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## ABSTRACT

### **DISCIPLESHIP OUT OF TRANSITION: A STUDY OF THE NEW MEMBERSHIP POLICIES AND PROCEDURES OF THE FREE METHODIST CHURCH AND ITS IMPACT ON DISCIPLESHIP**

by

Barton Todd Herndon

Discipleship is essential, and how a church conducts its Christian nurture is priority. When people enter church, they are open to new ways of living so that their Christian lives are meaningful. In light of these understandings we ask: How well are local Free Methodist Churches discipling new members? Are the changes from the 1995 General Conference enhancing or hurting the discipleship of new members?

The purpose of this study was to determine how the 1995 changes in the Free Methodist Church membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipling of new members as reported by selected clergy and lay leaders.

The study set out to evaluate the perceptions of selected Free Methodist clergy and laity concerning how the changes are impacting new members' discipleship. This study merged both qualitative and quantitative research, utilizing 46 interviews and 162 survey questionnaires with no comparison group.

ANOVAs and Pearson Coorelation Coefficients were run on the data gathered from the questionnaires. Clergy know substantially more about the membership policies and procedures than the laity. Clergy need to educate their laity on the principles behind the new membership policies and procedures because of this study's strong correlation findings. When new members have an increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church they also: 1) feel they belong

to their local congregations and to God; 2) are growing in their spiritual maturity; 3) make the Christian conduct standards a part of their regular behavior; and 4) are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ. If more Free Methodist laity, along with the new members, understood these principles, they would grow in these four areas of discipleship as well.

A significant percentage of both clergy and laity observed new members feeling they belong to their local congregations even though they have joined their churches under new membership requirements. This evidence supports the idea that the new membership policies and procedures are starting to work

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A Dissertation

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In Partial Fulfillment  
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by

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

God touched forty-two year old Cecil Hooks' heart on 15 October 1991. Cecil came to Harmony Grove Methodist Church's altar after the guest evangelist gave the invitation to the audience to accept Christ. Large tears welled up in Cecil's eyes as he said, "God touched me, and I am ready to serve God." After the revival, Cecil asked me what he must do to join Harmony Grove United Methodist Church. First, I simply asked him to fill out a membership card. Then I asked him, "Will you give of your time, presence, gifts, and service to this congregation?" However, neither the members of Harmony Grove United Methodist Church nor I mentored or explained to Cecil what it meant to give of his time, presence, gifts, and service to God and to the church. We gave him no guidance nor did we challenge him. Moreover, we never required or expected Cecil to serve God or the church. Six months later Cecil said to me, "I'm leaving your church. I do not know what your church stands for nor do I feel like I belong to your church."

In my mind, I keep coming back to the question, "Why did this happen?" I have the painful memory that I missed a good opportunity to help Cecil become a true disciple of Jesus Christ. He was so willing to grow and learn to be like Jesus.

Since people are so open at the time of seeking to join the church, membership processes are critical. New Christians, like Cecil, are very hungry to learn about God and to become like Jesus. Even if they have been Christians for some time and want to join a new church, I believe they are open to trying to learn and grow in new ways for Jesus. I

believe that how Christians are brought into a church can have a strong influence on the kind of disciple they become in their future.

These beliefs led me to search for good methods to disciple people through the membership process in the United Methodist Church. I became disillusioned and started examining the membership policies and procedures of other denominations in the Wesleyan tradition. I was impressed with the Free Methodist membership policies and procedures and many other things about the denomination. In June 1998 I became a Free Methodist.

Shortly after changing denominations, I discovered that the Free Methodist Church had revised its membership policies and procedures during the General Conference of 1995. I asked myself, “Will these membership changes help the denomination to disciple new Christians/new members or will they hinder their discipleship?” I set out to find answers to that question in this dissertation project.

Dallas Willard says, in his book The Divine Conspiracy, “The fundamental negative reality among Christian believers now is their failure to constantly learn how to live their lives for the Kingdom. And it is an accepted reality. The division of professing Christians into those for whom it is a matter of whole-life devotion to God and those who maintain a consumer, or client, relationship to the church has now been an accepted reality for over fifteen hundred years” (Willard 301).

Christian converts adopt the way of life of turning away from darkness and following Christ the light. This is not an instant accomplishment done in the secret chambers of the heart, but, a life-long public commitment, a process that begins with

responding in faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ, repenting from the old way of life, and entering a new life (Hinson 74-95).

Discipleship in the early church was a discipleship into faith in Christ and a new way of life. However, it was not enough simply to awaken faith. To be disciplined meant to be brought into a family, into the household of faith, into a community of people who lived differently (Green chap. 8).

Do the new Free Methodist policies and procedures include the components of discipleship as mentioned by Willard, Hinson, and Green? Are these components biblical?

### **Introduction To Biblical Foundations**

The Free Methodist General Conference of 1995 approved changes in membership policies and procedures in an effort to, "...make membership in the Free Methodist Church as nearly as possible synonymous with entering into the Body of Christ. The New Testament model of repentance, faith and baptism shall constitute the primary requirements for membership (1995 Book of Discipline 56). In order to determine what is biblical for entry into Christian discipleship, this study will examine what the gospel of Matthew has to say about discipleship and how this relates to bringing members into the church.

This study will focus mainly on Matthew's view of discipleship for four reasons. First, the gospel of Matthew has traditionally been characterized as "the ecclesiastical [church] gospel" (Johnson 172). "Matthew's Gospel has been referred to as the church's gospel, because Matthew's book aims to strengthen, and where necessary correct, the continuing life of this disciple community. Therefore, Matthew's Gospel can appropriately be called the church's gospel" (France 251). Matthew writes out of

pastoral concern for a Christian group whose weaknesses and temptations he knows well. His book is intended to help the followers of Jesus as he knows them to live up to their Master's intentions.

Also, Matthew's gospel should be examined to understand discipleship because Matthew described both Jesus and the twelve disciples as modeling similar elements of discipleship. First, they both shared a kindred mission in terms of: a) acts of ministry (10:7; 28:19); b) significance of ministry (Jesus--10:40; 15:24; 21:37 and disciples--10:2, 5, 16; 23:34, 37); and, c) corresponding persecutions (Jesus--2:1; 3:9; 20:19 and disciples --10:17; 10:18). Second, the ethical behavior (manner of living) of Jesus resembles the ethical expectations for the disciples. The disciples are expected to obey the law in terms of an inner attitude of love (5:43-48; 7:12; 22:36-40) as Jesus obeyed the law. Third, both Jesus and the disciples refer to God as Father (12:50; 20:23) (Bauer 58-63).

Third, Matthew's gospel is a good resource to understand Christian discipleship because it climaxed with Jesus commanding his disciples to undertake a universal mission of discipling, and Jesus promised to be with his disciples as they pursued their mission (28:16-20). This passage describes the final appearance and word of the resurrected and exalted Christ to his disciples. Matthew wanted us to consider what Jesus said during this time as very important because of its placement; Therefore, this is another reason to study Matthew in order to understand discipleship.

The fourth and final reason is not enough time or space for the study to account for all the New Testament evidence available on Christian discipleship.

Matthew's biblical foundations for discipleship will be presented in chapter 2.

### **Problem**

Thus far, chapter 1 has described the need for Christian discipleship. Discipleship is essential, and how a church conducts its Christian nurture is priority. How well are local Free Methodist Churches discipling new members? Are the changes from the 1995 General Conference enhancing or hurting the discipleship of new members since 1995?

### **Purpose**

These questions led to the study. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how the 1995 changes in the Free Methodist Church membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipling of new members as reported by selected clergy and lay leaders.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are important to understanding the discussion of how the 1995 membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipling of new members.

1. **Discipling**: Calling persons to a Christ-like life and giving them the support and nurture necessary to mature into Christ-likeness.
2. **Discipling Components**: Elements that contribute to the spiritual formation of believers - teaching them (instruction), placing them in small groups, assigning them mentors, requiring ethical conformity from them, and creating in people a belonging to a family of God.
3. **Teaching (Christian Instruction)**: Local Free Methodist Churches are giving people Christian instruction before they join, or after they join, or both.



4. **Small group**: A small group for discipleship consists of twelve people or less who meet with a leader. A small group should consist of at least one mature Christian. The small group's purpose is to nurture one another in Christian discipleship.
5. **Mentor**: A mentor is a person who is a more mature Christian than the one who he/she is mentoring. A mentor is one who shows another how to live the Christian life by the example he/she lives in his/her every day life at church and out in the world.
6. **Ethical Conformity**: Incorporating into one's life biblical standards for living. More specifically, ethical conformity to which Free Methodists are called is described in the Christian Conduct Standards described in the 1995 Free Methodist Discipline (1995 Book of Discipline A/315-342).
7. **Belonging**: The act of joining the Church universal through baptism and the local church through a membership ritual. It is also a sense of belonging which includes identification with a group and its ways and a sense of being welcomed.
8. **Preparatory Membership**: Preparatory membership is a membership given to those persons who seek fellowship with a local Free Methodist church, who will not be admitted into a full membership until they complete the approved course of instruction for prospective members which clearly teaches the history, theological distinctives, and mission of the Free Methodist Church (1995 Book of Discipline A/353e). During their time as preparatory members persons must also show proof, to themselves and the church, of the sincerity and depth of their convictions

and of the strength and purpose of their desire to lead a new life (A/360). Prior to 1995, all members of the Free Methodist Church began as preparatory members. Since 1995, preparatory membership exists only in local Free Methodist churches where Free Methodist Conferences have voted to maintain preparatory membership policies and procedures in their area of jurisdiction.

9. **Membership Class** (for full membership): A class for persons considering membership in the Free Methodist Church. Such classes teach the history, theological distinctives, and mission of the Free Methodist Church (1995 Book of Discipline 57).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study of membership changes in the Free Methodist Church and how they impacted discipling.

#### **Question #1**

How well did selected clergy and lay leaders understand the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures of the Free Methodist Church?

#### **Question #2**

Did the selected clergy and lay leaders perceive the changes in membership policies and procedures as having a positive or negative influence on the discipling of new members?

**Question #3**

How did the actual policies and procedures for discipling new members change since the 1995 General Conference?

**Question #4**

Were there significant differences in the perceptions of clergy and lay leaders, men and women, persons of different ages, persons from different regions of the United States, or persons who had been members of the Free Methodist church for varying lengths of time?

**Question #5**

What is needed to strengthen the discipling of new members in the Free Methodist Church?

**Methodology**

This study set out to evaluate the perceptions of selected Free Methodist clergy and laity concerning how the changes are impacting new members' discipleship. I conducted semi-structured interviews of clergy and lay leaders at the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference. From the information gained in the interviews, a researcher-designed questionnaire was created which was sent out to a sample of Free Methodist clergy and laity throughout the United States. In summary, this is an evaluative study in a triangulation mode, merging both qualitative and quantitative

research, utilizing 46 interviews and 162 survey questionnaires with no comparison group (Creswell 174).

### **Population And Sample**

The population of this study included all the Free Methodist clergy and lay leaders of the United States. From this population, two samples were taken.

A sample of convenience was used to select interviewees at the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference in Anderson, Indiana. Forty-six Free Methodist clergy and laity were selected to be interviewed.

The second sample of people came from the Free Methodist clergy and lay leaders who were listed in the 1999 Free Methodist Yearbook. Every tenth clergy and lay persons from every conference were selected. After the selections were made, the researcher realized that not enough women were represented. Therefore, more women were intentionally selected from the Yearbook. Also, more laity were selected later in the process in order to equal the number of clergy who were selected. This study's total random sample was 144 clergy and 166 laity.

### **Variables**

The independent variable in this study was the membership policies and procedures established by the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference. One of the dependent variables in this study was the perceptions the sample of Free Methodists had on how the 1995 membership changes were impacting the discipleship of new members. Were the new membership policies and procedures impacting the discipleship of new

members in a positive or negative way? The other dependent variables in this study consisted of the five discipling components: given Christian instruction, assigned small group, assigned mentor, required ethical conformity, and gained identity along with being welcomed (belonging).

The intervening variables in this study are: 1) gender, 2) age, 3) years as a Free Methodist member, 4) four regions in the United States where responders live, and 5) clergy or laity. Data was analyzed to determine whether or not these variables play a role in influencing the sample's perceptions about new members' discipleship.

### **Instrumentation**

Questions for a semi-structured interview and a researcher-designed questionnaire were the two instruments used to measure the perceptions Free Methodist clergy and laity had concerning the impact of the new membership policies and procedures on new members' discipleship.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher interviewed 28 laity and 18 clergy during the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference.

Also, 310 questionnaires were mailed to 144 Free Methodist clergy and 166 Free Methodist lay leaders listed in the 1999 Yearbook. One hundred sixty-two returned questionnaires served as the primary source of data for the study. Clergy responded with 88 questionnaires, and laity mailed back 74.

## Overview

The following includes the steps of procedure that will follow in the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 contains reviews of literature that relate to the purpose of the study. Chapter 3 explains the method used to collect and analyze the data gathered. Chapter 4 describes the research data information received. Chapter 5 highlights what the information means in relation to the purpose of the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Personal Concern

So, how can we help the Cecil Hooks of the world become maturing disciples of Jesus? In this chapter we will examine the literature that speaks to issues of discipling, especially those related to membership policies and procedures.

#### Biblical Foundations

##### Matthew On Discipleship

Matthew concluded his gospel with Jesus commanding his disciples to disciple (28:16-20). The placement of Jesus' commission at the end of Matthew's gospel has long been recognized as an indication of one of Matthew's purposes for writing his gospel (Doyle 95; Bauer 34-54). Matthew wanted his audience to understand Christian discipleship.

Jesus said, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:19-20 NIV). This commission that Jesus gave to his eleven disciples is clearer to understand in the Greek than in English. Jesus' statement has one main verb "*mathateusate*" (make disciples), and it is in the imperative mood (command mood). Three participles are related to the verb: "going, baptizing, and teaching." The participial instructions are subordinate in a linguistic sense to the main verb "make disciples." The participles are no less important than the main verb; however, they are

the means to the end of making disciples. The focus, then, is not so much on going to all nations, or on baptizing or teaching. It is upon the making of disciples.

