positionally (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19-20). The Spirit takes over control in many Christians' lives in a decisive moment of sanctification when that Christian permits the Spirit total control. From then on the indwelt and controlled Christian is expected to continue walking according to the Spirit's leading via God's Word, the Bible (John 17:17). This filling or controlling is something that is intended to continue in the sanctified Christian's life (Eph 5:18; 2 Cor 7:1) until it is completed in one sense at the Christian's death (Heb 12:22-23) and in the final sense at Christ's return when the Christian receives a resurrection body (Phil 3:12-14, 20, 21).

— Adopted by the 2003 General Conference

XVII — DIVINE FOREKNOWLEDGE

The historic Christian Church has universally held to God's omniscience. By definition the phrase "God's omniscience" includes the belief that God has exhaustive knowledge of all things actual and possible in the past, present, and future. Therefore, he foreknows all future events and possibilities (Matt 11:20-24).

However, some in the Christian community have challenged this view of God's foreknowledge. The position, recently dubbed the Openness-of-God view, typically affirms that God is omniscient, but it redefines omniscience. This view of omniscience excludes God's knowledge of future free choices and actions by human beings. This idea maintains that God may know all possibilities, but he does not know the actual future that human beings will choose.

The near unanimity of the historic Church against the Openness view of foreknowledge and omniscience has been due primarily to the seemingly clear passages of Scripture on the topic. For example, the prophet Isaiah distinguishes false gods from the true God by the latter's ability to foretell accurately the future. Foreknowledge is the very criterion the prophet uses to demonstrate who is truly God (Isa 41:21-24, 44:6-8; cf. Deut 18:22). Furthermore, the Bible is filled with predictive prophecies, many of them having to do with Israel, the Messiah, and the Church. Since many of these prophecies include the future free actions of human beings, they could not be merely predetermined events that God knew would happen only because he would himself cause them to happen (Dan 11:1-4). Rather, God fully knows the future, both events that he

predetermines thus causing them to happen, and future free human events that he foresees but does not cause to happen (Rom 8:29-30).

The Church has maintained throughout the centuries that such foreknowledge is both biblical and powerful evidence for the God of Christianity. The Missionary Church remains consistent with the teachings of the historic Church: God exhaustively foreknows the future, including future free human events (Ps 139).

— Adopted by the 2005 General Conference

XVIII— A BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

(Gen 1:27)

Sexuality and Creation

The Bible begins its discussion of human sexuality in the book of Genesis with the account of Creation. Jesus himself rooted his teaching on marriage and divorce in Genesis 2, citing the creation account as both authoritative and forever binding (Matt 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). The Apostle Paul reasoned likewise, anchoring his exhortations concerning Christian marriage in the specific language of Genesis 2:24 (Eph 5:31).

In Genesis 1-2 sexuality figures prominently in a larger conversation concerning God’s original intention for humankind—his crowning creative achievement. God, we are told, created human beings “male and female,” indicating that gender distinctions are part of the created order itself, not mere culturally conditioned artifacts. Gender supplies, then, an important component of what it means to be human.

Furthermore, gender distinctions prove essential for the fulfillment of God’s purposes for humanity. Indeed, the fulfillment of God’s initial mandate requires humankind to be both male and female. We read in Genesis 1:28: “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.’” Obedience to this original divine directive would be impossible without God creating and blessing innate gender distinctions.

Gender enables the wonderful mix of likeness and difference that makes sexual intimacy and procreation possible. Gender and sex are both divine gifts, part of a finished creation that God pronounced “very good” (Gen 1:31). However puzzling and problematic human sexuality may have become—especially in our day—God did not intend it to be this way.

Sexuality is a divine blessing. God created human beings, not only for spiritual intimacy with himself, but also for an extraordinarily rich intimacy within marriage. We read in Genesis 2:24: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen 2:24). This same truth we find underscored in the New Testament (Matt 19:4-6; Eph 5:31).

