

STUDY TEAM REPORT

Careful Thinking About God's Truth



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**REPORT OF THE
“ CAREFUL THINKING ABOUT GOD’S TRUTH”
STUDY TEAM**

(The Study Commission on Doctrine)

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‘Careful Thinking About God’s Truth’
2017 SCOD Report to the General Conference
May 19-22, 2017

1) Introduction: The Study Commission on Doctrine met annually in face-to-face meetings on three occasions since the 2014 General Conference as well as doing considerable work by email. Its active members are: Lee Barbour, Keith Elford (chair), Dale Harris, Beverly Kay, Greg Pulham, David Schuchardt, Derek Spink, Dustin Schellenberg, Mary-Elsie Wolfe. Rob Clements served for part of the term and John Vlainic has been a valuable resource person.

2) Website Resources:

SCOD has worked diligently to respond to requests from the constituency for work on topics related to issues in our country (e.g. Physician Assisted Suicide) as well as providing resources for pastors and local churches. It maintains a “Topics Worth Thinking About” section on the FMCIC website <https://www.fmcic.ca/position-papers/> and a list of all the resources to be found there are in **Appendix 1**.

“The ConneXion” found at <http://fmcictheology.blogspot.ca/> is a Free Methodist Theology Blog maintained by Dale Harris on behalf of the Study Commission on Doctrine. In it you will find blogs by various writers as well as a section on Worship Resources.

3) Assignment of Resolutions to the General Conference:

SCOD in its role as the General Conference Committee on Resolutions (See Standing Rules on p.2.) received three resolutions and assign them as follows:

Resolution A: "World Conference Referendum #1 – World Conference officers change"

Motion: That Resolution A be referred to the Board of Administration.

Resolution B: "World Conference Referendum #2 – Referendum voting process"

Motion: That Resolution B be referred to the Board of Administration.

Resolution C: "Pastoral Appointments-smaller churches-Roth/Hogeboom” be referred to the

Motion: That Resolution C be referred to the National Ministerial Education guidance and Placement (MEGaP) Committee.

4) Edits to *The Manual*:

SCOD is responsible for editing *The Manual* and submitted motions related to changes to *The Manual* to the BOA for their review, comments and approval. In some cases, the BOA sent some proposed changes back for further review. Below is a report of the work that has been done in this area since the 2014 General Conference.

a) Manual Edits already approved by the BOA

In those chapters in *The Manual* where the BOA can approve changes, SCOD submitted motions to the BOA and following is a list of changes that it approved. The complete text of the motions that were approved by the BOA authorizing immediate changes to *The Manual* can be seen in **Appendix 2**.

- i. ¶380-386C Forms moved to FMCiC website
- ii. ¶384A (Fellowship/Affiliated Congregation Questions moved to ¶370.5)
- iii. ¶ 374.6 Guidelines for Leaves of Absence
- iv. ¶630.2.5 *Entertainment*
- v. ¶630.2.9.3 *End of Life Care*
- vi. ¶630.2.9.4 *Other Ethical Dilemmas*
- vii. ¶630.3.1 The Christian and Marriage
 - a. ¶630.3.1.3 Healing Troubled Marriages
 - b. ¶630.3.1.4 Principles Regarding Divorce
 - c. ¶630.3.1.5 Care, Recovery, and Consequences After Divorce
 - d. ¶630.3.1.6 Remarriage After a Divorce
 - e. ¶630.3.1.7 Refusal of Counsel
 - f. ¶630.3.1.8 Exceptional Cases
 - g. ¶ Polygamy
- viii. ¶711 Pastoral Counsel regarding participation in Holy Communion
- ix. ¶711 Holy Communion edit (replace “anxiety” with “disbelief”)
- x. ¶712.2 INFANT BAPTISM / DEDICATION SERVICE edits

b) Manual Edits approved by the BOA and recommended to the 2017 General Conference

In those chapters in *The Manual* where only the General Conference can approve changes, SCOD submitted motions to the BOA related to the topics listed below. The BOA approved these motions and they have been placed in the “**Resolutions and Recommendations to the 2017 General Conference**” document along with other recommendations.