Since Jesus' command to make disciples does not include detailed instructions about methods, how do the disciples know what is required to "make disciples"? Within the passage 28:16-20, Matthew used two Greek words with the same root word for disciples; but the two words have different suffixes: "*mathetes*" in 28:16 and "*matheteuo*" in 28:19. "*Mathetes*" referred to those who were with Jesus and followed him (Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich 485). "*Matheteuo*" referred to making a disciple of Jesus (485). Therefore, the eleven disciples (Matt. 28:16) knew how to make disciples (28:19) because Jesus showed them the process. In other words, Jesus commanded the disciples that he had taught to go and make disciples as he had disciplined them. So, discipleship is properly employed more specifically when it refers to the methodology Jesus used to train the twelve disciples. To understand this formula for the twelve, we will observe how Jesus made disciples throughout the gospel of Matthew.

### **Disciples Are Made, Not Born**

Jesus demonstrated in his discipling method that disciples are made, not born. One way he illustrated this principle was through his emphasis upon teaching (Matt. 20:20). Matthew showed us in his gospel several unique aspects about Jesus teaching his disciples.

### **Jesus Is The Resource For Teaching Discipleship**

First, Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that he would always remain the key resource of information for Christian discipleship. Matthew used the term "*mathetes*" in his gospel to designate the followers of Jesus, because emphasis in the



common use of the term was not upon learning or upon being a pupil, but upon “adherence” to a great master (“Brother/Brotherhood” 216). What kind of adherence did Jesus want from his disciples? “*Mathatas*” and “*talmidh*” were popular terms at the time of Jesus to designate a follower who was vitally committed to a teacher/leader/movement (Discipleship In The Ancient World 220-221). In the *talmidh* tradition, the follower (disciple) was supposed to eventually become a teacher (rabbi) of his own followers. Jesus’ ideal for his disciples must be studied in its own light as a continuation of the Jewish heritage, yet as a departure from other master-disciple relationships of his day. Jesus was his disciples’ supreme teacher and leader (Matt. 23:7-10). They were not to be disciples of any other person and were never to advance to being called rabbi (Matt. 23:10) because the disciples were to teach “all that I [Jesus] have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). The disciples were supposed to teach the same thing as Jesus taught them to teach.

### **Disciples Accept Jesus’ Proclamation Of The Kingdom**

Second in the discipleship process, disciples had to show acceptance of Jesus proclamation on the kingdom (Matt. 10:7-15). His disciples acceptance of the Kingdom was shown through their commitment to learn (teachability) from Jesus and demonstrate obedience to what Jesus taught. Jesus expected his disciples to accept what he taught. If Jesus saw in people an acceptance of his proclamation, Jesus gave them a different kind of teaching that led to true discipleship. T.W. Manson contended that the teaching of Jesus was conditioned by the nature of its audience. He identified types of teaching for three audiences: the general public (crowd), scribes and Pharisees, and disciples (19-21).

In other words, Jesus' teaching was different to his disciples than to the scribes and Pharisees and the crowd. The typical format was for Matthew to mention explicitly the disciples saying or asking something (showing a commitment to know), and then to describe the instruction on the nature of discipleship that Jesus gives in response (Matt. 8:21; 10:42; 12:49; 13:10; 15:23; 16:5; 17:6; 17:10; 18:1; 19:10; 21:20; 24:3; 26:8; 26:40; 26:45). Jesus taught many times in parables to the crowds, scribes and Pharisees, but Jesus only explained those parables to those who had the potential and the desire to understand as they demonstrated by their acceptance of Jesus proclamation of the kingdom. In Matthew 13:1 Jesus left the house to address the crowds by the sea, and in 13:36 Jesus dismisses the crowd and goes into the house. Previously, the crowd has been a primary audience and the disciples secondary; but now the disciples are the exclusive audience. The privacy of the house signifies the exclusive nature of the teaching of the disciples. The disciples come asking for an explanation of the parable of the tares, and in so doing show that, while not perfect in their understanding, they possess the potential and desire to understand. Their asking prompts the explanation of the parable, and ultimately the disciples understand (Matt. 13:51) (*Discipleship In The Ancient World* 146). Matthew referred to disciples as those who gained a clearer explanation by Jesus, and they were disciples because they understood (135). True disciples, to Matthew, are those who move beyond the surface teaching of Jesus and focus on the advanced teaching of Jesus (Matt. 16:5-12; 17:10-13; 18:1-5; 19:3-12).

Jesus did not clarify his instruction to the religious leaders of the day, scribes and Pharisees, because they showed no acceptance of Jesus' teachings nor showed obedience in conformity to Jesus' instruction. The hearts of the scribes and Pharisees were hard

toward Jesus. According to Kingsbury, the Jewish leaders are antagonists - those responsible for Jesus' crucifixion (Matthew As Story 57-73).

Jesus did not clarify his instruction to the crowd because, as Matthew showed us, the crowd was a basically neutral, though curious, group who were not attached in any serious way to Jesus. Jesus initiated his proclamation to the crowd. They did not come to him at first. Then Jesus called the crowd to follow him. Even though the crowd followed Jesus, the crowd (*ochloi*) never exhibited the twin prerequisites of discipleship: acceptance of Jesus proclamation about the kingdom and obedience to his teachings. The crowd, as found in Matthew, were basically a neutral group who were the object of Jesus' ministry. Jesus preached and taught and healed them, but they nowhere exercised faith in him. They followed him (4:25), appealed for healing (15:29-31), gave acclaim to him (7:28; 21:9-10), but at times laughed at him (9:23-25), came to arrest him (26:47), were influenced by the chief priests and elders (27:20) and were responsible for the blood of Jesus (27:24).

However, Jesus gave his disciples proper instruction. Why? The twelve disciples accepted Jesus proclamation to come out of the crowd and respond to Jesus' call (Matt. 4:18-22, 9:9); and they had the desire to come to him for instruction (Matt. 13:10, 36). How did the disciples show they had accepted Jesus' proclamation? First, they had a desire to know about the Kingdom of Heaven (Wilkins 163; Matt. 13:52; 27:57). Second, Matthew showed us that Jesus required disciples not only to gain instruction to be a disciple, but that they were also supposed to demonstrate those teachings through action. Jesus required obedience. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:46-50, disciples are those who exemplarily do the will of the Father.

### **Jesus Required Ethical Conformity From His Disciples**

Jesus required his disciples to demonstrate a manner of living (ethical conformity) as the way to do the will of the Father. Jesus gave his disciples some behavioral requirements in his Sermon on the Mount as ways to do God's will (Matt. 5-7). He instructed his disciples to deal with their anger (Matt. 5:22-26), prevent adulterous thoughts from dwelling in their minds (Matt. 5:27-30), stand against divorce (Matt. 5:31-32), and love their enemies (Matt 5:43-47). The capstone of his sermon is the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock and the fool who built on the sand. The wise man, Jesus said, was the one who heard his words and did them while the fool was only a hearer (Matt. 7:24-27). In other words, Jesus was saying that cognitive instruction, which was not followed through with behavioral application, was useless.

### **Small Groups And Mentorship Promote Discipleship**

Matthew uncovered small groups as an important tool for the mentoring aspect of discipleship to take place. Because Jesus concentrated upon a few, he could train them well enough for them to train others.

Although learning occurs in structured situations, learning also takes place through mentoring in informal situations such as the small group offers. In small groups, lives are shared with one another as a means of learning because some things are easier caught than taught (Coppedge 61). Most people learn more effectively when they both hear a concept and see it demonstrated (mentored) in real-life situations that occur in small groups. For example, when Jesus modeled godliness of character and effective patterns of service, his disciples could more easily understand these truths and translate them into their own lives. On one occasion as Jesus and the twelve moved from Galilee

down to Jerusalem, a “rich young ruler” approached him (Matt. 19:16-30). Jesus set his standard before this young man, and the young man turned away. Jesus modeled one aspect of Christ-like character, then Jesus explained his response and enlarged upon the Christian principles involved.

Overall, Matthew presented Jesus mentoring his disciples in two ways. First, Jesus instructed his disciples to have a kindred mission. In Matthew 10, Jesus called his twelve to him and let them know that eventually he would send them out, but first he needed to show them some things so that they would know what to do. The mission he gave them was the same as Jesus had displayed through his actions before them. Both Jesus and the disciples (eventually) taught, and they taught the same thing: “all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus gave his disciples authority to perform the same eschatological works that he accomplished (Matt. 10:1; 11:27; 28:18). The authority included the ability to heal people. Not only did the disciples cast out spirits, they were also to preach as Jesus preached that the kingdom is near in Matthew 10:7 (Bauer 58).

Second, Jesus guided his disciples into a similar ethical conformity (manner of living). Jesus accomplished this outcome by coaching and expecting certain actions from his disciples on the one hand, and then modeling for the disciples, as narrated by Matthew, on the other. For instance, Jesus demanded lowliness of his followers in 18:3-4 and 23:12; then Matthew presented Jesus as the prime model of meekness and lowliness. Jesus lived the law, then he counseled the twelve to do the same; however, the law is understood not in terms of the letter of the Old Testament regulations but in terms of the

inner attitude of love which is manifested in obedience to God in Matthew 5:17; 7:12; 20:28; 22:36-40 (Quell 21-35).

Moreover, Matthew used the term “twelve” (the small group) as a mentoring component to readers (like us) of his Gospel. Jack Kingsbury suggests that Matthew tied the twelve to discipleship to suggest that the reader identifies with the disciples and learns from them, both positively and negatively. For example, when looking at the eager scribe and the reluctant disciple in Matthew 8:18-22, Kingsbury interprets important principles for discipleship from which the reader is to learn (“On Following Jesus” 57). Kingsbury suggests that the disciples as a group are a single, primary character within Matthew’s story. Matthew focuses on them as a teaching tool because they possess not only good traits like Jesus, but because they possess traits that conflict. Because the disciples possess conflicting traits, the reader is invited, depending on the attitude Matthew as narrator or Jesus takes toward them on any given occasion, to identify with them or to distance himself or herself from them. “It is through such granting or withholding of approval on cue, therefore, that the reader becomes schooled in the values that govern the life of discipleship in Matthew’s story” (Matthew As Story 13-14). In other words, for Kingsbury the small group of disciples constitutes the example from which the reader learns.

### **Discipleship And Belonging**

Jesus told his small group of disciples that they were family to him. While his physical mother and brothers waited outside to see him, Jesus stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, “Behold my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, this one is my brother and sister and mother” (Matt.

12:46-50). With this definition, Jesus declared that spiritual union in the family of God takes precedence over national or blood-family lines (“Brother/Brotherhood” 783). Here Jesus united discipleship with an emphasis of belonging such as found between people in a family but even greater.

Obedience to God’s will made people Jesus’ true brothers, sisters, or mothers. Disciples who obey God’s will for themselves today have intimate relationships with Jesus and can depend on him the way members of his immediate family did. For Jesus said in Matthew 28:20, “Lo, I am with you always.”

However, Jesus stressed the shared responsibilities among the members of the Christian disciple’s family. Disciples belong to the family of God as they perform the will of God, and to those who do not, Jesus said, “I never knew you” (Matt. 7:23). Jesus gave his disciples the responsibilities to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and those in prison. Jesus also commanded the disciples to share in the responsibilities of “making disciples” (Matt. 29:19). Moreover, Jesus emphasized that he wanted his disciples to abide by an ethical conformity as stated in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and as stated in Matthew’s chapter eighteen. All these factors help create a sense of family (belonging) among the members because Jesus will know them. As the disciples come to do will of the Father, they will know him more.

Why is belonging so important to Christian discipleship? A Christian will give up the faith when persecuted for his/her beliefs if a sense of belonging to a larger community is not felt. Jesus warns his disciples of severe persecutions when he sends them out in chapter 10 of Matthew. He describes them as “sheep in the midst of wolves” (10:16) and, consequently, advises them to “beware of people” (10:17) in describing the activity of

these persecutors. These opponents will scourge the followers of Jesus in their synagogues (10:17; 23:34). Further, these adversaries will lead the disciples before governors and kings (10:18) in analogy to Jesus who was pursued by King Herod (2:1; 3:9) and will be delivered over to Pilate the governor. Indeed, Jesus is eventually killed by his opponents, so the disciples will be delivered up to death (10:21). Yet those who, like Jesus, “endure to the end” will be saved (10:22; 24:9). Also, Jesus had told his disciples earlier, “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (5:11-12).

### **Baptism And Ethical Conformity**

In the gospel of Matthew, we have seen how teaching what Jesus taught (i.e., ethical conformity) through small groups and mentoring along with a sense of belonging are important elements for Christian discipleship. Matthew also showed that Jesus felt baptism is an important part of discipleship as well (28:19).

Matthew did not discuss baptism in detail, but he did include a few references. In 3:15, Matthew described John baptizing Jesus with water. Jesus submitted to baptism, even though he had no need to confess sin, in order to “fulfill all righteousness” (Bauer 60). Jesus showed obedience to the will of God as revealed in the Old Testament by being baptized; furthermore, Jesus agreed with John’s teaching about repentance along with baptism or Jesus would not have allowed John to baptize him. Oscar Cullman stated in The Early Church that Jesus was in harmony with John’s baptism (177-182).

For John, how was true repentance supposed to be demonstrated? In Matthew 3:7-10, John gave a scathing denunciation of the religious leaders and crowds who came



for baptism without the desire for true repentance. John asserted that “fruit” had to be shown with repentance. In other words, the stress on John’s baptism was not on removal of defilement but on entrance into a new ethic, on acceptance of a new lifestyle, which would continue indefinitely (Badke 196).