The creation account lays the foundation for a consistent and comprehensive theology of sexuality that will be developed throughout the rest of sacred Scripture. We may summarize the biblical understanding in brief: *Human sexuality is a divine gift, by which human beings, created male and female, may experience within marriage a deep and multi-faceted union—one that is physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—and fulfills the divine mandate to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen 1:28).*

Before we conclude this overview of sexuality and creation, however, we should interject one important observation: while the Bible consistently celebrates the gift of marriage (Gen 2:18, 2:24; Prov 18:22, 19:14; 1 Cor 7:2; Heb 13:4), it also celebrates the gift of celibacy (Matt 19:10-12; 1 Cor 7:25-38). Both are divine blessings. Both provide a context for human flourishing.

Sexuality and the Fall

God's initial created order was, indeed, "very good" (Gen 1:31), but the Fall changed everything. It disrupted, first of all, the spiritual intimacy that God intended human beings to enjoy with him. It disrupted, secondly, the intimacy that God intended us to enjoy within marriage, including its sexual dimension. In a word, since the Fall, our sexuality is broken. The Fall left no aspect of human nature or human experience uncorrupted. Human nature fell; and human sexuality fell with it.

It should come as no surprise, then, that we find such sexual disorder in the world. God's original design for sex—that it thrive within the context of a marriage between one man and one woman—has been thwarted in countless ways. Pre-marital sex, co-habitation without marriage, adultery, pornography, and various forms of sexual abuse are rife in contemporary culture.

Sadly, we witness these disorders even in the church. On rare occasions, even some pastors have succumbed to sexual immorality. Sexual abuse perpetrated by members of the clergy is but one of the more egregious signs of the depth and pervasiveness of human sin.

Disordered sexuality is not a uniquely contemporary problem. It was a plight in the biblical world as well. Many biblical passages clearly forbid particular sexual practices (Exod 20:14, 22:19; Lev 18, 20:10-21; Deut 22:13-30, 23:17-18; Matt 5:27-30; Mark 7:21-23; John 7:53-8:11; Acts 15:19-20; Rom 13:13; 1 Cor 5:11, 6:13, 6:18, 10:8; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5-6; 1 Thess 4:3-5; Rev 2:20). Other texts catalogue the egregious consequences of disordered sexuality (Gen 19:1-29, 19:30-38; Num 25; 2 Sam 11-12; 2 Sam 13; 1 Kgs 11; Prov 2:16-19, 6:30-35).

From almost the beginning of the human story, God's gift of sexuality—which he intended for our good—has been misused by us to our own detriment. Even the most illustrious Old Testament heroes—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon—practiced polygamy, though God originally intended marriage for one woman and one man. David himself was an adulterer. Biblical spirituality, in both its Old and New Testament manifestations, has been threatened with destruction by disordered sexual desire in its myriad forms.

We should not think, then, that our contemporary sexual chaos and confusion are somehow unique. They are evidence of the fallen human condition. Disordered sexuality is a problem both for believers and unbelievers. It is a problem for both men and women. It is a problem for those with both different-sex and same-sex attraction. Clearly disordered sexuality is a universal human problem.

But we currently find ourselves at a cultural crossroads. Two particular expressions of sexual disorder have come to occupy center stage in the contemporary debate on human sexuality, namely homosexuality and transgenderism. These have always been part of the fallen human condition, but the widespread clamor for their acceptance as morally appropriate lifestyle choices is unprecedented. It is incumbent upon the church, then, to think about such disorders—and those who wrestle with them—as deeply, biblically, and compassionately as possible.

Homosexuality

Homosexuality has become a hotly contested topic in recent years. Matters of great import hinge on this debate, including the nature of human sexuality and the nature of biblical authority. So we must think deeply and speak clearly to the issue. We are, however, called as Christians to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15). That requires us to carefully navigate the narrow space between two different errors.

On the one hand, we cannot accept the growing cultural consensus regarding homosexuality. More and more people accept homosexual behavior as a valid personal choice, exempt from any kind of moral censure. Same-sex marriage is becoming commonplace. Increasingly, objection to homosexual practice—no matter how charitably expressed—is characterized as hateful and "homophobic." We cannot simply adjust our theology to accommodate the changing moral climate. We must not exchange conventional "wisdom" for the truth of God's Word.

