

## ***Book of Discipline Basics***

The Book of Discipline is a “living document,” meaning that every four years at General Conference, resolutions are voted on which can change the contents of anything in the Book of Discipline except for our Constitution (chapters 1 & 2, which includes beliefs. These chapters take 2/3 ratification by the world church to be changed).

Because the Book of Discipline is a living document, this can sometimes cause confusion, particularly when it comes to knowing the difference between what is suggested and what is required in our local churches. In addition, most of our churches use the Book of Discipline as their bylaws. Because of that we want to ensure that our churches are operating within the requirements of the Book of Discipline.

So... what is truly required for our local churches in their structure when it comes to how they operate?

1. **BELIEFS & VALUES:** Chapters 1-3 outline our beliefs. Clearly, our churches need to be teaching what is in line with our doctrine, our pastors need to honor their ordination vows (§8400 & 8700), and both pastors and members should adhere to the membership covenant (§154-160). In addition, the first two sections of the chapter on the Local Church (“Preamble” and “Characteristics” §6000-6060) outline our values and non-negotiables. These are vital to any FM church. Our new “Free Methodist Way” are 5 values that we expect all FM churches to uphold (<https://fmcusa.org/thefmway>).
2. **MEMBERSHIP:** While churches vary in what classes are taken prior to membership, having members is required in order to be a legally operating entity (another term can be substituted for “members” that fits the local church context). These members should be people who agree with and are living out our membership covenant, becoming more and more like Jesus.  
§151 The requirements of full membership are:
  - A. Christian baptism,\* confession of a personal experience in regeneration, and a pledge to seek diligently until sanctified wholly\*\* if that experience has not been attained;
  - B. acceptance of the Articles of Religion, the Membership Covenant, the goals<sup>1</sup> for Christian conduct and matters of church government as written in the *Book of Discipline*;<sup>1</sup>
  - C. a covenant to support the Church, to live in fellowship with the members thereof, to be an active participant in the ministry of the Church, and to seek God's glory in all things;
  - D. approval of membership by the local Board of Administration and the candidate's public declaration of membership vows.^
3. **ANNUAL SOCIETY MEETING:** Free Methodist local churches are called “societies.” Churches must have at least one meeting of the membership each year. Around Genesis, these gatherings have a variety of flavors and names, but they are always an opportunity to focus on the mission and vision of the church, celebrating the good that has happened in the past year and setting vision for the coming year. These annual meetings should be announced to the members at least 10 days before they take place. Each year, financial reports and a report from the board should be given to the members (a formal report, a letter, a creative video are all possibilities for this annual report). These can happen at this annual meeting, or *electronically*, as long as there is opportunity for members to ask questions. Non-members may be invited to the annual meeting, but voting is done by members. *Voting is sometimes included in the annual society meeting, but in recent years has often switched to electronic communication and voting prior to the society meeting. Before voting, biblical qualifications for leadership should be presented.*

4. **VOTING:** *Those below must be duly elected by members:*
  - A. **The Local Board of Administration** (called a variety of things throughout Genesis) must be approved by vote of the members. It should not contain pastoral family members, and ideally it should not have more than one person from a family. Board members are voted in for rotating 3 year terms. Board members may be asked to serve a second term, but after the second term should step off the board for at least a year.
  - B. *IF there is a separate Board of Trustees, they must be voted on by members (see below\*)*
  - C. **The Delegate(s) and Reserve Delegate** must be elected by the members as the delegate(s) / reserve. The delegate should not be a pastor's family member. The delegate must be willing and able to attend Annual Conference. Delegates are elected by a separate ballot.
  - D. **A Treasurer** must be elected by the members as the treasurer.
  - E. **The Nominating Committee** must be elected by the members (and other than the pastor, is different people from the Board).