However, Jesus demonstrated that Christian baptism is more than repentance. As Oscar Cullman stated in Baptism in the New Testament, Jesus’ baptism meant participation in the forgiveness of sins because of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross (18). Jews came to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist for their own sins. Jesus, on the contrary, at the very moment he is baptized hears a voice which declared: “This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). The Father’s statement declared that Jesus was the one who Isaiah prophesied that he must suffer representatively for the sins of the people (42:1; 53). According to Cullman, this is what Jesus meant when he told John, “to fulfill all righteousness” (Baptism 18).

### **Early Church On Baptism And Ethical Conformity**

Matthew did not discuss baptism much because he assumed that his audience was already familiar with the meaning of baptism; therefore, this study needs to examine how the early church developed baptism.

In Acts 2:38, Peter proclaimed, “Repent and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (NIV). We see from this verse that Peter’s view of baptism included the requirement of repentance: “a complete change of heart, a spiritual about-face, was essential if those who had failed to recognize their God-sent deliverer in Jesus were nevertheless to enjoy the deliverance which he had come to procure for them and was now offering them from his place of exaltation” (Bruce 69).

People who wanted to be baptized had to commit to living like their deliverer--Jesus; they were committing to a new ethical conformity.

In 1 Peter 3:21, Peter connected Christian baptism with “an appeal to God for a good conscience” (NASB). The Greek word for “appeal” in this verse is *eperotama*. G.R. Beasley-Murray stated, “There is evidence for an official use of *eperotama* in the sense of oracular declaration, and in more popular usage as the equivalent of the Latin *stipulatio*, the clause in an agreement containing a formal question and consent of two parties making a contract” (261). Therefore, Beasley-Murray translated baptism in 1 Peter 3:21 as either “the pledge to God proceeding from a good conscience,” taking *suneidaseos* as a subjective genitive or, “the pledge to God to maintain a good conscience” taking the genitive as objective (261). On either view the “pledge” is given in response to a demand: the baptismal candidate answers affirmatively to God’s request for faith and obedience; therefore, a baptized person is one who is under obligation to God to live a holy life.

After reading this, some might conclude that Peter viewed baptism with a theology toward works righteousness, but we have not completed the statement in 1 Peter 3:21: “Baptism now saves you, not as a removal of dirt ... but as a pledge of good conscience toward God ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (NIV). According to this declaration, the power of baptism is not in people’s pledge to God but the resurrection of Christ. In baptism, the Lord who rose from his redemptive death acts for believers’ deliverance from sin and death to new life and righteousness, hence the “clear conscience” (Beasley-Murray 262).

As Beasley-Murray has stated, the chief lesson of this passage is its emphatic denial that the external elements of baptism constitute either its essence or its power. The cleansing in baptism is gained not through the application of water to the flesh but through the pledge of faith and obedience “there-in” given to God, upon which the resurrection of Jesus Christ becomes a saving power to the individual concerned. A person’s answer to God does not save; the risen Lord does that. However, the baptismal candidate’s faith and obedience is at the heart of the baptism wherein the Lord makes the resurrection effective.

So, Christian baptism is not about people’s works righteousness, but it is about people’s perseverance in the Christian faith. People who are baptized make a commitment to live lives like Christ through their faith and obedience. God supplies the saving; people supply the response to a Christ-like ethical conformity.

### **Summary**

Matthew has shown us that Jesus understood “making disciples” (28:19) in several unique ways. Jesus followed a principle that disciples are made, not born. Disciples had to do certain things in order to become his disciples. One of the fundamental ways this happens is through teaching. Would-be disciples had to show willingness to cultivate relationships with him in the sense that Jesus would be their only teacher. Jesus first required acceptance of his proclamation about the kingdom (teachability) and then obedience from his disciples in order to teach them on deeper levels about the will of the Father and the Kingdom to come. Jesus placed expectations of ethical conformity upon his disciples as a means of showing obedience to him. Moreover, Jesus taught disciples on more vast levels within a small group dynamic, and

he used this dynamic to develop a sense of belonging between the disciples and as a means of developing a sense of belonging between believers.

Jesus also showed that disciples are made and not born by supporting the idea that believers be baptized. The resurrection of Jesus inwardly cleansed and restored people through baptism; however, people's external acts toward a Christian ethical conformity activated the power of Jesus' resurrection in people's lives.

All in all, Jesus commanded disciples (churches – body of disciples) to be disciple makers. Jesus showed in Matthew effective ways to accomplish this task: 1) teaching people what Jesus taught, 2) requiring people to behave in a certain ethical conformity, 3) placing people within small groups of other believers, 4) assigning people mature Christian mentors, and 5) helping people belong to the family of God.

### **Theological Foundations**

Next, we will look at what the Wesleyan theological tradition has to say on discipling.

#### **Wesley Believed Scripture Is Primary**

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, considered the Bible to be the primary source for Christian belief and life (discipleship). He wrote, "I will not, I dare not vary from this book, either in great things or small. I have no power to dispense with one jot or tittle of what is contained therein. I am determined to be a Bible Christian, not almost but altogether" (Sermon: "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity"). He described himself as "homo unius libri," a man of one book, and that book was the Bible. (Sermon: "On God's Vineyard"). Wesley was satisfied that the Bible was authoritative because it was inspired by God.

All Wesley's basic theological convictions were rooted in the Scriptures, and he constantly appealed to them in his preaching, teaching, and disputing about religious matters. Even though Wesley used other sources--Church tradition, reason, personal experience--for understanding what a Christian and the Christian community should be and do, he employed these three to interpret the Bible and to assist Christians in understanding it and putting its message into practice (Yrigoyen 26). If tradition, reason, and experience strayed from Scripture, then they were not giving the truth about true discipleship and understanding God's will. In Dublin in 1750, Wesley "exhorted the society to stand fast in the good old Bible way and not to move from it, to the right hand nor to the left" (Vol II:180).

In summary, discipling that is true to Wesley's perspective will place Scripture as the central source to learn Christianity, and the three other sources will encourage people to use their minds, learn from men and women throughout church history (tradition), and emphasize living out in experience what they learn from Scripture.

### **Wesley And Ethical Conformity In Discipleship**

Jesus commanded his disciples to evangelize and nurture other disciples as he had evangelized and nurtured them (Matt. 28:16-20). Jesus proclaimed that discipleship is created from evangelism and nurture. Also, John Wesley understood that the components of evangelism and nurture be present if people are to be properly disciplined. This is why Wesley said, "I am more and more convinced that the devil himself desires nothing more than that the people of any place should be half-awakened and then left to themselves to fall asleep again. Therefore I determine, by the grace of God, not to strike one stroke in any place where I cannot follow the blow" (Vol. I:416).

Wesley's concern that converts be properly nurtured led him to the formation of a hierarchy of instructional groups by which each component gathering of people employed methods tailored to a specific function, then these groups were yoked together into an interlocking network (Henderson 83). The first instructional group Wesley established was called the Methodist societies (Vol. VIII:269-271). Only one condition was laid down for those who wished to join these societies--"a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.'" Wesley believed that people will show their hunger by their fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation (270). This they would achieve by avoiding evil of every kind, by doing good, and by attending on all the ordinances of God: public worship, the ministry of the Word, the Lord's Supper, family and private prayer, Bible Study, and fasting or abstinence (270-271).

The first instructional group, called societies, that Wesley developed required its participants to have a desire to learn how to avoid evil and have a commitment to obeying biblical instruction. In Discipleship in the Ancient World and Matthew's Gospel, Michael Wilkins showed through his study of the word "disciples" (*mathatai*) that Jesus required his people to have a desire to learn and obey his teachings in order for Jesus to call them his disciples. (This was also shown earlier in chapter 1.) John Wesley, like Jesus, felt people's desire to learn about Christian teachings and their willingness to obey what they learned were important to discipleship.

Wesley developed another instructional group called the class meeting. If people wanted to be a member of a society, they had to be a member of a class meeting and regularly attend it (Henderson 95). The class was to be an intimate group of ten or twelve

people who met weekly for personal supervision of their spiritual growth (95). The class was the disciplinary unit of the society, and its responsibility of a leader was “to see each person in his class, once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor” (Vol. VIII:253). Thus “evil men were detected, and reprov'd. They were borne with for a season. If they forsook their sins, we received them gladly; if they obstinately persisted therein, it was openly declared that they were not of us” (253).

Wesley devised another instructional group called “the band” that would help Christian disciples to grow more mature. Wesley, like Jesus, showed that disciples should always continue to grow in their discipleship. As we saw in the biblical foundations, disciples should continue to learn and grow from the eternal Master Jesus. They are never to become masters themselves.

Henderson suggested the band facilitated affective redirection. Unlike the class meeting, it was a homogeneous grouping, not only by sex, but also by age and marital status; the married men met together, the single women, and so on (272-274). The bands were voluntary cells made up of people who professed a clear Christian commitment and who desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention. Henderson remarked that the group environment was one of ruthless honesty and frank openness in which its members sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections (Ibid). Wesley instructed the bands to meet weekly for the purpose of recounting current Christian experience and telling each other’s faults “and that plain and home” (272).

Again in this group, we see Wesley's focus on desire to learn about Christianity (volunteer group) and a commitment to do what they have been taught.

In summary, Wesley learned that demanding and expecting obedience and life transformation from people was not enough. He connected people in groups where they could be taught, supported, and held accountable. These structures resulted in transformed lives and established Christians. As George Whitefield wrote, "My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruit of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are as a rope of sand" (qtd. in Urlin 188).

### **Wesley On Teaching Through Small Groups**

John Wesley supported the concept that humankind's nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals (Henderson 132). He supported this concept by responding to instructional needs through groups such as societies, class meetings, and bands. Wesley established these groups in order to help people learn to grow in God's will (to grow in holiness). Probably the most succinct statement of Wesley's belief in human association for learning is found in the Preface to the 1739 Methodist Hymnbook. "It is only when we are knit together, that we have nourishment from Him, and increase with the increase of God" (Osborn ix-xxiii).

One of the key doctrines that Methodist small groups taught concerning discipleship was the perfectability of human nature that comes through God's grace and obedience. "This doctrine," said Wesley, "is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up" (Vol. VIII:248-268). He believed that God could, and



would, purify people's hearts so that they would attain Christ-like character, and this theme became the overarching goal of the entire movement. Wesley believed that God best purified people's hearts working through small groups.

Wesley believed in the potential of human beings when God's grace was working through them. Wesley's optimism about human potential was expressed in the total Methodist system of group instruction. The groups' commitment to a supreme purpose, both behavioral and affective goals (which the different groups had), kept the groups from stagnation (morbid introspection). The idea that human nature could improve with proper care and discipline was an essential plank in the Wesleyan instructional platform of small groups (Henderson 131).

Wesley believed God's grace could promote holy learning in these small groups by separating the cognitive, affective, and behavioral functions (Henderson 145). Wesley wanted to avoid the temptation to try to accomplish too many purposes in any level of instruction. So, he carefully kept the various functions of his movement separate by limiting each group level to one major function: the societies proclaimed and explained doctrine, the class meetings were designed to implement the behavioral quest for holy lifestyle, and the bands facilitated the cultivation of inner purity and the purging of the attitudes. Wesley's small group network was an interlocking system, woven around a common theme. Each component depended on the others and worked together to accomplish different facets of the stated goal. Wesley believed the greatest advantage to this small group network allowed him to keep up with the nurture of his Christian disciples. Near the end of his life, Wesley could claim that he knew all of the thirty-

thousand people in his societies by name and the condition of their spiritual life (Henderson 144).

### **Wesley Believed Mentors Promote Discipleship**

John Wesley employed mentorship as a means of helping thousands of people in personal spiritual growth. Wesley learned this method from his mother, Susanna. She considered the nurture of each of her eleven children's religious lives as a serious duty entrusted to her by God and the highest calling an individual could receive. Susanna devoted an hour every week with each child to attend to his or her spiritual progress. Each evening she took one or two children aside to discuss religious questions and to evaluate their spiritual improvement. These sessions were not formal and stuffy but warm and intimate sharing concerning the reality of God and the greatness of his provision and the joys of the Christian life (Newton 53). John's turn came on Thursdays. Years later, while he was a student at Oxford, he fondly recalled these intimate times of spiritual conversation which he had shared with his mother (77). Susanna's concept of mentoring that was developed in John's childhood would motivate his work as an adult (Henderson 38). Part of the genius of Methodism was its concentration on individuals and their particular needs. Just as Susanna had tailored her spiritual instruction to the needs and interest of each child, so John and his associates individualized the tutoring of every person entrusted to their care.

John constructed a mentorship program based on the influence of his mother by creating different types of groups for people on different spiritual levels; however, John could not take care of the thousands of people who desired Christian nurture by himself,

so he mentored a small group leadership corps to accomplish this need. Wesley mobilized the entire Methodist membership so that nearly every member had some share in the ministry of the congregation. Within the hierarchy of Methodist groups, Wesley parceled out to the entire body of believers (not just the chosen elite) dozens of official positions: stewards, class-leaders, band leaders, exhorters, trustees, sick-visitors, helpers, preachers and booksellers. This sharing of the leadership role called for a totally different approach to spiritual and educational leadership. Rather than performing ministries themselves, the leaders' main task was the training or equipping of the leaders at lower levels (Henderson 138).

### **Wesley Promoted Belonging As Important To Discipleship**

Wesley looked at the Anglican church, and saw that it was not providing Christian community to people within its church or outside the walls of its church. Wesley wanted to develop that sense of Christian community. The biblical word that describes this emphasis is *koinonia* and carries the connotation of intimate fellowship and loving concern, or a sense of belonging. The *koinonia* concept was the germinal idea behind the small group experiments Wesley (and others) undertook in an attempt to experience the inwardness of the true Church, the fellowship of genuine believers (Davies and Rupp 314.)