On the other hand, we must not overreact. We cannot single out homosexual practice, as if it were uniquely subject to divine denunciation. Indeed, the Scriptures clearly indicate God's disapproval of homosexual behavior (Gen 19:1-22; Judg 19:1-21; Lev 18:22, 20:13; Rom 1:24-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Tim 1:10). But the Scriptures are equally clear about God's disapproval of heterosexual immorality. (See previously cited Scriptures.) Sexual immorality of all kinds contradicts clear

biblical teaching, distorts the divine gift of sexuality, and stands under the righteous judgment of a holy God. The Scriptures warn us: “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18), in whatever form that immorality may take.

While we find ourselves in the midst of a cultural debate on homosexual *practice*, we also find ourselves debating sexual orientation itself. Some see sexual orientation as a matter of biological determinism. People are prone to same-sex attraction because of genetics, they say. Others think that it is conditioned by initial sexual experiences. Still others think that same-sex attraction is purely voluntary.

At this point, thoughtful Christians may have more questions than answers. Human sexuality is a remarkably complex phenomenon with biological, psychological, emotional, and spiritual components. To explain same-sex attraction oversimplistically—as merely nature, merely nurture, or merely an act of the will—fails to do justice to sexuality’s complexity. But we do know this: we live in a fallen world in which much is not as it was supposed to be. Disaster, disease, death—none of these accord with God’s original intent. They are part and parcel of a creation in “bondage to corruption” (Rom 8:21). In a fallen, disordered creation, it should come as no surprise that human desires become disordered, that sexual desire—which was designed to blissfully propel us toward sexual intimacy and procreation within marriage—gets bent out of shape. Some people, through no fault of their own, find themselves struggling with same-sex attraction. This fits with what we know about our fallen world and our fallenness within it. Creation is broken, waiting to be restored. We are still waiting for Jesus to make “all things new” (Rev 21:5).

Nonetheless, we do not need to fully understand the origins of same-sex attraction to insist that God both demands and divinely enables obedience to his commands. The Bible clearly prohibits sex beyond the bounds of heterosexual marriage. So even if the Bible has little to say *directly* about sexual orientation, that is something of a moot point. What the Bible prohibits is sexual immorality. Sexual attraction is not the issue; sexual behavior is.

Transgenderism

Though God originally created two distinct and complementary sexes (Gen 1:27; Matt 19:4), a distinction evident in the physiological makeup of the human race, one of the effects of the Fall is that some persons experience gender confusion. They perceive their gender to differ psychologically from their gender biologically. This differs from the rare condition of *intersexualism* or *hermaphroditism*, conditions in which a person’s sex is biologically ambiguous—that is, a person possesses both male and female primary sexual traits. In the case of *transgenderism*, an individual’s sex is biologically clear but psychologically unclear. It is an issue, not of physiology, but of self-perception.

Recently, the American medical community has begun providing a range of treatment options for what is technically called “gender dysphoria,” including hormone therapy and gender reassignment surgery. Many LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender) advocates are seeking to normalize transgenderism, insisting that individuals have a right to define gender according to their self-perception, rather than according to their biological makeup. Furthermore, many public schools are encouraging parents and staff to validate the feelings of those with “gender dysphoria.”

Nonetheless, any understanding of gender as self-defined or self-determined stands in sharp opposition to the created order and to the Word of God. God, in his wisdom, made humankind “male and female” (Gen 1:27). That order, and each individual’s participation in it, must be valued and affirmed. Gender is an important component of human personhood and cannot be tampered with without individuals suffering untold harm.

How gender roles should be understood and appropriately expressed may vary from culture to culture, but gender itself remains rooted in Creation rather than culture. While gender embraces more than mere biology, it cannot be determined apart from it.

It is indeed tragic that the Fall has introduced biological anomalies like intersexuality into human experience. It is tragic that some individuals suffer from gender identity confusion. We look longingly for the liberation of creation from its current “bondage to corruption” (Rom 8:21) and the “redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). In the meantime, we must show love and compassion to those struggling with gender identity confusion and invite them to share in the hope for wholeness held out in the gospel.