5) **New/Continuing Projects**

a) **Celibacy Statement** to incorporate into The Manual

- Singleness is also instituted by God
- Marriage is important but so is singleness

b) **Marriage/Divorce/Remarriage**

c) **Polyamory:** the unique situations Canada will face based on the CBC report and current lobby movement of twenty/thirty somethings.

d) **Free Methodist distinctives:** article by Denny Wayman

<http://fmcusa.org/lightandlifemag/the-freedoms-of-free-methodists/>

e) “**A FM Response to the Prosperity Gospel**” – Kendall

- f) **Grace and Truth:** A position paper that fleshes out the cautions of falling in either ditch and the life giving blessings of walking in the power of their balance.
- g) **Mental Health** Resource
- h) **Church Health** document

SCOD APPENDIX 1:

Resources in the “Topics Worth Thinking About” section of the FMCIC website

<https://www.fmcic.ca/position-papers/>

Communion

- Free Methodist stance regarding Communion
- Children’s Communion Brochure
- Children’s Communion Brochure – Leaders Guide
- Communion Service for Children
- Communion Bibliography

Ecclesiology

- Ecclesiology Affirmation
- Discernment about Support and Partnership

Evangelism

- Eastern Thought and the Gospel
- Ministry and evangelism in contemporary Canadian society

Human Sexuality

- Christian Marriage
- HIV/AIDS: Implications for the Local Church
- Rethinking Sexual Identity with the Mind of Christ – **NEW**
- A “Four Quadrant” Framework for Thinking about Homosexuality and the Church - **NEW**
- Pastoral reflections on Singleness and Celibacy - **NEW**

Methodism

- A Vision of Holiness for God’s People
- Defining the Elements of a Methodist Ethos
- Identifying Ministry & Life That Is Wesleyan
- Justification: “Clean Slate?”
- Sanctification: Free Methodist Position
- Sanctification: Saved to the Uttermost
- The World through a Wesleyan Lens
- Seven Steps Toward Free Methodist Renewal
- The Free Methodist Synthesis

- The Story of Christian Perfection
- Wesley's Means of Grace

Ordination

- What is the Meaning of Ordination?
- Life and Character of an Ordained Minister
- Dennis Camplin interview on the meaning of ordination
- Tom Gurnick interview on the meaning of ordination
- John Vlainic interview on the meaning of ordination

Pastoral Ministry Resources

- Discipleship With The Same Sex-Attracted Christians - **NEW**
- Membership Covenants
- Providing Pastoral Care for Same-Gender-Attracted Individuals
- Service for Miscarriage or Stillbirth
- Suicide – A Funeral Sermon Resource

Science and Ethics

- A Clergy Guide to End of Life Issues – Book Review
- Cloning, Embryonic Stem Cell Research, and Approach to Bioethics
- End of Life Care
- Organ and Tissue Donation
- Ethics – How to Make Ethical Decisions in a Complex World
- A Theological Framework for Thinking about Technology
- Surrogacy- **NEW**
- Physician Assisted Suicide- **NEW**

Social Issues

- Compassion and the Poor
- Human Rights
- Social Justice
- The Environment
- Child Abuse Prevention Policy – Winning Kids Inc

Theological Issues

- Documents to Help Us with Issues of Truth
- Baptism and Dedication
- Divine Healing
- Open Theism
- The Security of Believers
- Theology of Possessions

- Article on The Father- **NEW**

Women in Ministry

- How I Changed My Mind about Women in Ministry – Book review
- Jesus Transforms Cultural Norms- **NEW**
- Women in Ministry (FMCNA, FMCIC)
- Wesleyan Perspectives on Women in Ministry
- Women in Ministry (Reading the Bible as a whole, 1 Timothy 2:12)
- Why The Bible Does Not Prohibit Women Leaders – Bishop Kendall- **NEW**

SCOD APPENDIX 2: (Manual Edits approved by the BOA 2014-17)

1. Fellowship/Affiliated Congregation Questions

MOTION: That the “Questions to become a Fellowship or an Affiliated Congregation” be moved from ¶384A to become a new paragraph listed as ¶370.5 as follows:

¶370.5 Questions to become a Fellowship or an Affiliated Congregation

Before a Free Methodist Fellowship Certificate or Free Methodist Affiliation Certificate is signed, the bishop (or a designee) shall ask those who are to become charter members, the following questions:

1. Do you today reaffirm your commitment to Jesus Christ to work under His leadership to build His church?
2. Do you today reaffirm your loyalty to the ministry of (name of local church)?
3. Are you now willing to be a Free Methodist Fellowship/an Affiliated Congregation of The Free Methodist Church in Canada by agreeing together to adopt The Manual of The Free Methodist Church in Canada, and are you willing to be guided by it and live in harmony with it as a congregation?

2. ¶374.6 Guidelines for Leaves of Absence Administered by the Local Church

MOTION: That ¶374.6 Guidelines for Leaves of Absence Administered by the Local Church be changed to read as follows:

There are times when an appointed pastor requires a short leave of absence. A leave of absence differs from a sabbatical. A leave of absence is a response to a specific, unanticipated need that has arisen in the life of the pastor. A sabbatical is a proactive planned time away for the purpose of maintaining pastoral health. A sabbatical operates from the perspective of “from health, for health.”

A short leave of absence affects the employment arrangement with the local church but does not change the appointment arrangement with the conference. The reasons for the leave may vary from personal health (physical and/or mental) to educational pursuits. If requested by either the pastor or official board, the Director of Personnel (or a designate) will assist with the planning for the leave.....