Wesley visualized the class meeting as the point of entry for most initiates into Methodism, and he wanted the entry group to be a warm fellowship of fellow strugglers, representing a broad cross-section of Methodism. The class meeting provided a forum, available nowhere else in England, for free expression in an accepting environment by

people from widely different social backgrounds. Leslie Church, in his analysis of the class rolls of early societies, points out how completely the rich and poor, educated and illiterate gentlemen and laborers, were united in these classes:

There is a complete absence of class distinction in these lists. They represent a “family” whose spiritual kinship was recognized by each member. They came together in an intimacy that could not recognize social barriers, and the names of the people who met on perfect equality each appear side by side, whether they are gentlemen or laborers, yeomen or apothecaries. Those who could enter a Methodist society must first abandon all idea of caste (2-3).

Moreover, Wesley instructed that every Methodist should be under someone else’s direct and immediate supervision as a means of developing belonging (or *koinonia*). Methodists placed a constant emphasis on bearing another’s burdens. As one disgruntled Anglican clergyman complained,

“The discipline of the Methodists is such an artful and well-linked chain of dependence that every man is either office bearer, or under the immediate superintendence of some other person of his own rank and near his own size of understanding. The framers of the Church of England contemplated no such state of things as this. They provided one guide to one flock and expected that they should look to him alone. Accordingly the parish minister now stands single against a host of bands, classes, and nameless authorities all acting with the compact and uniform force produced by combination” (Davies and Rupp 312).

### **Literature On Teaching Christian Discipleship**

Teaching is an important component of Christian discipleship (Matt. 28:16-20). Jesus considered “teachability” as an essential attitude for instruction that people must possess in order for them to become Christian disciples. If people did not display an acceptance of his proclamation of the kingdom and a desire to sincerely learn from him,

he would not educate them on deeper matters of faith. Therefore, if churches are to be effective disciplers, they need to teach people when they have teachability.

One important component of teachability is timing. What kind of time frame do churches have with new people before they lose their teachability? What kind of initiation enhances teachability? We will look at sources that support a long duration and sources that support a short duration.

### **Long Initiation**

Modern day literature gives various opinions on when people are teachable. Some literature supports the argument that people need to go through a long initiation process before they join because they are most open to new understandings about a group prior to joining. Edgar Schein says persons go through a three-stage change process when they join something new (93). The first stage is the “unfrozen” stage when people are open to change. Mircea Eliade says that people at this stage need instruction along with a body of rites that have the purpose of producing a decisive alteration in their religious and social status (x). Schein would say that people need to be given a psychological safety net during this time where they can have the opportunity to give feedback on what they have learned from Christian instruction and to receive feedback. The second phase or stage is the “changing stage.” This stage involves helping new members to see things, judge things, feel things, and react to things differently based on a new point of view obtained through identifying with a new role model or mentor or new information. The third stage is the “frozen stage” when people refreeze into a new state from what they were before. When people settle into this new state, they will find

changing themselves a difficult task as long as they remain with the same group. Other authors also explore the same line of argument of people transitioning into a new group (Van Gennep 11; Turner 95-97). According to all of these authors, people need to be taught about the group before they join the group. These authors believe that officially joining the group should come as a person refreezes (Schein 93; Van Gennep 11; Turner 95-97).

### **Long Initiation Because Instant Conversion Does Not Occur With Everybody**

Certainly, there have been and will always be conversions “on the journey to Damascus” (Acts 9:3 NIV). But even these conversions require development and nurture that may be represented by stages of maturation and growth. For example, St. Paul went away to Arabia, then, after three years, went to Jerusalem for fifteen days to confer with Cephas. Next, he went off to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And finally, fourteen years after his conversion, he went to Jerusalem and on to his famous missionary work (Gal. 1:15-2:1). Exegetes agree that these fourteen years were a time of growth and development for Paul. Like Jesus, who “increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor” (Luke 2:52 NRSV) (Webber, Liturgical Evangelism 12). Webber looks upon conversion into Christ and the church as a process that, even if preceded by a dramatic conversion, still requires a person to develop over time a responsible and dynamic relationship with Christ and the church.

The notion of a long initiation was not foreign to the early church fathers. Irenaeus, for example, refers to growth this way: “Man has first to come into being, then to progress, and by progressing come to manhood, and having reached manhood to

increase, and thus increasing to persevere, and by persevering be glorified, and thus see his Lord” (Irenaeus 68).

According to Robert Webber, the process of conversion consists of a series of readily identifiable stages of development. The period of inquiry presupposes an interest in the gospel; next, the catechumenate presupposes a certain degree of commitment; the period of intense spiritual preparation before baptism assumes a resolute determination and an inner resolve to identify with Christ; the rite of initiation (baptism) is a turning point, a crisis moment in which one plunges fully into a relationship with Christ; this results in the final period, that of incorporation into the church, participation in the body of Christ, and an acceptance of responsibilities implied by belonging to the family of faith (Webber, Liturgical Evangelism 13)

### **Belonging And Ethical Conformity**

Eliade, Van Gennep, and Turner argue that a long initiation process is necessary for people to join a group so that they can leave their old ways behind and have time to incorporate the new ways of the new group into their lives (x; 11; 95-97). When people behave like the people of the new group, then they feel they belong to the new group.

### **Ethical Conformity**

Early church fathers believed that people needed a long initiation of Christian instruction and Christian molding. They argued for these elements so that people had time to mature as Christians. They believed this longer instructional period before they join was needed so that people would be motivated to seek spiritual maturity. If

instruction was not given until after they joined the church, the influences of the world could cause them to abandon their efforts to seek any Christian maturity at all (Placher 65; Webber, Celebrating Our Faith 2-3).

Long initiation advocates also believe that people should meet high standards of expectations before they are allowed to become full members of churches. Some authors preach against “the absolute minimum obligations in order to keep the maximum number of people” (Segundo 78-86). Authors like these are saying that churches should expect people to demonstrate that they are working to meet church expectations before they are allowed to join. Dean Kelly says that this could have an effect on whether the church is able to change the lives of its people and the course of history (qtd in Hunter, How To Reach Secular People, 57). According to these authors, Cecil may have left the church because he had no expectations placed upon him.

### **Active In Small Group Discipleship Program Before Joining**

Some successful churches utilize longer initiation processes for their new members. Pastors want the longer initiation to prevent new members from leaving or becoming inactive members as fast as they join. They believe that people who are active in a small group discipleship program before they join will remain active and teachable in their churches after they join.

Two churches that utilize a long initiation program using small groups are Fellowship Bible Church in Little Rock, Arkansas (membership around four thousand) and Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago, Illinois (membership over sixteen thousand). Fellowship Bible Church requires prospective members to demonstrate active



participation in discipleship before they can become members. They have to show that they are participating in worship, community (belong to a small group), growth (have a daily devotional plan), and service (contribute toward a mission project in some way). People who want to become members of Willow Creek Community Church must participate in what is called the Five Gs that are essential for a Christian who is progressing toward full devotion to Jesus. The five Gs are Grace, Growth, Group, Gifts, and Good Stewardship (Hybels and Hybels 198-199). These churches would say that people leave churches because they are not involved in discipleship before they are allowed to join the church.

### **Short Initiation**

Substantial literature supports the argument that converted Christians do not need a long initiation in their discipleship process in order to become full members of a church.

### **Guilt And Ethical Conformity**

In the literature, we find support for people being more teachable (and reachable) during a short initiation program before they join a church.

Some authors believe that a short initiation process is better for discipling new members because people need to start where they are in their spiritual journeys and not be prematurely forced into a discipleship program that could hurt them more than help them. William Abraham says that not everyone should go through the same discipleship program because everyone is different in how they will experience (101).

Moreover, authors like Bob Logan believe that putting people through an established discipleship program presuppose where people should be spiritually. If churches demand that people should be at certain places spiritually, then churches create a destructive guilt within these people. When churches try to force obedience on people before they are ready to be obedient, then disobedience is established in their spiritual genetic code even though they have just started in their spiritual journeys. These authors recommend that churches allow people to join them where they are in their spiritual journeys. The churches should allow their people to experience justification and grace for a while, then their mentors can tell them about Romans 6:23 later (Logan). So, according to these authors, people might leave churches even if they have been placed in a long initiation process because they could feel the process did not meet them where they were spiritually, or it might have made them feel guilty, or both.

Donald Bastian suggests that people need time to internalize Christian rules. If they are forced to perform rules before they become internalized, the rules change to legalism (145).

### **Short Initiation And Belonging**

George Hunter argues against the long initiation process before people join because he believes that people go through what he calls the Liu Scale as the means to enter churches in a healthy way. This scale shows how people move to Christianity. First, let people join your church. Secondly, they will begin to relate to and identify with some Christians that they like and enjoy. Thirdly, they begin to like church (worship services) and to think of church as okay. Next, they start liking Jesus, and they become

open to learning more about him. Then, in time, they become open to commitment to Jesus (Hunter, How To Reach Secular People 84).

Some successful churches follow Hunter's reasoning. Jim Harnish is the pastor of a large United Methodist Church in Florida. He believes that faith is discovered in a pattern counter to evangelical assumptions: "I grew up thinking that the sequence was accept Jesus, then read the Bible, then get into fellowship and service in the world. But I learned that, usually, it is just the opposite; they first get involved, then they ask the biblical and theological questions, and then they move into commitment" (qtd in Hunter, How To Reach Secular People 100). Jeff Spiller, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church in Mobile, Alabama uses this same approach for bringing in new members at his church (Spiller, Becoming 3-10).

### **Short Initiation Including Ethical Conformity**

However, some churches use a short initiation process with a different approach than do Harnish and Spiller. Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Valley Community Church in Orange County, California uses a short initiation process that requires four things from people before they can join: 1) a personal profession of Christ as Lord and Savior, 2) baptism by immersion as a public symbol of one's faith, 3) completion of a four hour membership class, and 4) a signed commitment to abide by Saddleback's membership covenant (320). Warren has stated that, "The manner in which people join churches will determine their effectiveness as members for years to come" (315). Warren sees the importance of people's initiation and he believes that a short initiation process

promotes good discipleship. Warren's building of a mega-church gives credibility to what he is saying.

### **The Best Approach To Take In Order To Insure Teachability**

The importance of right timing is important in effective discipleship, but the significance of taking the right approach to teaching people whose thinking has been influenced by a postmodern society is another critical component to consider as well. Those who defend postmodernism and those who criticize it agree that the essence of postmodernism is that it is "anti-foundational" (Harvey 9). The postmodernists view the foundations of the modern era--the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the emotionalism of Romanticism, the will-power of Existentialism--as obsolete. They believe that our society is best without foundations because people should avoid foundational judgments altogether (11).

The psalmist anticipates the dilemma of our age and for our church in the profound question of Psalm 11:3: "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Gene Veith, Jr. says that churches are right to seek ways to communicate with and appeal to contemporary society. "They must remember, however, that while they need to reach out to post-moderns, they dare not leave them where they found them" (227). The church may have to appeal to people's emotions, but it then must teach them how to think biblically and live biblically.

## **Relationships And Biblical Living**

Leith Anderson says teaching people how to think biblically and act biblically can happen through the influence of relationships. Contemporary people have problems paying attention when someone talks about abstract ideas. Moreover, people of this day tend not to think in a systematic way or pay close attention to rational argument. Ideas can best be approached issue by issue through the influence of mentors and small groups more than through objective reasoning (45-46).

Allan Coppedge believes mentors, through the method of “life transference,” can help other people live biblically. “Life transference occurs when a person shares wisdom, knowledge, experience, and maturity with another” (61). Most people learn more effectively when they both hear a concept and see it demonstrated (modeled/mentored) in a real-life situation. When someone models godliness of character and effective patterns for service, an observer can more easily understand these truths and translate them into his or her own life.

## **Small Groups Promote Teaching Christian Living**

From its very beginning, the Bible sees human life in terms of relationships. Human life is noticed in the Bible in terms of mutual relationships between man and woman, between parents and children, and between families and clans. This mutual relatedness, this dependence of one on another is part of the journey toward the goal of salvation. To know God, we need each other. There is not private salvation, no salvation which does not involve us with others. Lesslie Newbigin suggests, “In order to receive God’s saving revelation, we have to open the door to neighbors whom he sends as his

appointed messengers” (Newbigin, The Gospel In A Pluralist Society 83). We can find these neighbors within the structure of a small group of people of faith.

The faith of Christianity is a kind of knowing that comes in part from our relations with other people. We learn from other Christians who have found better answers to our questions than we have ourselves. Without them, we are left to our own resources to produce questions and answers to those questions (Newbigin-*Proper Confidence* 11). The apostle Paul substantiates this claim by talking about our mutual dependence on one another in 1 Cor. 12:20, “...there are many parts, but one body” (NIV).

### **Small Groups And Belonging Leading To Christian Faith**

Veith claims that postmodern people are group oriented, and groups may bring these people to Christian faith (227). The young man/woman who says that he believes the Bible, but who also believes in reincarnation might come to orthodoxy through a Bible study focusing on the specific issue of life after death. As he reads the Word of God, the Holy Spirit will be at work. In the meantime, by forming close relationships with a pastor whom he respects and solid Christians whom he loves, the young man will likely come under the influence of their orthodoxy.

### **Belonging And Committed Christians**

Once people come to believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they need to be moved to a public identity in Christ. People who want to become disciples of Jesus Christ cannot keep their faith only in the private sphere. As Jesus said, “Take up your

cross and follow me” (Matt. 8:34, NIV). However, people who want to be like Christ need help in preparing to go public in their ministries as Jesus trained his twelve disciples.

One way of moving people from private to public with their faith is their knowing they belong to a family of God. According to Patrick Keifert, belonging begins when mature Christians are willing to make their Christian faith public among strangers who want to belong and understand (8). Keifert uses the term “stranger” in the sense that all people are different. Freidman says that people have to work at overcoming the fear of people who are different from themselves because people’s willingness to know others with differences does not come naturally (212-215). For instance, Robert Bellah says that “lifestyle enclaves” work against forming community with others who are different. “A lifestyle enclave is formed by people who share some feature of private life. Members of a lifestyle enclave express their identity through shared patterns of appearance, consumption, and leisure activities, which often serve to differentiate them sharply from those with other lifestyles” (335). People who are of one particular kind of lifestyle enclave will naturally “triangulate” (will not allow entry in their group) those who are different because the new people threaten the established power structure and normal routine of the old group (Friedman 212-215). Paul would argue that things like triangulation and lifestyle enclaves are not the Christian way, “For we are baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink (1 Cor. 12:13, NIV). In summary, belonging does not automatically happen when new people try to enter an established group, but effective discipleship makes it happen.