While we cannot condone the actions of those who seek to chemically or surgically alter their biologically indicated gender, we must sympathize with the profound “gender dysphoria” that inclines them to do so. Some of those who

wrestle with this issue are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must embrace them in the bonds of Christian affection and fellowship, following the example of Jesus, of whom it was said: “A bruised reed he will not break” (Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20).

As believers, we are called to extend to our neighbors love and compassion. We are called to affirm the worth of every person as an image bearer of God. We are called to invite them into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. Yet we also insist that individuals should not seek to alter their biologically indicated gender in order to align it with their gender as self-perceived.

Sexuality and Redemption (Present and Future)

Disordered sexuality remains a deep and pervasive problem, but God has provided a redemptive remedy in the gospel of Jesus Christ. God created us for wholeness as human beings—including sexual wholeness. This wholeness, so tragically distorted by sin, can be restored by God’s grace. Our fallen sexuality can be redeemed in Christ.

We can be redeemed from the *penalty* of sin. Jesus bore all of our sins on the cross. Christ died for those with same-sex attraction and gender confusion just as he died for those of us whose lives are sexually broken in other ways (Rom 3:23). There is no sin, sexual or otherwise, that cannot be forgiven by God for those who trust in Jesus (1 Cor 6:9-11). When we are in Christ, sin’s penalty is cancelled. Our true identity, then, is found in Christ, not in sexual attraction.

We can now also be redeemed from the *power* of sin. God’s moral demands are impossible to meet in our own strength. But Jesus breaks the power of cancelled sin. With the divine aid of God’s indwelling Holy Spirit, God’s grace enables those who follow Jesus to live lives of moral purity and holy sexuality. This does not mean that grace necessarily eliminates the desire for sexual expressions God has ruled out of bounds. It does not mean, for example, that God will necessarily eliminate a person’s same-sex attraction or gender confusion. God has clearly forbidden adultery, and yet the Scriptures and Christian experience make clear that Christians still wrestle with adulterous desires. Temptation to sin remains a characteristic feature of the Christian life. But while temptation may be inevitable, succumbing to temptation is not (1 Cor 10:13). God provides us freedom from sin’s enslavement (Rom 6:6). But, as followers of Christ, in order to experience this freedom, we must continue to resist the dangerous undertow of our sinful nature (Gal 5:17; Col 3:5). We are enabled to resist the power of sin, sexual and otherwise, as we walk in the Spirit sustained by God’s strength (Gal 5:16; Phil 4:13).

Those in Christ will ultimately be redeemed from the *presence* of sin. While we can, by God’s grace, progressively overcome the power of sin during this life, we will not attain complete perfection until our bodies are fully redeemed and glorified (Rom 8:23). Then we will forever dwell, sin-free, in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1-5). While gender distinctions will remain in eternity—we will still be male or female—human sexual expression was designed by God only for the current created order, where it serves as a symbol of the spiritual intimacy between Jesus and his bride, the Church (Eph 5:31-32). Once Jesus has been fully united with his bride, marriage and sexual expression, as we now know them, will be replaced with the higher pleasures and the perfect intimacy of the new creation (Matt 22:23-33).

Human Sexuality: Core Affirmations

Therefore, the Missionary Church, in faithfulness to the Scriptures, and in concert with historic Christian orthodoxy, affirms the following truths:

- We affirm that God’s intention for sex is that it adorn the institution of marriage—a sacred covenant between one man and one woman.
- We affirm that sex is a divine gift, given to seal the marriage covenant, and intended both for pleasure (Prov 5:18-19) and for procreation (Gen 1:28).
- We affirm that sex is part of the current order of creation, where it serves as a symbol of that glorious spiritual intimacy by which it will be subsumed in the new creation (Matt 22:23-33).
- We affirm that God intends heterosexual marriage to serve as a living symbol of the relationship between Jesus and his bride, the Church (Eph 5:31-32).
- We affirm that God declares all sex outside the boundaries of marriage—whether pre-marital or extramarital, whether heterosexual or homosexual—as sin.
- We affirm that sexual disorder is a universal human problem and that *all* sexual sin lies under the judgment of God.