*The nominating committee (varying in size, usually chaired by the pastor), brings the slate of those on the ballot to the membership. All members of the board must be members of the church. The nominating committee and pastor are responsible for ensuring that those on the ballot meet the leadership requirements listed in the Book of Discipline, ¶3402 & 6200.E.(listed below ++)*

*°°A basic sample ballot is below*

## 5. SELECTING LEADERS:

Leaders are called to a high standard. They must be people who live within Scriptural guidelines for leaders, express Christlike attitudes, have spiritual gifts that match what they are called to do, continue to live out our doctrine and mission, and be fully supportive of the church (including attendance, service, and tithing). (See ++) Leaders placed on the ballot for boards, as well as other key leaders within the church, should have these characteristics.

## 6. REQUIRED BOARD(S):

¶6200.D - Recognizing the diversity in the Free Methodist Church, diversity in board and ministry structures is needed to meet the Expected Outcomes. Ministry settings vary due to size, goals and culture. The society is free to organize its boards and ministry structures in such a manner as to maintain Free Methodist values while accomplishing the Expected Outcomes.

- A. **BOARD OF ADMINISTRATION** (called different things at the local level):
  - i. A local church board is normally chaired by the pastor. It includes:
    - a. a Treasurer (voted on by the society),
    - b. a Secretary (elected and voted on by the board),
    - c. one Delegate (in churches with multiple delegates, a "lead delegate" should sit on the board. See below to know how many delegates you are allowed^^),
    - d. additional elected board members.
  - ii. The Board of Administration may function in the legal capacity as the Board of Trustees\* (and in most Genesis churches, they do, with only one Board). If they do, the Board of Administration assumes financial responsibility for the church, ensuring that finances and properties are handled in a responsible, legal and godly manner. *Note: when a church desires to sell or purchase property, or do major renovations or building that require more than 10% of annual income, pre-approval by the Genesis BOA is needed.*
  - iii. Beyond this most basic structure, local churches are free to determine the best structure and use of the board. Our Book of Discipline encourages our structures to be in line with what will best allow the church to fulfill the mission of Jesus in its local context. ("In consultation with the conference superintendent, the society may choose other structures and titles to appropriately reflect core values and desired outcomes." ¶6300)

- iv. While there must be an elected Treasurer who is a member duly elected to the board, the church is free to hire a bookkeeper or other financial people. The Treasurer would be responsible for ensuring that financial practices and reporting are strong, but other people may be creating the financial statements, etc.
  - v. While there must be a Secretary who is part of the board (and considered the Society Secretary), there may be other notetakers at board and membership meetings. Meeting minutes (particularly recording any voted-upon action) should be kept of all board meetings. Pastor's parsonage allowance should be voted on and recorded in meeting minutes annually (November or December for the coming year).
  - vi. *Examples of church board functions include: Boards that oversee finances, property and legal issues. Boards that include leadership of various key ministries. Boards that support the pastor and the mission and vision of the church. (Structures change as churches change. If you are wondering what kind of board structure might work for a church like yours, reach out to the conference for a consultation).*
- B. If the Board of Administration operates legally as the Board of Trustees, then only one board is required. While we recommend limiting the number of boards and elected positions, *we encourage the use of ministry teams with empowered leaders. These leaders and teams do not have to be elected by membership.*
- C. The **Nominating Committee** meets only when preparing ballots for the annual meeting. The Board of Administration nominates the Nominating Committee for vote at the annual meeting. It is recommended that the Nominating Committee request recommended names from all members and prayerfully consider names that are recommended before preparing the final ballot. While names may come in of people who do not meet the leadership qualifications or the gifts desired for the board (and therefore should not be on the ballot), other names may come to light that the committee is unaware of, but who would serve well. For board nominations, the number of people nominated may match the number of people needed. (In other words, ALL may win the election). For the delegate(s), there must be at least two people on the ballot for one position. They may also be people nominated for the board (in other words, everyone on the ballot may be coming onto the board, but the vote will determine who will be the delegate(s) and reserve delegate(s)).

Notes from the Sup:

\* Baptism can be infant baptism confirmed, or believer's baptism.