If belonging (community) is not placed in the genetic code of discipleship, parishes will function as “single-cell churches.” They imagine themselves as one extended family and therefore limit both the number and variety of people they can care for and involve in their congregational life (Wagner).

### **Ethical Conformity And Postmodern Society**

History informs us that people wanting to be disciples of Jesus should conform to the Christian way of life so that the world will see the power of its principles and want them for itself. According to historian Stephen Benko in his study of the anti-Christian propaganda in imperial Rome, early Christians were persecuted because they claimed to possess exclusive truth. In its decay, Roman culture had become something like our postmodern culture today, advocating cultural relativism and the validity of all religions (58-59). The church, however, did not try to conform to the pattern of the world. It refused to compromise its principles. Far from being popular and socially acceptable, Christianity was despised. Thousands of Christians were martyred. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit kept bringing people to Christ. Eventually the whole Roman Empire in all its power and glory bowed before the lordship of Christ. Therefore, people of today’s postmodern times need to be discipled into living a Christian countercultural lifestyle.

### **Development Of New Membership Policies And Procedures**

The process to change the membership policies and procedures began when the 1989 Free Methodist General Conference called upon the Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) to examine “the nature of membership and the place of rules within the church”



(SCOD Report 8). The General Conference of 1989 referred nine papers on membership to SCOD. SCOD chose to focus on two of those nine:

Paper 418--“That the Study Commission on Doctrine study these [membership] questions in a broad, theological, and historical context and make recommendations to the next General Conference regarding the nature of membership and the place of rules within the church, all in the light of our mission, taking into account: 1) a Biblical theology of belonging, 2) Biblical ethics, 3) human development insights regarding how Christians best grow and develop holy character, 4) church growth insights regarding the role of membership prerequisites and rules in growing churches” (49).

Paper 702.1--“That condition #2 of Paragraph 360 be amended to read: ‘Assent to making the membership covenant and the Guidelines for Christian Conduct the goals of their maturing Christian lives’” (49).

The members of SCOD then produced thirty papers based on papers 418 and 702.1. From these thirty, three proved to be most influential on the thinking of the SCOD Committee in proposing their changes to the 1995 Free Methodist General Conference (SCOD Report 49).

David Kendall submitted a paper titled “The Call To Holiness And The Significance Of Belonging.” His purpose was to study 1 Peter’s view on holiness and its implication for church membership. He concluded that church membership is what God works in us, not what humans are able to achieve. Once we belong to God, we receive our call to holiness (ethical conformity). People achieve holiness only with the support of a body of believers (57).

Kendall argued against the 1989 membership requirement that people wanting to become full members of a Free Methodist Church have to “assent to the membership covenant and the guidelines of Christian Conduct” (1989 Book Discipline par. A/360 #2, 58), and favored the amendment, “assent to making the membership covenant and the guidelines for Christian Conduct the goals of their maturing Christian lives,” because people need the mentorship of the mature Christian body before they can attain the goal of holiness.

Paul Livermore wrote a paper on the “Historical Uses of the General Rules.” Livermore argued that the Free Methodist Church, not John Wesley (the father of Methodism), used the General Rules as conduct standards for determining who can be a member of a local Free Methodist Church. Livermore argued that Wesley did not require people to achieve a manner of living before they became members of a church; therefore, the Free Methodist Church should not either (64).

Dennis Wayman wrote a paper entitled “Social Psychology’s Insight For Church Membership.” Wayman held the position that requiring people to live by a conduct standard before they join undermines the denomination’s goal for spiritual maturity of its members. He argued that a group that began as followers of Jesus Christ and lovers of all people can become a reinforced group of “standard bearers, conduct police,” and “authoritarians” that work against the creation of loving communities if behavior becomes the emphasis on belonging (membership) (65-72).

In summary, the most influential papers on SCOD’s membership analysis refuted many of the 1989 membership requirements because they were based on human

achievements. SCOD proposed to the 1995 General Conference “that we change the entry level in our church by focusing on repentance, faith, and baptism as the primary requirements for membership, shifting our focus away from human achievements toward biblical conditions” (80).

With this perspective, SCOD recommended that the 1995 General Conference revise the conditions for membership in paragraph A/360 (1989 Book of Discipline). The following are a few of the revisions: 1) assent to participate in the maturing opportunities offered by the church such as membership classes, Bible studies, and small groups and 2) commitment to the principles of the Membership Covenant (par. A/154-160, 20-21) and Christian Conduct section (par. A/315-342, 43-54) (85).

SCOD suggested “at least three months” of instruction for full members change so that prospective members agree to participate in instruction after they join (1989 Book of Discipline A/360 #3, 58). SCOD wanted the General Conference to remove preparatory membership as a requirement for full membership because SCOD believed that preparatory membership was a human achievement requirement.

SCOD also suggested that prospective members do not have to “achieve the membership covenant and the guidelines of Christian Conduct” (1989 Book of Discipline, A/315-342, 58). SCOD recommended that people wanting to join a Free Methodist Church agree to work on making the Membership Covenant and the Christian Conduct Standards a part of their manner of living every day. Prospective members should be allowed to work on this ethical conformity after they join.

Since SCOD was influenced by the idea that new members need help achieving the Christian Conduct Standards and Membership Covenant, they recommended that the General Conference make the membership covenant more corporate and less individualistic in commitment. In other words, when prospective members make commitments to achieving the membership covenant and conduct standards during the membership ritual, local congregations commit to helping them reach their goal of Christian holiness. New members will not work on the behavioral standards alone and are not totally responsible for their progress.

### **1995 General Conference Decisions**

The 1995 Free Methodist General Conference voted to change its entry level into church. The Conference agreed with SCOD's recommendation to move membership requirements away from human achievements and more toward biblical conditions. The membership preamble in the 1995 Book of Discipline states, "We invite '... into membership and equip for ministry all who respond in faith' the New Testament model of repentance, faith and baptism shall constitute the primary requirements for membership.... The principles of Christian conduct as expressed in Paragraphs A/315-342 are to be the maturing life goals of all who are invited into membership" (56). The conference also included in the discipline that prospective members are required to agree to participate in Christian instruction, but no specific time is given (A/353e, 57). Moreover, the Conference chose to allow local conferences to decide whether they continue preparatory membership. Further, the 1995 delegates agreed with SCOD that prospective members should commit to, instead of achieve, the membership covenant and the Christian conduct section (A/353f, 57). Finally, the leadership of the Free Methodist

Church agreed to make the membership covenant ritual more corporate and less individualistic, thereby making the whole church membership responsible for new members' progress toward holiness.

### **Summary Of Conference Decisions In Relation To Discipleship**

SCOD and the 1995 General Conference decided on a shorter initiation program (instead of a longer initiation) for its prospective members. They believed that belonging to a church comes more from God's grace and local church support than first meeting ethical conformity and human achievement. They thought that the emphasis of church membership should not be placed on achievement and ethics because it moves church communities away from love toward legalism. They defined belonging as establishing a relationship with Jesus Christ through repentance, faith, and baptism, then local churches help new members achieve holiness after they join. They stress that corporate bodies of local churches play key roles in ensuring that new members make progress on Christian behavioral standards; therefore, new members will need to be connected with mature Christian mentors, small groups, and continual Christian instruction.

### **Current Denomination Literature On Discipleship**

The denomination has produced different literature resources to help the discipleship of new members. Samuel Shreffler produced a membership training course for the Free Methodist Church called "Belonging" which was released at the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference. The purpose of this literature is to introduce the beliefs, history, mission, vision, and doctrine of the Church to people contemplating church membership. Paul Livermore et al. wrote Foundations of a Living Faith: The Catechism

Of The Free Methodist Church because the General Conference of 1995 called for a new “catechism of baptism” to be written for the purpose of making disciples and for membership training. Livermore wanted pastors and laity to receive the catechism as an instrument for preparing people in the Christian life and for proclaiming plainly the saving faith of the gospel (Preface).

However, this researcher has not found that the denomination has produced any long-term discipleship program or plan since the membership changes of 1995. As a matter of fact, SCOD at the 1999 General Conference recommended to the delegates that they vote in favor of the denomination creating a long-range discipleship program. “Whereas, some curriculum ordered by the 1995 General Conference on baptism and membership has been published and is available to churches, but many of our churches still lack a context or comprehensive plan for discipleship and membership training” (Paper No. 602A). The 1999 General Conference concurred with and agreed with the 1999 SCOD proposal to direct the denomination to engage “itself in a critical and timely comprehensive curriculum-development forum to help pastors and their congregations develop their own unique comprehensive discipleship plan to become a Biblical and Spirit-empowered ‘church’” (Paper No. 602.A).

### **Conclusions**

The Free Methodist Church supports a short initiation approach for prospective members to become full members. The literature review has shown that whether a church supports a long initiation or a short one for their membership in our postmodern

society, long-term discipleship training (i.e., mentorship programs, small group support, and biblical studies) is critical for promoting the holiness of new members.

### **Resources Used To Create The Researcher-Designed Questionnaire**

The Art of Asking Questions by Stanley Payne was the first source used in writing a questionnaire. Payne stated that the fundamental principle in good questions is reproducing in the minds of respondents the same issues that are in the mind of the creator of the questionnaire. In order for this to happen, questions have to be clear and understandable. One cannot assume that people know what the questionnaire is talking about. Payne thinks that the best way to ascertaining the information desired from the responders is through multiple-choice questions. Multiple-choice questions give more control of the information the questionnaires desires.

How To Conduct Surveys: A Step-by-Step Guide by Arlene Fink and Jacqueline Kosecoff was the main resource used to write the questionnaire. This book showed that the best approach for gathering data for this dissertation would come from an opinion survey.

The authors also emphasized the need for pilot testing the questionnaire before mailing it out to the sample population. Pilot testing is important for self-administered questionnaires because these questionnaires are heavily dependent on the clarity of the language, and pilot testing quickly reveals whether people understand the directions the questionnaire provides and if they can answer the questions. Pilot testing and analysis of the results will also ensure reliability and validity.

The authors also stated that reliable and valid questionnaires are obtained by making sure the definitions used in the purpose statement are grounded in fact or

established theory or experience. The definitions should come from the purpose statement. These definitions set the boundaries of the questionnaire. Once the content and boundaries are established, the questionnaire is ready to be written.

From this book, the authors stated that the questionnaire needed 'content validity' and 'construct validity.' Content validity refers to the accuracy with which the questions represent the characteristics they are supposed to survey (41). For this questionnaire, content validity came from properly representing the 1995 Free Methodist membership policies and membership procedures. Construct validity is experimentally obtained proof that a survey (questionnaire) that is intended to measure a specific feeling, attitude, or belief truly measures it. Construct validity came from interviewing Free Methodists at the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference.

The attitudes and beliefs of the Free Methodist clergy and laity I interviewed concerning the new membership policies and procedures provided the domain from which the researcher-designed questionnaire was developed. Clergy and laity's perceptions were placed in the questionnaire as nominal and ordinal questions. The nominal questions asked for categorical responses. And the ordinal scales asked for ordering answers or ranking answers based upon logical sequence.

I also learned from this book how I should analyze nominal scales and ordinal scales. Nominal scales gave me my frequency information from which I could see how many agree with certain beliefs and understandings. I was able to run ANOVAs from these questions. With the ordinal scale question (item #13), I was able to conduct more statistical analyses. I was able to do correlation coefficients and ANOVAs from this question.



The authors of Introduction to Research in Education talked about the need to determine whether the data I gathered was reliable and valid or the result of pure chance. The reliability of a measuring instrument is the degree of consistency with which it measures whatever it is measuring (262-273). Data is considered valid to the extent to which a test measures what it is intended to measure (262-273).

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how the 1995 changes in the Free Methodist Church membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipling of new members as reported by selected clergy and lay leaders. Based on the biblical studies, theological studies, and literature review discussed in chapters 1 and 2, five elements for discipleship have been identified as important for churches to include in their membership policies and procedures. These five elements of discipleship for new members are: 1) receiving Christian instruction, 2) starting ethical conformity (identification with Jesus in baptism and obedience to Christian instruction), 3) having small group experiences, 4) forming a mentoring relationship, and 5) developing a sense of belonging in the family of God. This study sought to discover from selected clergy and laity their opinions on whether these five elements were happening in their local Free Methodist Churches and whether changes happened in the discipling process since 1995. Data collected through semi-structured interviews and a researcher-designed questionnaire were analyzed to determine whether clergy and laity were seeing the five components of discipleship in their local churches' membership policies and procedures and what changes they observed.

This study evaluated the opinions of clergy and laity concerning the changes in membership policies and procedures by asking five research questions. The opinions of the clergy and laity were gathered through forty-eight interviews and 162 questionnaire responses.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

### Question #1

How well did selected clergy and lay leaders understand the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures of the Free Methodist Church?

Item ten in the questionnaire asked for clergy and laity understanding of the 1995 membership policies and procedures. The answers to item ten can determine if the clergy or laity or both were sufficiently informed about the membership policies and procedures. Answers from the interviews contributed insight into this question.

### Question #2

Did the selected clergy and lay leaders perceive the changes in membership policies and procedures as having a positive or negative influence on the discipling of new members?

Questions eleven and twelve of the questionnaire relate to this research question. Question eleven asked the responders to consider whether they saw the membership changes as positive or negative. Question twelve asked the responders to state what they had heard others say that was positive or negative. The questions listed specific positive and negative perspectives for respondents to check. The positive and negative statements were generated from the semi-structured interviews of clergy and laity at the 1999 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church.

**Question #3**

How did the actual policies and procedures for discipling new members change since the 1995 General Conference?