- We affirm that God calls and empowers all Christians, whatever the nature of their sexual attraction, to moral purity and “holy sexuality.”¹
- We affirm that homosexuality is contrary to God’s original design for human flourishing and that homosexual behavior is clearly forbidden in the Scriptures.
- We affirm that homosexual marriage, even though it may be sanctioned by the State, remains forbidden by God.
- We affirm that gender is a divine gift, essential to both our humanity and personal identity.
- We affirm that God’s design was the creation of two distinct and complementary sexes, male and female, a distinction evident in physiological makeup of the human race.
- We affirm that gender identity is biologically (physiologically) determined, rather than being dependent on self-perception.
- We affirm that sexual sin—in whatever form it manifests itself—cannot efface the image of God. All human beings—whatever the precise nature of their sin—remain worthy of our compassion and respect, just as they remain the object of the lovingkindness of God (Rom 5:8).
- We affirm that God calls us to love sinners, even as we grieve for their sin.
- We affirm that all have sinned (Rom 3:23) and are in need of the redeeming and restorative grace of God.
- We affirm our confidence in the saving power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16) and the life transforming power of the indwelling Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18). God intends grace, rather than sin, to have the last word in the lives of his children. “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57).

— Adopted by the 2015 General Conference

XIX — HUMAN ORIGINS & GOD’S POWER

The Missionary Church is passionately committed to the biblical teaching that God is the Creator of all things (John 1:3).¹ Purely naturalistic views that deny God’s role in creation stand outside the doctrinal fence posts of our denominational family. While individual pastors and churches may hold varying understandings of the specific timeline and processes God employed to accomplish the work described in Genesis chapters 1 and 2, we together agree that creation was an act of God, planned and executed by God alone, out of nothing, without any pre-existing material. All of nature was created by him and has no self-organizing capacity apart from him. As Genesis 1:1 states, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

Specifically, the Missionary Church affirms the existence of one historical Adam and one historical Eve, directly and uniquely created by God. This conviction flows not only from the text of Genesis 1-2 itself, but from our commitment to the integrity of the whole fabric of biblical truth. The biblical account of humanity’s fall (Gen 3), which resulted in our inherited sinful nature, rests upon the existence of a singular historical Adam, as does Paul’s explanation of the “first Adam-second Adam” substitutionary work of Jesus in accomplishing our redemption (Rom 5:12-19). The historicity of the rest of Genesis chapters 1-11—Cain and Abel, Noah, the Flood, the tower of Babel, and all the biblical implications that flow from those accounts—rests upon the historicity of Adam and Eve as described in Genesis 1-2. The existence of a uniquely created Adam and Eve provides integral support to the biblical claim that humanity is uniquely made in God’s image, as distinguished from all other creatures. Further, the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Luke 3 traces Jesus’ lineage through a series of historical individuals beginning with Adam. In short, removing the thread of a uniquely and directly created Adam and Eve causes the whole tapestry of biblical revelation to unravel.

We understand that a primary source of the human origin controversy among Christians is the perceived conflict between science and the biblical account. We assert that there is no ultimate conflict between scientific knowledge and biblical truth, because “all truth is God’s truth.” Science can enable us to see with greater clarity God’s glory in creation. For this reason, scripture encourages us to examine the created order for evidence of God’s invisible attributes (Rom 1:20), as

¹The phrase is Christopher Yuan’s from *Out of a Far Country: A Gay Son’s Journey to God, A Broken Mother’s Search for Hope*.

¹As demonstrated by the multiple references to God as Creator in the “Articles of Faith” segment of our Constitution.

well as his involvement in and with his creation. Apparent conflicts between biblical truth and scientific observation are legitimately worthy of study with a heart for understanding. We also understand that scientific inquiry is limited. For example, scientific methodology cannot prove or disprove the biblical human origins account. The Bible provides that account in the words of the “God who was there” and asks us to accept by faith that his power is sufficient to accomplish whatever his Word declares.