\*\* Years ago, before I was ordained, the MEG board asked me if I had any questions about FM theology. I told them I did not understand "entire sanctification"! ("Sanctified wholly"). My superintendent gave me an answer that made sense. He said: "We want to see people in a place of spiritual freedom, where they are free to not sin." Since I had been working with people to help them find freedom from things that had bound them in the past, this made great sense to me. If people feel that there is an area in their life that has them bound to sin, we are called to help them find freedom from what binds them. They are then free to live a life that more and more reflects the holiness and wholeness of Jesus.

^ Public declaration of membership vows can take place in a Sunday service, or a special gathering. Some churches have chosen to update the language of the membership vows (¶8800), or add on an additional question related to their local church. However, agreement (publicly declared or in writing) to our membership vows is important. Why? As an example: you discover that a leader is having an affair and is unrepentant. The membership vows they have agreed to allow you to remove them from leadership and membership. This is one of these places where the Book of Discipline as your bylaws "covers you." IN ADDITION: At a conference level, when we vote to approve conference boards, we do not assume that all on the ballot are known by all who are voting, but we vote to affirm the process that has been taken by trusted leaders to bring names forward. "Approval by the local BOA" may be the same thing, particularly in a larger church or when many members are being added. The local BOA oversees and affirms the process, knowing that those who are entering membership understand the commitment and affirm the covenant.

^^One lay delegate shall be admitted from each society. If there is more than one pastor in full membership (ordained elder) appointed to a society, the society shall be entitled to one additional lay delegate for each additional pastor. A society that has more than 100 adult members, may elect an additional lay delegate; and for each additional 200 adult members, an additional lay delegate may be elected.

++ ¶3402 Leadership in the Church

Leadership in the church is an honor that has accompanying responsibilities and sacrifices. The Scriptures describe the qualities of leaders in such passages as: Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9. Those who are chosen to lead in the church do so in a spirit of humility and dependence upon God. They must be spiritually mature individuals whose lifestyle shall be in harmony with the Scriptures, the doctrine of the Free Methodist Church (¶100-131), the principles of the Membership Covenant (¶154-160), which are the goals of our maturing life in Christ, and of the selection of leaders.

++ ¶6200.E

A. Selecting Leaders

1. Leaders of the society give substance and direction to the society as they seek to fulfill our Expected Outcomes. They pray, strategize and focus the energies, spiritual gifts and passion of the whole body.
2. Leadership and/or policy-making positions shall be filled by members who:
  - a. live consistently within scriptural guidelines (expectations) for leaders (e.g. Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9) and express Christlike attitudes in life and in relationships (e.g. Matthew 20:26-28; John 15:12-17; Acts 6:1-7 and Ephesians 4:1- 17);
  - b. give evidence of spiritual gifts such as leadership, faith and administration;
  - c. agree with and sincerely seek to live out the goals for their maturing life in Christ (i.e. the principles of the membership covenant);
  - d. continue in harmony with our doctrine and mission; and
  - e. are vital in faith, faithful in attendance and financially supportive of their church to at least the level of a tithe.
3. Leadership and/or policy-making positions are defined as: the Board of Administration, delegate(s), Nominating Committee, financial chairman and/or treasurer, plus other key ministry or teaching positions as determined by the local Board of Administration.

°° Sample Ballots:

**For the board (nominated by the Nominating Committee. Vote for all you approve of):**

Samantha Carman \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Joe Smith \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Alicia Jones, Treasurer \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

(Continuing on the board are: Names listed followed by the year their term ends)

**For Delegate: (nominated by the Nom Committee. Vote for one. A majority is needed for election:)**

Samantha Carman \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

Joe Smith \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_\_no

(NOTE: for larger churches or churches with more than one appointed elder, more delegates are needed. See ^^ IF more than one delegate & reserve is needed, more names should be offered. A majority vote is needed for election. The delegate or "lead delegate" [if there are multiple delegates] sits on the board)

**Nominating Committee: (Nominated by the board):**

\_\_\_\_\_Sarah Clapton

(Continuing to serve: Names, with the years their terms end listed after them).

For next year's ballot I would recommend \_\_\_\_\_(name)\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_(position)\_\_\_\_\_