This research question is answered by the responses found in item 13 of the questionnaire. Responders were asked to state what results of discipleship they are seeing or hearing in local Free Methodist Churches. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient was run on this question as a way to look at correlations between the five elements of discipleship (dependent variables) in this study (Neutens and Rubinson 115). Interview data will contribute to results as well.

**Question #4**

Were significant differences found in the perceptions of clergy and lay leaders, men and women, persons of different ages, persons from different regions of the United States?

The first six items of the questionnaire provide demographic information on clergy and laity responders such as their gender, region they live, age, how long a Free Methodist, and whether they went through preparatory membership or not. The ANOVA was run on items 6a-15 to identify significant differences between the various groups (Fink, Arlene and Jacqueline Kosecoff 83).

**Question #5**

What is needed to strengthen the discipling of new members in the Free Methodist Church?

Questions fourteen and fifteen were designed to give respondents opportunities to show what is needed for discipleship. These questions are asking for responses to discipleship items that they value as important.

### **Population And Sample**

All Free Methodist clergy and laity of the United States made up the population of this study. From this population, the study took two samples.

The first sample was a sample of convenience. Free Methodist clergy and laity who attended the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference were selected based on their availability. If they happened to be present in general gathering places and had time for an interview, they were interviewed. Near the end of the General Conference, the interviewer tried to find younger delegates, because most of the interviews had been with middle-aged and senior Free Methodist. A total of forty-eight clergy and laity were interviewed over a ten day period.

The second sample came from the Free Methodist clergy and lay leaders listed in the 1999 Free Methodist Yearbook (53-416). Every tenth clergy and lay person from every conference listing were selected. After these random selections were made, not enough women were represented in the sample; therefore, more women were intentionally selected from the Yearbook. Also, more laity were selected later in the process in order to equal the number of clergy selected. The sample was 144 clergy and 166 laity. Eighty-eight clergy returned questionnaires, and 74 laity responded.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher-designed questionnaire was the primary instrument used to gather data on clergy and laity opinions about the impact the new membership policies and procedures were having on the discipleship of new members. Questionnaire items were developed out of data gathered from the interviews conducted at the 1999 Free Methodist General Conference. Interviewees were asked two questions: 1) What are your perceptions of the 1995 changes in the membership policies and procedures? 2) Do you think these changes have enhanced the discipleship of new members since 1995? From their responses, pilot questionnaires were created (See Appendix A and B). The pilot questionnaires, one for clergy and one for laity, were tested with nine Free Methodist clergy and laity who attended a Board of Administration retreat at Perkins, Oklahoma on 16 October 1999. Three professors reviewed the pilot questionnaires and gave feedback. From their advice, the final draft of one questionnaire was completed to be used with both clergy and laity (see Appendix C).

The questionnaire consisted of sixteen items. Items one through six were demographic questions. The other ten items in the questionnaire contained sub-questions that pertain to the five discipleship components mentioned earlier in chapter three. Table 3.1 displays the five discipleship elements and the number of the sub-questions that relate to its aspect of discipleship.

## Discipleship Scales

Table 3.1

(See Appendix F)

Instruction	Small Group & Mentoring	Ethical Conformity	Belonging
6a. Participated in membership class for four hours or less (before joining )	6c. Participated in a small discipleship or Bible study group (before joining)	8g. Observed that new members made behavioral changes (before joining)	11g. The changes help people feel connected to the church; therefore, they are more willing to work on their spiritual maturity.
6b. Participated in membership class for four hours or more (before joining)	7c. Participated in a small discipleship or Bible study group (after joining)	9g. Observed that new members made behavioral changes (after joining)	11h. The changes help those who felt excluded feel included.
7a. Participated in membership class for four hours or less (after joining)	6d. Assigned mentor or spiritual director (before joining)	8h. Observed that new members made progress on making behavioral changes (before joining)	12d. It is good to allow people who feel excluded to feel included.
7b. Participated in membership class for four hours or more (after joining)	7d. Assigned mentor or spiritual director (after joining)	9h. Observed that new members made progress on making behavioral changes (after joining)	12e. These changes make people feel connected.
6e. Received instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church (before joining)	6f. Received encouragement and support for making behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian's conduct standards of the Church (before joining)	10e. Prospective members must meet certain behavioral standards.	13f. New Christians who are feeling like they belong to congregation and to God
7e. Received instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church (after joining)	7f. Received encouragement and support for making behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian's conduct standards of the Church (after joining)	10f. Prospective members do not have to meet the behavioral standards (described in the "Christian Conduct" section of the <u>Discipline</u> ) before they become full members.	13g. New members are not allowed into the group of members who have been a part of your local church for 5 years or more.
8a. Observed membership classes meeting 4 hours or less (before new members joined)	8c. Observed new members assigned mentors (before joining)	10g. New members achieve these behavioral standards (established by the Free Methodist Church) basically on their own.	

<b>Table 3.1, continued</b>			
<b>9a.</b> Observed membership classes meeting 4 hours or less (before new members joined)	<b>9c.</b> Observed new members assigned mentors (after joining)	<b>10i.</b> Prospective members must have had a conversion experience before they can become full members within the Free Methodist Church.	
<b>8b.</b> Observed membership classes meeting 4 hours or more (before new members joined)	<b>8e.</b> Observed that new members were encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church (before joining)	<b>11d.</b> The changes enhance the discipling of new members because new members don't have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join the church	
<b>9b.</b> Observed membership classes meeting 4 hours or more (after new members joined)	<b>9e.</b> Observed that new members were encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church (after joining)	<b>11e.</b> The changes hurt the discipleship of new members because new members don't have to make certain behavioral changes before they join.	
<b>8d.</b> Observed new members given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church (before they joined the church)	<b>8f.</b> Observed new members attended small discipleship or Bible study groups (before joining)	<b>11f.</b> The changes are good because people need to be allowed to join the church where they are in their spiritual maturity, because the Holy Spirit needs time to build the Christian's spiritual maturity.	
<b>9d.</b> Observed new members given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church (after they joined the church)	<b>9f.</b> Observed new members attended small discipleship or Bible study groups (after joining)	<b>11i.</b> The changes do not push new members to grow in their spiritual maturity.	
<b>10b.</b> Prospective members must first be preparatory members before they can become full members.	<b>10h.</b> All members of a local church are responsible for helping new members achieve behavioral standards.	<b>11j.</b> The membership changes give a free license for members to do any behavior they want.	



<b>Table 3.1, continued</b>			
<b>10c.</b> Prospective members do not have to be preparatory members before becoming full members.	<b>13d.</b> New Christians being given the support needed to break habits that bind them	<b>11k.</b> Too stringent	
<b>10d.</b> Each Free Methodist Conference votes to determine whether its local churches will require preparatory membership for prospective members.	<b>15c.</b> A mentor or spiritual director for every new member	<b>12b.</b> New members are not working on their conduct standards after they join.	
<b>11b.</b> The changes hinder people from struggling with what it means to be a Christian.	<b>15h.</b> Laity and clergy giving more time to helping new members meet conduct standards	<b>12c.</b> It is good to allow persons to become members of a church no matter what their spiritual maturity is--as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.	
<b>11c.</b> The changes did not include a program that helps new members continue their discipleship long range.		<b>12f.</b> The new policies and procedures allow new members to change their behavior standards over time.	
<b>12a.</b> New members are not receiving enough discipleship instruction.		<b>12g.</b> People are allowed time to grow in their spiritual maturity.	
<b>13h.</b> An increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church		<b>12h.</b> New members are not pushed to grow in their spiritual maturity.	
<b>15a.</b> Required preparatory membership		<b>13b.</b> People becoming members of the church even though they are still drinking or smoking	
<b>15b.</b> No preparatory membership		<b>13c.</b> New Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco	

<b>Table 3.1, continued</b>			
<b>15d.</b> Comprehensive doctrinal instruction before persons join the church		<b>13e.</b> Concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits	
<b>15e.</b> Comprehensive doctrinal instruction after persons join the church		<b>13i.</b> People are growing in their spiritual maturity.	
<b>15f.</b> Instruction on Christian living before a person joins the church		<b>13j.</b> New members are making the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church a part of their regular behavior.	
<b>15g.</b> Instruction on Christian living after a person joins the church		<b>15h.</b> Laity and clergy giving more time to helping new members meet conduct standards	

### **Reliability And Validity**

Two data gathering techniques were used in this study in order to achieve more reliability and validity. The qualitative technique used for the study was a semi-structured interview. The quantitative data was gathered using a researcher-designed questionnaire.

### **Variables**

The independent variable in this study is the membership policies and procedures established by the Free Methodist Denomination during the General Conference of 1995. The dependent variables to this study are two-fold: 1) the perceptions of Free Methodist clergy and laity concerning how the 1995 membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipleship of new members and 2) discipleship components present in the churches.

Five intervening variables were examined in this study: 1) gender, 2) age, 3) years a Free Methodist, 4) region of home, and 5) clergy or laity. The study wanted to examine whether any of these variables had an impact of the perceptions of the sample.

### **Data Collection And Data Analysis**

The primary instrument used to gather data for this study was the researcher-designed questionnaire.

Three types of analyses were used. First, frequency analysis was done on all sixteen questions. Second, a Pearson Correlation-Coefficient was applied to question 13a (Cronbach alpha coefficient [or coefficient alpha] figure of 70% was used in determining reliability [Ary 287]), and an ANOVA was run on items 6a-15 (SAS/STAT, [1996]. Version 12.) These statistical results will be discussed in chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The 1995 Free Methodist General Conference changed its denominational membership policies and procedures. The purpose of this research was to evaluate how these changes in the Free Methodist Church membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipling of new members as reported by selected clergy and lay leaders.

Five research questions have guided this study. The data pertaining to these questions will be addressed within this chapter.

#### **Data Gathered From Interviews**

Table 4.1 displays how the 28 Free Methodist laity and 18 Free Methodist clergy responded to the question, “What is your understanding of the changes in membership policies and procedures made by the General Conference of 1995?”

The information in Table 4.1 shows the clergy understood the membership changes much more than the laity. Therefore, the interviews revealed that the clergy were more informed than the laity (The data found in this table gives answers to research question 1.).

Table 4.1

## Clergy And Laity's Understandings Of Membership Changes

	Clergy	Laity
1) Did not know of any membership changes	6%	50%
2) Knew there was some kind of change to preparatory membership	94%	43%
3) Knew that local conferences made the changes to preparatory membership in their local churches	94%	0
4) Knew that potential members did not have to meet behavioral standards before becoming full members	94%	8
5) Knew about changes in membership instruction time before potential members become full members	94%	0
6) Knew about more emphasis being placed on corporate membership mentoring new members	94%	0

Table 4.2 reveals how 28 laity and 18 clergy responded to the question, "Do you think the membership changes have impacted new members' discipleship in a positive or negative way"?

The clergy and laity had split opinions concerning the influence of the changes on new members' discipleship (The data found in this table helps to answer to research question #2.).

**Table 4.2****Support For The Membership Changes**

	Clergy	Laity [How laity responded after the interviewer explained the membership changes to the laity]
Support the changes	39%	43%
Support some of the changes	17%	7%
Do not support the changes	28%	39%

Table 4.3 describes how the 28 laity and the 18 clergy viewed some of the membership changes and their impact on new members' discipleship. Again, the clergy and laity had split opinions concerning the influence of the changes on new members' discipleship (The information in this table helps to answer research question #2.).

**Table 4.3****Influence Of Membership Changes On New Members' Discipleship**

	Clergy	Laity
Think new members' discipleship starts better if new members do not have to meet behavioral standards before they become full members	39%	43%
Think new members' discipleship starts better if new members do not have to meet behavioral standards before they become full members with some reservations	17%	7%
Think new members' discipleship is harmed because new members do not have to meet behavioral standards before they become full members	28%	39%

### A Summary Of The Qualitative Data

The clergy understand the 1995 membership changes much more than the laity. Secondly, both clergy and laity had split opinions on supporting the membership changes. Thirdly, clergy and laity were equally divided in their opinions over the changes to membership ethical conformity.

### Profile Of Questionnaire Responders

One hundred sixty-two Free Methodist clergy and laity returned questionnaires. The demographic breakdown of those who responded is found in tables 4.4 and 4.5 on the next page.

**Table 4.4**

### Profile Of Responders

REGIONS	CLERGY	LAY	MALE	FEMALE	AGE		
					18-39	40-65	65 & Over
EAST	24	22	27	18	5	31	9
HEARTLAND	23	18	26	15	9	26	6
CENTRAL	18	17	24	11	11	17	7
WEST	23	17	29	11	6	28	6
TOTAL	88	74	106	55	31	102	28

**Table 4.5**  
**Profile Of Responders**

REGIONS	YEARS OF FREE METHODIST MEMBERSHIP				PREPARATORY MEMBERS	
	0-5	6-10	11-15	16 & Over	Yes	No
EAST	7	6	4	28	23	22
HEARTLAND	3	6	2	30	24	16
CENTRAL	5	1	4	25	17	17
WEST	4	4	5	27	21	17
TOTAL	19	17	15	110	85	72

### **Regions Of The Free Methodist Church In The United States**

People returned questionnaires with an even distribution from the different regions of the Free Methodist Church in the United States: 1) Eastern Region 28 percent, 2) Heartland Region 25 percent, 3) Central Region 22 percent, and 4) West Region 25 percent.

### **Clergy And Lay Responders**

Clergy responded with more returned questionnaires than laity (54 percent vs. 46 percent). Clergy and laity from the East Region returned more questionnaires than the other regions. Also, people from different regions of the United States responded with almost equal numbers of returned questionnaires.

Eighty-six percent of the pastors who responded were men between the ages of 40-65 years. Thirty-seven laymen and thirty-six laywomen returned answers to the questionnaires.



## **Gender**

Men returned the largest number of questionnaires (66 percent).

## **Age**

Responders between the ages of 40 to 65 comprised 63 percent of the 162 questionnaires. The group between the ages of 18 to 39 sent back 19 percent of the questionnaires, and the group 65 and older returned 18 percent.