As Christians, we know that many historical events described in the Bible cannot be scientifically observed or explained. Science—anthropology, geology, archeology, etcetera—may corroborate aspects of the biblical record, but we accept by faith many biblical assertions that stand outside the scope of scientific inquiry. For example, we believe that Jesus rose from the dead, even though this historical event cannot be scientifically verified today.

We also believe that we who are in Christ will rise from the dead, complete with resurrected bodies, and that all persons will live forever, either with God or apart from his presence. We believe God performs miracles. These and many other biblical truths cannot be scientifically explained. Therefore, science is a valuable and biblically encouraged tool for investigating reality, but it is not our ultimate source of truth. We are first and foremost people of faith: in God, in his Word, and in his power to do whatever he says he did, is doing, and will do.

— Adopted by the 2019 General Conference

XX — A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO RACISM

A biblical response to racism begins with the understanding that we are all one human race (Acts 17:26). All human beings are created by God and bear his image and his likeness equally (Gen 1:26-27, 5:1, 9:6). While the Bible does not provide us with a concept of race in the scientific anthropological sense of the term, it does speak to the various divisions among people groups, ethnicities, and cultures, and is well acquainted with the realities of disharmony and alienation that exist along these lines.

Scripture teaches us that this alienation is a direct result of the fall, where sin initially entered our world through our first parents (Gen 3:14-24). This led to envy and strife (Gen 4:8-16), the radical corruption of our hearts being bent toward evil (Gen 6:5-6), and widespread division among people (Gen 11:1-9).¹ We understand the sin of racism as a specific form of alienation from the fall. It can be defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism toward a person of a different race based upon the belief that one’s own race is superior. Racism is a pervasive evil that disparages other image bearers on the basis of differences in physical appearance, cultural practice, or certain behavioral traits that correspond to such differences. It is a sin that divides both humanity and the church. And like other sins, it can be both intentional and unintentional and come in forms of both commission and omission (Jas 4:17; Lev 4:27).

Insofar as racism violates the image of God in a person, it is first and foremost a sin against God (Gen 9:6; Ps 51:4). We are all equally bearers of God’s image, and to be prejudiced against another image bearer is an affront against what God has created. Yet racism is also a sin against our neighbor. In the Old Testament, God revealed his intention to bless every nation and people on earth through Abraham’s offspring (Gen 12:3, 22:18). The New Testament also urges us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:31), and to honor the image of God in our fellow persons (Jas 3:9; 1 John 4:20).

When it comes to a cure for racism, Scripture reminds us that the mind “set on the flesh is hostile to God” (Rom 8:7). With this mind we cannot submit to God’s law in our own power. Only by being united with Christ in his death can the power of sin be broken — and this includes the sin of racism (Rom 6:6-7). Christ himself is our peace, having broken down in his flesh the dividing walls of hostility among different ethnicities, cultures, and races (Acts 2:1-11; Eph 2:14; Col 3:11). His redemption makes a new creation (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17). Scripture calls believers to be transformed by the renewal of their minds, to set their minds on the Spirit, and to regard no one according to the flesh (Rom 12:2, 8:6; 2 Cor 5:16). We are urged not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought (Rom 12:3), and to avoid showing partiality in our churches (Jas 2:1-4; Acts 10:34-35). Racism not only violates the image of God, but it also denies the truth of the gospel that all believers are one in Spirit and have been baptized into one body (John 17:22-23; 1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal:3:28).

¹ While some would try to argue that God intended a separation by race at Babel, we reject any notion that this scattering was done along racial lines or for purposes of racial “purity.” We further reject as a misreading of Paul the idea that God has placed intentional boundaries between people based on racial or ethnic distinctions (See Paul’s Areopagus sermon in Acts 17:26).