3. Forms ¶¶380-386C

MOTION: That the forms in ¶¶380-386C in Chapter 3 of The Manual of The Free Methodist Church in Canada (as well as the “Application for a Period of Grace – FMCiC Core Ministries, Giving Streams” form) be made available only on the website with the following notation being made in The Manual:

¶380 LOCAL CHURCH FORMS

The following forms are provided at <http://fmcic.ca/wp-content/uploads/380-LOCAL-CHURCHFORMS> on The Free Methodist Church in Canada website:

- ¶381A LAY MINISTER’S LICENSE
- ¶381B RENEWAL OF LAY MINISTER’S LICENSE
- ¶382A TRANSFER OF MEMBERSHIP
- ¶382B TRANSFER OF ADULT MEMBERSHIP TO ANOTHER DENOMINATION
- ¶382C TRANSFER OF YOUTH MEMBERSHIP
- ¶383A RESTORATION OF CREDENTIALS
- ¶383B RECOMMENDATION FOR MINISTERIAL CANDIDACY
- ¶384A QUESTIONS TO BECOME A FELLOWSHIP OR AN AFFILIATED CONGREGATION
- ¶384B FREE METHODIST FELLOWSHIP /AFFILIATION CERTIFICATE
- ¶385 INCORPORATION AND DEEDS
- ¶386A APPLICATION TO MORTGAGE PROPERTY OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH
- ¶386B APPLICATION TO PURCHASE PROPERTY FOR THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH
- ¶386C APPLICATION TO SELL PROPERTY OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH

4. ¶630.2.5 Entertainment

MOTION: That ¶630.2.5 be changed to read as follows:

In a culture where pleasure is ardently pursued, we must exercise care regarding our recreational activities. We face a multitude of entertainment media - television, videos, movies, recorded music, the internet, dances, magazines, novels, video games etc. Since many of these

are pursued in the home, we cannot be legislated into wise choices; we must make them from a renewed heart. In the case of children and young people living at home, however, our convictions as Christian parents should prevail.

5. ¶630.2.9.3 *End of Life Care*

MOTION: That ¶630.2.9.3 *End of Life Care* be changed to read as follows:

For the Christian, death is not the end of life, but the transition into eternity (John 5:24-25). Therefore, physical death is not the ultimate enemy, but part of our journey. Christians must discourage the assumption that some lives are not worth living. Chronic disease, diminished physical capacity or ongoing disability do not constitute the end of life. We believe that there is no such thing as a “useless” life. The value and worth in our lives rests primarily in our relationship with a God whose love sustains us all through life, even to the end. He ministers to us personally and through the healing environment of Christian community. Divine wisdom in the face of end of life issues comes to us through Scripture, prayer, godly counsel, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

“Sanctity of life” must not be confused with “quality of life.” Because we affirm the sanctity of life (¶630.2.9) and the consequent worth of all persons (¶630.2.1), there can be no justification for euthanasia or assisted suicide.

We recognize and support the right of a competent individual, who is facing the end of life, to decide the aggressiveness of his or her care. If an individual is incompetent to make or incapable of making this decision, then a substitute decision maker, who respects the wishes of the individual as far as they are known, can make this decision on his or her behalf.

Treatment, or lack of treatment, which carries the risk of shortening life, is permissible so long as the intent is to provide relief or otherwise benefit the patient, rather than to cause death. A request that life not be sustained by heroic measures does not constitute euthanasia or physician assisted death.

We also recognize that when people choose to proceed with physician assisted death their suffering is such that they are convinced this is the only alternative. We would assert however that there are alternative therapeutic approaches available such as pain management and effective palliative care. In addition, we believe that the Holy Spirit can bring grace to situations that may otherwise seem hopeless or unendurable.

In situations like these we reserve the right for our ministers to be involved pastorally to the degree their conscience allows. Even though we do not celebrate this type of end of life nor do we encourage it, ministers should continue to be willing to provide pastoral comfort to all involved.

6. 630.2.9.4 Other Ethical Dilemmas

MOTION: That ¶630.2.8.4 be changed to read as follows:

¶630.2.9.4 Other Ethical Dilemmas

These biblical principles, which guide our approach to bioethics will need to be applied on an ongoing basis to other ethical dilemmas rising from advances in medical technology. Such ethical dilemmas may include but not be limited to: the allocation of finite resources, organ transplantation, genetic engineering and testing, and gender identity issues.

As we attend to human suffering, we acknowledge that the ability of medical technology to end human suffering is finite limited. Therefore, we accept our responsibility to use this technology with wisdom and compassion; honouring God, who is ultimately supreme.

7. ¶630.3.1.11 Polygamy

MOTION: That the following paragraph be added to The Manual.