## **Years Of Free Methodist Membership**

Those who had been Free Methodist for sixteen years or more returned the vast majority of questionnaires (68 percent).

## **Preparatory Members**

Only a little more than half (84) of the responders had gone through preparatory membership.

### **Impact Of Membership Changes On Discipleship**

The following sections look at how the responders view the new membership policies and procedures and their impact on new members' discipleship. Items 8-9 were not analyzed due to the wording in the questionnaire. We were not able to determine whether people were responding to the discipleship they had observed over the last five years or the last 50 years.

### **Research Question 1**

Item 10 in the questionnaire contained nine sub-questions pertaining to research question one: How well did selected clergy and lay leaders understand the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures of the Free Methodist Church?

Both clergy and laity agreed correctly (in item 10a) that the 1995 General Conference made membership changes. The clergy showed a better understanding of the membership changes in the eight remaining sub-questions; however, a high percentage of clergy as well as the laity are not informed about some of the membership changes. For instance, 93 percent of clergy and 95 percent of the laity did not know that each Free Methodist Conference votes to determine whether or not its local churches will require preparatory membership for prospective members. Also, 31 percent of the clergy and 32 percent of the laity still believe that prospective members must meet certain behavioral standards (described in the “Christian Conduct” section of the the Discipline) before they become full members (1995 Book of Discipline A/315-A/342, 43-55).

The data also showed that clergy and laity disagreed significantly on their understandings of three of the membership changes. These significant differences will be described in research question four.

### **Research Question 2**

Items 11 and 12 in the questionnaire addressed research question two: “Did selected clergy and lay leaders perceive the changes in membership policies and procedures as having a positive or negative influence on the discipling of new members?”

Item 11 asked the responders what they themselves thought were positive or negative aspects about the membership changes. Clergy and laity voted similarly (based on percentages) on eight of the eleven membership changes listed in the sub-questions under item 11. Of these eight, clergy and laity indicated primarily a positive view toward the new membership policies; although, neither group was very decisive on whether or not the changes included: 1) a long-range discipleship program (11e) or 2) whether or not the changes help people feel connected to the church (11g).

Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on three of the eleven sub-questions in item 11. These will be discussed in research question four.

Item 12 asked responders to indicate whether they heard others express positive or negative views toward the new membership policies and procedures. The majority of clergy and laity have heard people express feelings about five of the eight membership changes listed among the sub-questions in item 12. Of these five, they heard positive comments about: 1) new members receiving enough discipleship instruction (12a), 2) new members working on their conduct standards after they join (12b), and 3) new members are encouraged to grow in their spiritual maturity (12h). They heard negative comments about: 1) new membership changes not allowing new members who had felt excluded feel like they are now included (12d), and 2) new membership changes not making people feel connected (12e). The data of 12d and 12e will be discussed further in relationship with 13f.

Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on what they heard others say about sub-questions 12c, 12f, and 12g. These differences will be presented in research question 4.

### Research Question 3

Research question 3 asks, How did the actual policies and procedures for discipling new members change since the 1995 General Conference? This question asks how the denomination is progressing in its discipleship efforts. Items 6a-9 and 13 in the questionnaire pertain to research question 3.

The data obtained from items 6a-7 revealed neither a majority of clergy nor laity received or participated in three discipling components: membership instruction, small group support, nor mentoring before joining a church as a full member or after joining a church. However, a majority of clergy and laity did receive instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church.

The majority of item 13 consisted of ten sub-questions that referred to lifestyle changes. Nearly 20 percent of the responders did not answer any of the ten questions. Table 4.6 shows the results.

**TABLE 4.6**

#### **New Members' Christian Conduct Progress**

<b>ITEM #</b>	<b>No Response</b>	<b>Decrease</b>	<b>About The Same</b>	<b>Increase</b>
<b>13b</b> – People becoming members of the church even though they are still drinking or smoking	23%	8%	37%	32%
<b>13c</b> – New Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco	20%	10%	40%	30%

Table 4.6, continued				
13d – New Christians being given the support needed to break habits that bind them	16%	7%	33%	44%
13e – Concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits	15%	9%	34%	42%
13f – New Christians who are feeling like they belong to congregation and to God	18%	2%	24%	56%
13g – New members are not allowed into the group of members who have been a part of your local church for 5 years or more	30%	29%	34%	7%
13h – An increased understanding of principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church	22%	12%	38%	29%
13j – New members are making the Christian Conduct standards a part of their behavior	21%	8%	37%	34%
13k – New members are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ	19%	4%	25%	52%

A strong percentage of responders indicated in the nine sub-questions 13b-13k that progress was being made in new members' behavior (refer to Table 4.6).

The positive response to the nine sub-questions mentioned above contradicts what one-third of the 18 clergy and one-half of the 28 laity said in their interviews. Their

responses during their interviews saw no behavioral changes happening in their local churches since the membership changes were ratified.

Clergy and laity reported in the questionnaire that they are seeing behavioral changes occurring in new members since the membership changes were passed in 1995. Clergy witnessed more progress than laity as revealed in table 4.11 (13c, 13d, 13e, and 13f).

The Pearson Correlation Coefficient was conducted on item 13 and identified several variables that demonstrated a strong positive relationship ( $r > .70$ ; see Table 4.7). The following correlation table shows how the sub-questions in item 13 relate to one another (see Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7**

**Analysis Of The Pearson Correlation Coefficient On Item 13**

	13a	13b	13c	13d	13e	13f	13g	13h	13i	13j	13k
13a	1.0										
13b	.4508	1.0									
13c	.4696	.6170	1.0								
13d	.4037	.4596	.7049	1.0							
13e	.4286	.4554	.7208	.9103	1.0						
13f	.4044	.5233	.6208	.7221	.7537	1.0					
13g	.3786	.4657	.4151	.3716	.3879	.4707	1.0				
13h	.3790	.3548	.5110	.5185	.5720	.7273	.3846	1.0			
13i	.4202	.3400	.5174	.6452	.6573	.7981	.3810	.7502	1.0		
13j	.3772	.3542	.5260	.5712	.6033	.7424	.4218	.7392	.8283	1.0	
13k	.3772	.3778	.4961	.6181	.6526	.8226	.3644	.7107	.8992	.8606	1.0

The numbers in red represent strong correlations ( $> .70$ ).

The correlation data shows that most correlations occurred between new members feeling a sense of belonging in their churches (13f). Thirteen (f) correlates with six other variables (13d, 13e, 13h, 13i, 13j, and 13k) included in the ordinal question--item 13. The correlations may be viewed in two different ways. **A)** New members will feel they belong to their churches if: 1) they break habits that bind them (13d); 2) they live a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits (13e); 3) they understand the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church (13h); 4) they grow in their spiritual maturity (13i); 5) they make the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church a part of their regular behavior (13j); and 6) they grow in their relationships with Jesus Christ (13k). **B)** Or when new members feel they belong, then they are more likely to: 1) break habits that bind them (13d), 2) live a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits (13e), 3) understand the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church (13h), 4) grow in their spiritual maturity (13i), 5) make the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church a part of their regular behavior (13j), and 6) grow in their relationships with Jesus Christ (13k). Regardless of the two perspectives, a strong correlation existed between the variable “belonging” in item 13 and six other variables. Five of these six variables relate to ethical conformity (behavioral standards).

Two other items (13h and 13k) showed strong correlations. Thirteen (h) correlates with four variables (13f, 13i, 13j, and 13 k) included in the ordinal question – item 13. In other words, when new members had an increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church they also: 1) feel they belong to their local congregations and to God (13f); 2) grow in their spiritual

maturity (13i); 3) make the Christian conduct standards a part of their regular behavior (13j); and 4) grow in their relationships with Jesus Christ (13k).

Thirteen (k) also correlates with four variables (13f, 13h, 13i and 13j) in the ordinal question – item 13. New members grow in their relationships with Jesus Christ also: 1) feel they belong to their local congregations and to God (13 f); 2) have an increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct (13h); 3) are growing in their spiritual maturity (13i); and 4) are making the Christian conduct standards a part of their regular behavior.

#### **Research Question 4**

Research question four asked: Were significant differences present in the perceptions of clergy and lay leaders, men and women, persons of different ages, or persons from different regions of the United States? The vast majority of significant differences only occurred between the perceptions of clergy and lay leaders. ANOVAs were run on pastors and associate pastors as one group together, and on laity in items 6a-15 in the questionnaire, and the results showed no significant differences occurring in items 6a-9; however, significant differences were found in items 10-15.

The ANOVA run on item 10 revealed clergy and laity disagreed significantly on three of their understandings pertaining to the 1995 membership changes (see Table 4.8).



Table 4.8

## Clergy And Laity's New Membership Understandings

ITEM #	CLERGY	LAITY	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANT DATA	
			F VALUE	Pr > F
10b – Full members must be preparatory members before they can become full members.	11% Agreed	27% Agreed	3.35	0.0376
10f – Prospective members do not have to meet behavioral standards before becoming full members.	56% Agreed	24% Agreed	8.94	0.0002
10i – Prospective members must have had a conversion experience before they can become full members.	78% Agreed	54% Agreed	5.90	0.0034
SAMPLE: 88 CLERGY + 74 LAITY = 162 RESPONDERS				P < .05

Clergy and laity differed in their understanding concerning preparatory membership (see Table 4.8, 10b). A significant number of laity believed that prospective members must first be preparatory members before they can become full members. The truth is that the 1995 General Conference voted to allow Free Methodist Conferences the right to determine whether or not their churches would continue to require prospective members to have preparatory membership before they could become full members. The majority of Free Methodist Conferences do not require their local churches to expect preparatory membership from their prospective members.

The majority of clergy knew that the Free Methodist Church no longer requires prospective members to meet the behavioral standards described in the Discipline (1995

Book of Discipline A/351, 56) before joining the church. Only 24 percent of laity reported awareness of this membership policy change (see Table 4.8, 10f).

The majority of clergy and laity indicated that prospective members must have had a conversion experience before they can become full members. The significant difference is found in the vast majority of clergy and the simple majority of laity (see Table 4.8, 10i).

Items 11 and 12 in the questionnaire asked for the sample's positive and negative opinions concerning the new membership policies and procedures. Item 11 asked clergy and laity to express their own attitudes about the changes, and item 12 asked clergy and laity what they have heard others say about the new membership requirements. The two groups significantly differed on six out of the nineteen sub-questions asked of them within the two items (see Table 4.9 and Table 4.10).

**Table 4.9**

**Clergy And Laity's Positive/Negative Opinions About Changes**

ITEM #11	CLERGY	LAITY	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANT DATA	
			F Value	Pr > F
11d – Changes enhance discipleship program because people do not have to make behavioral changes before they join	48% agreed	24% agreed	5.08	0.0073
11f – Changes are good because they allow people to join the church where they are in their discipleship maturity	67% agreed	37% agreed	8.61	0.0003

Table 4.9, continued				
11g – The changes help people feel connected to the church; therefore, they are more willing to work on their spiritual maturity	61% agreed	38% agreed	4.63	0.0111
SAMPLE: 88 CLERGY / 74 LAITY = 162 TOTAL				P < .05

In Table 4.9, clergy and laity significantly disagreed on two items (11d and 11f) that relate to ethical conformity and discipleship. The vast majority of laity did not agree with the view that reducing behavioral expectations before full membership is granted will enhance the discipleship of new members (11d). About half of clergy thought this new membership policy would allow new members' discipleship to grow. Clergy liked the idea of meeting new members where they are in their discipleship level of growth (11f). The vast majority of laity disagreed with this idea.

Furthermore, we see in Table 4.9 that clergy and laity disagreed significantly on the issue of improving new members' connectedness to the church. The clergy thought the changes would promote new members' feeling of belonging, and the laity disagreed.

The clergy and laity also disagreed on three sub-questions in item 12 (see Table 4.10).

**Table 4.10**  
**What Clergy And Laity Are Hearing Others Say**

ITEM #12	CLERGY	LAITY	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANT DATA	
			F Value	Pr > F
<b>12c</b> – It is good to allow persons to become members of a church no matter what their spiritual maturity is as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ.	53% agreed	28% agreed	5.45	0.0051
<b>12f</b> – The new policies and procedures allow new members to change their behavior standards over time.	57% agreed	26% agreed	9.47	0.0001
<b>12g</b> – People are allowed time to grow in their spiritual maturity.	63% agreed	37% agreed	5.74	0.0039
<b>SAMPLE: 88 CLERGY / 74 LAITY = 162 TOTAL</b>				<b>P &lt; .05</b>

Laity disagreed with clergy over allowing new members to become full members before they have met the Christian conduct standards in the Discipline (see Table 4.10; 12c, 12f, and 12g). The laity showed in 12f that they disagreed with the idea that new members will work on changing their behavior after they become full members. Half of the laity (14 out of 28) interviewed at the 1999 General Conference expressed this same opinion.

The significant data revealed by the ANOVA run on item 13 show both clergy and laity see new members making progress on the behavioral standards since the membership changes. Clergy indicate new members making more progress with behavioral standards in their local churches than laity reported (see Table 4.11). Also, clergy stated that more new members feel they belong to their local churches than laity reported (see Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11**

**Significant Differences Between Clergy And Laity In Item 13**

ITEM #	CLERGY	LAITY	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANT DATA	
			F Value	Pr > F
13c – New Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco	35% see progress	24% see progress	4.42	0.0135
13d – New Christians being given the support needed to break habits that bind them	55% see progress	34% see progress	4.31	0.0151
13e – Concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits	46% see progress	38% see progress	3.70	0.0268
13f – New Christians who are feeling like they belong to congregation and to God	65% see progress	47% see progress	3.25	0.0412
SAMPLE: 88 CLERGY + 74 LAITY = 162				P < .05

What do the significant differences tell us in items 14 and 15? One significant difference occurred in item 14. A significant difference resulted between clergy and laity over the importance of “Pastors giving more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives” (14h). The laity indicated that they think

pastors should spend more time teaching new members about the Holy Spirit in order to promote their discipleship effectively. The clergy responders did not think the task was an important tool for effective discipleship (see Table 4.12).