Jesus plainly says that the work of the gospel in the lives of his disciples will inevitably bear much fruit (John 15:8). It is worth noting that Jesus explained and illustrated neighbor love with a parable featuring persons of different ethnicities (Luke 10:25-37). In his own earthly ministry, he himself crossed barriers of gender, class and ethnicity in his encounter with the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-42). Furthermore, in the early church we see the Holy Spirit confronting cultural and ethnic divisions, bringing about gospel reconciliation (Acts 6:1-7, 10:1-22). Scripture clearly and repeatedly calls God's people to treat those of a different appearance, background, language group, ethnicity, or culture with respect, love, dignity and care — modeling true unity before the world (John 13:34-35, 17:21; Rom 12:5; Phil 2:2-3).

We reject as unbiblical any theory that would assign guilt or innocence, superiority or inferiority, on the basis of skin color alone. God has created us as a rational, moral people who are both capable of making choices and being held responsible for those choices. Scripture teaches that no sin is inevitable and only one sin is unpardonable — racism is neither. We call upon the Missionary Church to first and foremost think biblically about the sin of racism.

Like many North American denominations, we recognize that the Missionary Church has a somewhat complicated history on the subject of race. With historical beginnings in the late nineteenth century resulting in a 1969 merger, our roots reveal a mixed record. Early publications from our forbearers often reflected an indifference regarding racial issues. When addressed, our approach toward racial injustice was often patronizing and at times resorted to stereotyping.² We were both reserved and late to offer condemnation of Jim Crow laws or explicitly racist groups.³ One of our denominational schools even prohibited interracial dating and marriage.⁴ Stated plans to more intentionally and effectively embrace minority groups were not well received, much less carried out.⁵ In short, our history reveals that the Missionary Church has tended to drift along with our culture on this issue.⁶ The numerical growth of Latino brothers and sisters within our denomination more recently has been a tremendous blessing. The Missionary Church must intentionally and consistently address any sense of disconnectedness and second-class status in our regional and national meetings. Our denomination has much to learn about developing ministries in urban, inner-city, and non-Anglo communities across the nation. Our church planting strategies have historically reflected a tendency to start new works where there has been the greatest interest (and perceived potential to be successful) — not necessarily where there was the greatest need. We not only lament the legacy of every form of racism in our world, but we also acknowledge the presence of historical failures and ongoing shortcomings within our own denomination.

When it comes to a sin like racism, it is important to note that Scripture distinguishes between sin's guilt and its corruption. Culpability for sin is personal, but corruption can be corporate (Rom 3:10-12, 8:20-21). Some within the Missionary Church may be personally guilty of the sin of racism and have an obligation to seek repentance. Others may simply live in the midst of the corruption of this particular sin and be inheritors of a mixed record. We challenge everyone to examine their own hearts and ask the Lord to reveal any hidden faults (Ps 19:12-14). We also understand that when damage done by previous generations remains unaddressed or unresolved, such damage needs to be repaired and such wrong needs to be righted. Scripture presents several biblical precedents for corporate repentance when not every individual involved was personally guilty (2 Chr 6:24-39; Neh 9:33; Matt 23:31; Rev 2:13-16). Even if one is not directly culpable for specific past sins, repenting of corporate or historical sins can be an expression of regret and a form of public disavowal (Dan 9:3-15). As recipients of the Missionary Church's heritage, we acknowledge and lament these sins — and where appropriate, we confess such sins personally. Furthermore, we unequivocally renounce any statutes, systems, or structures in our world that would strip individuals of their image bearer status based on prejudice against skin color, ethnicity, language group, or cultural background.

² See various articles in the *Gospel Banner*, years 1883-1969.

³ In a March 23, 1916, editorial in the *Gospel Banner*, J. A. Huffman (UMC) condemned segregation, one of the cornerstones of Jim Crow laws. In a September 4, 1924, *Gospel Banner* article, a contributing writer decried the impact of the Ku Klux Klan and called out ministers who were complicit with the KKK. These two instances are the closest the Missionary Church has come in its history to officially denounce Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan.

⁴ Fort Wayne Bible College prohibited interracial dating until 1972. See "Inter-racial Dating," *BC Book* (1959-60), 19; cf. "Inter-racial Dating" in *BC Book* (1969-70), 31.