¶630.3.1.11 Polygamy

When individuals involved in a polygamist marriage confess Jesus Christ as their Saviour and testify to their desire to follow him as Lord, The Free Methodist Church responds graciously while remaining faithful to the biblical “one man and one woman” vision of marriage. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6)

In polygamy, a man has entered into legal covenants with more than one woman and, as an honorable person, he must honor his promises. He must provide for the welfare of his wives. The church gives the family the responsibility to determine whether they will all continue to live together. As the children grow, the parents will rear them to understand and embrace a Christian view of marriage and the family.

The husband must take an interest in all of his children as a Christian father and provide for the well-being of all of his children.

Such believers living in polygamous relationships cannot be given positions of leadership within the church.

8. ¶711 Pastoral Counsel regarding participation in Holy Communion

MOTION: That the words under the heading “Who Can Participate?” in ¶711 be changed to read as follows:

~~“Those known to be living an immoral life or to be guilty of any disreputable practice should be counselled not to participate until they give satisfactory evidence of repentance.”~~ be replaced by “Where it is known to church leaders that a person has not responded to the communion invitation with integrity, pastoral counsel will be required. Such counsel may include a request not to participate until there is evidence of repentance.”

9. ¶711 Communion Wording Change

MOTION: That the word “*anxiety*” be replaced by the word “*disbelief*”.

O merciful Father, have mercy upon us; pardon and deliver us from all our sins:
from blindness of heart and lack of love;
from the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil;
from false doctrine and neglect of your Word;
from ~~anxiety~~ **disbelief** and lack of trust;

10. ¶712.2 INFANT BAPTISM / DEDICATION SERVICE

MOTION: That ¶712.2 INFANT BAPTISM / DEDICATION SERVICE be changed to read as follows:

(In the FMCiC, this liturgy is to be adapted and used for either an infant baptism or infant dedication service.)

God, through Moses, made covenant with his people, saying to them, “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).

In the days of the new covenant, Christ Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these;” (Mt 19:14) and on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter declared, regarding the salvation given through Christ, “The promise is for you and your children” (Acts 2:39).

We believe that God created human beings for community. We resist the modern tendency to isolate as families and as individuals. We believe in mutual encouragement and in humble,

loving correction as we strive to be God's kingdom people. We invite wisdom from God's people as parents, as children, as brothers and sisters in the Lord. In good times and in troubled times, may it be this people who rejoices with us and who weeps with us, who prays for us and who speaks forgiveness to us.

It is therefore a privilege to present our children to the Lord. It is also a duty to teach them what it means to be citizen of God's kingdom. And so this morning, these parents now bring [this child] to offer [him/her] in dedication and to pledge in the presence of this congregation, to bring [him/her] up in the Lord's discipline and instruction.

Prayer

Father, we praise you today for the gift of [this child] into our world, among your people, and into these parents' home. Thank you for all the joy [this child] has already brought. We praise you too for all the potential that you have packed into [this life]. May [he/she], as the years progress, increase in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with you and with other people.

Bless [name parents] as they parent [this child/their children]. Let them come to know your love more fully through their church family. Renew in their hearts the desire be your disciples and to serve others with whatever gifts you give them by your Holy Spirit.

Thank you for grace that seeks us even before we have even thought of you. May we know your presence here with us as we give [this child] and ourselves to you. We pray this as worshippers of the triune God – Father, Son and Spirit. Amen.

Covenant

Now these questions we address to the parents:

1. Do you, in the presence of God and this church, give [this child] to the Lord in baptism?

[We do.]

2. With God's help, do you renounce the devil and all his works? Do you commit to creating a home free from the worship of false gods and the dehumanizing practices associated with them? [We do.]

3. Will you, in faith, lead your child[ren] into a relationship with Jesus both by what you speak and by how you live? [We will.]

4. Do you accept the authority of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God?

[We do.]

5. Will you diligently teach [this child] the commandments and promises of the Most High God contained in the Bible, raising [him] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord?

[We will.]

6. And will you continue to raise your child in the fellowship of the church so that he/she might see and experience what it means to be part of the life of worship and mission of God's people? [We will.]

[Turn around & face the congregation.] As God's adopted children, let us also affirm our duty to love, pray for, disciple and encourage this family. Please show your commitment by standing. And these questions we address to the congregation:

Will you, as the people of God, the disciples of Jesus Christ, the body made alive in the Holy Spirit, commit to loving, supporting and guiding this family? [We will.]

As God's kingdom people, will you strive to communicate with and to encourage both parents and child in their connection to the Body of Christ, his church? [We will.]

[The Pastor shall take the child in his/her arms]

Please name your child. [Parents respond]

[this child], you are a gift from God so we place your life in God's hands. I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Prayer of Blessing]