⁵ See the "1965 Action of the MCA Study Committee for Reaching Minority Groups," (Fort Wayne, IN: March 15, 1967), housed in the Missionary Church Archives at Bethel University.

⁶ As recently as 2019, the Missionary Church's Constitution and position papers gave racism only a single, brief mention. "WE STAND . . . FOR government based on the equal rights of all citizens regardless of race, gender, or faith — . . . AGAINST racism and anti-Semitism anywhere, anytime." See Position Paper XI: "Our Values," adopted by the 1989 General Conference) in the *Constitution of the Missionary Church*.

We know that the church will one day worship as a great multi-ethnic, multi-racial, multi-cultural assembly (Isa 2:1-4; Zech 8:23; Heb 12:22-23; Rev 7:9-10). This picture of the heavenly state, where every tribe, tongue and nation gathers to worship God (Heb 12:18-24), should be reflected in our earthly state (1 Pet 2:9-10). We therefore express our desire to mature in our racial diversity and harmony as brothers and sisters in the Missionary Church. Toward that end we furthermore call upon local churches, regions, and our entire denomination to recognize that from the earliest days of the church God has gifted and called a diverse group of leaders in order that they may raise up a similarly diverse and beautiful bride (Acts 13:1). We live and minister in the bright light of this first-century biblical example. We wholeheartedly affirm our partnership in the gospel and our equal standing together before the Lord — all purchased with the precious blood of Christ. Our prayer is that the Missionary Church will grow as a unified and diverse community of equal image bearers who are being increasingly conformed to the image of God's Son (John 17:21; Rom 8:29).

— Adopted by the 2021 General Conference

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDENTIALING

Licensing

Applicants must have completed a minimum course of study consisting of at least one course in each of the following: Old Testament, New Testament, biblical or systematic theology, practical ministry theology, biblical interpretation, homiletics or communication, leadership and the Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church.

Ordination

Candidates for ordination shall fulfill the educational requirements listed below

- Completion of any bachelor's degree in professional Christian ministries, *or*
- Completion of any master's degree in professional Christian ministries, *or*
- Completion of the Pastoral Leadership Institute course of studies, *or*
- Completion of a supervised course of studies including 32 semester hours of general education courses and 21 semester hours of professional Christian ministries courses, in addition to the minimum courses prescribed in the requirements for obtaining a license (Old Testament, New Testament, biblical or systematic theology, practical ministry theology, biblical interpretation, homiletics or communication, leadership and Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church), with a minimum of three hours in each of the following: Old Testament, New Testament, biblical or systematic theology, counseling, evangelism and discipleship, and one course related to the individual's area of ministry (youth, missions, Christian education, church planting, church growth, etc.).

General Information

Courses may be taken at Bethel University or any accredited (AABC, regional, or ATS) college or seminary including the correspondence departments of such schools.

Courses may also be taken through the Pastoral Leadership Institute or at schools which have been recognized for alternative education for those persons preparing for ministry for whom traditional educational programs constitute insurmountable geographical, financial, or family difficulties. The specific advantages and disadvantages of such programs are to be explained to interested persons.

Details for the Pastor Orientation Course of the Missionary Church are printed in Appendix 2.

APPENDIX 2

MISSIONARY CHURCH PASTOR ORIENTATION COURSE

An Independent Study Course for New Pastors in the Missionary Church

The Pastor Orientation Course gives a broad introduction to key information about the vision, ministry, history, resources and responsibilities of every leader and church in the Missionary Church.

Course Procedure

Complete this course by taking the following steps:

- Go to mcusa.org/become-part/prospective-pastors
- Click “Pay Now” to pay \$35 exam fee through online portal
- Once payment is complete, click “Already paid? Click here.”
- The course has 8 parts. You will watch a video in each section and answer questions. It will take approximately 45-60 minutes to finish. If you cannot finish at one time, you can save and return to your progress later.
- Submit completed exam.

Results of your exam will be sent to you, your regional or district director and, for PLI students, the Pastoral Leadership Institute. Please note: exams will not be made available to your district or region for credentialing until payment is received.

The videos include the translation in Spanish.

Designated Contact for any course questions:

Grace Henderson
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