**Table 4.12**

**What Is An Effective Tool For Discipleship**

ITEM #	CLERGY	LAITY	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANT DATA	
			F Value	Pr > F
14h – Pastors giving more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives	9% Thought this discipling tool was most important	28% Thought this discipling tool was most important	7.75	0.0006
SAMPLE: 88 CLERGY & 74 LAITY = 162				P < .05

Three statistical differences resulted in item 15 between clergy and laity on the question: What do you think should be provided for improved discipleship (see Table 4.13)?

**Table 4.13**

**Differences About How To Improve Discipleship**

ITEM #	CLERGY	LAITY	STATISTICAL SIGNIFICANT DATA	
			F Value	Pr > F
15a – Required preparatory membership	15%	51%	13.32	0.0001
15b – No preparatory membership	22%	4%	5.61	0.0044
15d – Comprehensive doctrinal instruction before persons join the church	42%	66%	4.61	0.0113
SAMPLE: 88 CLERGY + 74 LAITY = 162				P < .05

Laity believed that preparatory membership will improve new member discipleship if it is a membership requirement; whereas, only a small percentage of clergy agree (see Table 4.13, 15a). In 15b, the laity and clergy disagreed again on the issue of preparatory membership; furthermore, a majority of laity believed that comprehensive doctrinal instruction before persons join the church will help the discipleship of new members (15d). Less than half of the clergy expressed the opinion that this instruction will improve discipleship.

### Research Question 5

Questionnaire items 14 and 15 gave data for answering research question five: What is needed to strengthen the discipling of new members in the Free Methodist Church?

Item 14 asked: What tools and resources do pastors and churches need to be more effective in discipling new members? Table 4.14 displays the top three answers.

**Table 4.14**

#### **Resources For Effective Discipleship**

RANK	TOOLS AND RESOURCES	PERCENTAGE	
		CLERGY	LAITY
1	A long-range discipleship program for all new members (14i)	22%	38%
2	Workshops for pastors and lay leaders on the discipling of new Christians (14d)	18%	27%
3	Study resources to be used in small discipleship groups for new Christians (14a)	17%	23%

The laity was more decisive in their selection of the top three resources for improved discipleship found in item 14. The clergy had more diversified opinions concerning what tools would improve new members' discipleship. The top tool for both groups was the long-range discipleship program.

In Table 4.15, clergy and laity are more in agreement with what methods would improve new members' discipleship. Again, laity showed more emphasis on conduct standards than clergy (15h).

**Table 4.15**  
**Methods For Effective Discipleship**

RANK	EFFECTIVE METHODS	PERCENTAGE	
		CLERGY	LAITY
1	Instruction on Christian living given before a person joins (15f)	61%	77%
2	A mentor or spiritual director for every member (15c)	53%	61%
3	Laity and clergy giving more time to helping new members meet conduct standards (15h)	50%	61%

#### Intervening Variables

Findings were examined to determine if the intervening variables of gender, age, region, pastors and laity, and years as a Free Methodist impacted the perceptions that the sample had on its view of the new membership policies and procedures. Sixteen significant differences were observed between the variables of clergy and laity.



## SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

1. A strong correlation existed between the variable “belonging” in item 13 and six other variables in item 13. Five of these six variables related to behavioral standards (ethical conformity).
2. A strong correlation existed between new members understanding the principles behind the Christian conduct standards and four other variables in item 13.
3. A strong correlation existed between new members growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ and four other variables in item 13.
4. Clergy and laity agree that new members are making progress on the behavioral standards.
5. Clergy and laity agree that more new members feel they belong to their local congregations since the membership changes.
6. More clergy and laity think new members are feeling they belong to local churches because of the new membership policies.
7. Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on their understandings concerning new policies for preparatory membership.
8. Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on their understandings about new behavioral conduct requirements for full membership.
9. Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on their opinions about the new behavioral conduct requirements for full membership.

10. Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on what they heard from other people concerning the new behavioral conduct requirements for full membership.

11. Laity gave significance to the opinion that pastors should give more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives as a way to promote new members' discipleship.

12. Clergy and laity significantly disagreed on the issue of the amount of Christian instruction that should be given to prospective members before they become full members.

### **SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT FINDINGS**

1. Clergy understood the new membership policies and procedures better than the laity.
2. Some clergy and laity were not aware of the membership changes.
3. Neither a majority of clergy nor laity responders received three components of discipleship: membership instruction, mentoring relationships, and small-group support before or after they joined the Free Methodist Church.
4. A majority of clergy and laity received instruction to understand the Christian Conduct Standards of the Free Methodist Church before they joined.
5. Both clergy and laity agree that new members have made progress on the behavioral standards since the 1995 membership policies and procedures were introduced.
6. Both clergy and laity agree that a long-range discipleship program is the most important resource for helping new members' discipleship progress.

7. Both clergy and laity agree that instruction on Christian living before a person joins is the most important discipleship method for new members.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The 1989 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church called on the Study Commission on Doctrine (SCOD) to study “the nature of membership and the place of rules within the church” (SCOD Report 8). SCOD brought recommendations to the 1995 General Conference which were approved as the new membership policies and procedures of the Free Methodist Church. This study attempted to discern the impact of these changes as reported by Free Methodist clergy and laity. What conclusions can be drawn from the findings in chapter 4?

#### **Evaluation And Interpretation Of Major Findings**

##### **Importance of Christian Instruction**

A major goal of the 1995 membership policies and procedures was to help persons know Christ and help them grow in their relationships with Jesus (1995 SCOD Report). This goal was my desire for Cecil that I did not provide.

We noted in chapter 4 (see Table 4.7) that sub-items 13h and 13k show strong correlations. Thirteen (h) correlates with four variables (13f, 13i, 13j, and 13k). These correlations show that new members who have an increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church also: 1) feel they belong to their local congregations and to God (13f); 2) are growing in their spiritual maturity (13i); 3) make the Christian conduct standards a part of their regular behavior (13j); and 4) are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ (13k). The four

correlations with 13h infer that a significant relationship exist between Christian instruction and the possibility for new members to feel belonging from their local congregations, make Christian conduct standards a part of their regular behavior, and their ability to grow in their spiritual maturity.

Thirteen (k) correlates with four variables (13f, 13h, 13i and 13j). Clergy and laity responders indicated that new members who are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ also: 1) feel they belong to their local congregations and to God (13f); 2) have an increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct (13h); 3) are growing in spiritual maturity (13i); and 4) make the Christian conduct standards a part of their regular behavior. Again, Christian instruction helps people grow in their relationships with Jesus.

These correlations (13h and 13k) indicate the importance of Christian instruction. Twenty-nine percent of both clergy and laity observed an increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church. Gara Mosier, Associate Professor of Statistics at the University of Arkansas, said, “Twenty-nine percent is a good progress indicator that the new policies are working within an institution like a church.”

However, clergy indicated that new members’ understanding of the principles (13h) is the slowest change occurring in local Free Methodist Churches since the membership changes were accepted in 1995 (see Table 4.6, 13h). Therefore, clergy and laity need to improve their Christian instruction for new members. This conclusion leads to another conclusion. Clergy and lay leaders may not know how to improve their

Christian instruction because many lay leaders and clergy did not receive a substantial amount of Christian instruction when they joined their local churches (see Table 4.5). Many responders did not participate in a membership class, receive a mentor or Christian spiritual director, nor participate in a small group Bible study before they joined a Free Methodist Church (6a, 6b, 6c, and 6d).

### **Perspective Differences On Christian Instruction**

The majority of clergy and laity agree that prospective members need instruction on Christian living before they join the church (see Table 4.15, item 1). However, the majority of clergy and the majority of laity do not agree on the amount of Christian instruction before prospective members join. Clergy did not support the idea that prospective members receive a substantial amount of Christian instruction (that in the past was to come through preparatory membership) before they join. A significant percentage of laity believed that prospective members must first be preparatory members before they become full members (see Table 4.8, item 10b,  $Pr > .0376$ ; Table 4.13, item 15a). Laity responded in significant numbers to the idea that prospective members' discipleship would be improved if the church required people to go through preparatory membership (see Table 4.13, item 15a,  $Pr > .0001$ ). In item 15b (see Table 4.13,  $Pr > .0044$ ), the majority of laity rejected the idea of no preparatory membership.

What kind of Christian instruction should the church give prospective members before they join? Laity supported in significant numbers (clergy did not) the idea that comprehensive doctrinal instruction given to persons before they join the church would benefit their discipleship in the future (Table 4.13, item 15d,  $Pr > .0113$ ).

### Perspective Differences On Behavior Standards

Both clergy and laity observed new members making progress on achieving the Christian conduct standards (see Table 4.6). This data supports the claim that the new membership policies and procedures have helped new members achieve the behavior standards in the Discipline. This evidence supports the argument that when people feel they belong to a local church, they are more willing to grow into Christian maturity (see pages 74 and 75 on the two ways to view the correlations on 13f).

However, more clergy observed progress than laity. For instance, more clergy than laity witnessed new Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco (Table 4.11, item 13c,  $Pr > .0135$ ). A majority of clergy observed new Christians being given support needed to break habits that bind them (Table 4.11, item 13d,  $Pr > .0151$ ). Also, more clergy than laity have seen new members show a concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits (Table 4.11, item 13e,  $Pr > .0268$ ).

Clergy and laity disagreed in other perspectives as well. They disagreed on their understandings about new behavioral conduct requirements for full membership (Table 4.8, item 10f,  $Pr > .0002$ ). Second, clergy and laity significantly disagreed on their opinions about the new conduct requirements. The clergy indicated that the changes would enhance the discipling of new members because new members do not have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join the church; whereas, the laity disagreed (Table 4.9, item 11d,  $Pr > .0073$ ). The clergy indicated that the changes were good because people need to be allowed to join the church where they are in their spiritual

maturity (Christian conduct) and because the Holy Spirit needs time to build Christians' spiritual maturity (Table 4.9, item 11f,  $Pr > .0003$ ). The laity disagreed with this perspective (11f). Also, the majority of clergy thought that the membership changes help people feel connected to the church; therefore, they are more willing to work on their spiritual maturity (Table 4.9, item 11g,  $Pr > .0111$ ). The majority of lay responders disagreed.

Clergy and laity significantly differ on what they are hearing from other people concerning the new behavioral conduct requirements for full membership. The majority of clergy indicated that they heard other people approving of the new membership policies because they allow persons to become members of a church no matter what their spiritual maturity (Christian conduct) is, as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ (Table 4.10, item 12c,  $Pr > .0051$ ). The majority of laity have not heard this positive opinion (12c). The majority of clergy were informed by others that the new policies and procedures allow new members to change their behavior standards over time (Table 4.10, item 12f,  $Pr > .0001$ ). The majority of laity have not gathered the same information. The majority of clergy were informed that it is good to give people time to grow in their spiritual maturity (Christian conduct). The majority of laity were not told the same thing (Table 4.10, item 12g,  $Pr > .0039$ ).

### **Interpretation Of Differences**

Table 4.6 revealed that a high percentage of both clergy and laity saw new members working toward behavioral standards after they joined their local churches. Even though both percentages from laity and clergy were high (30 percent or more),



clergy reported a higher percentage than laity. Clergy may show a higher positive perception because part of their jobs as pastors is to observe the changes that are taking place in their churches. Common sense gives proof to the fact clergy would have more of an awareness than laity.

Clergy and laity both observed positive changes occurring in the behavioral standards of their new members. However, the majority of laity (as indicated in Tables 4.9 and 4.10) seem to remain loyal to supporting the old membership policy that new members should achieve behavioral standards before they can join local Free Methodist churches. Their loyalty could be due to the fact that the majority of lay responders have been Free Methodists for sixteen or more years. Most of the lay responders joined Free Methodist churches when it was required of them to meet the behavioral standards. The majority of lay responders indicated that they had instruction to understand the Christian Conduct Standards before they joined the Free Methodist Church (6e). They may feel that what was required of them to be included in a group should also be required of new people wanting to join (Van Gennep 11; Turner 95-97; Eliade x; Bellah 335).

However, the vast majority of clergy responders have also been Free Methodists for sixteen years or more. Also, the majority of clergy responders indicated that they had instruction to understand the Christian Conduct Standards before they joined the Free Methodist Church (6e).

So, what other possible reasons exist for the majority of laity to hold onto the old behavioral policies and the clergy to accept the new policy? Data revealed that the

majority of clergy have a different philosophy than laity on behavioral standards as a way to enhance people's discipleship through the Free Methodist membership process.

### **Reflection Through Theological Lens**

#### **Clergy's Philosophy On Ethical Conformity Before Membership**

The majority of clergy responders indicated that church membership should begin where people are in their spiritual maturity as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ (11d, 12g, and 12f). Also, the clergy believed that people need to have time to grow in their discipleship (11d, 11f, and 12c). The majority of the eighteen clergy I interviewed during the 1999 General Conference held these philosophies of membership as well.

The biblical foundations and theological foundations study gave support to the clergy's viewpoint. Matthew shows that the way to be a part of Jesus' group of disciples was to accept Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom and obey. Wilkins describes these two components as having a desire to know him (163). When Jesus saw in people a true desire to know him, then Jesus revealed the truth to them. Once Jesus taught his disciples, he expected them to obey his teachings (Matt. 5-7). The wise man, Jesus said, was the one who heard his words and followed them while the fool was only a hearer (Matt. 7:24-27). Jesus let people become his disciples when he saw true desire to know him such as those who know him in true Christian conversion today. He did not require ethical conformity to his teachings until after they had learned about his teachings.

Jesus' idea of "belonging" can be seen in Matt. 12:46-50. "Jesus stretched out his hand toward his disciples and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother'" (NIV). Jesus indicated that his disciples were those who had kinship with him. As was previously mentioned, his disciples became a part of Jesus' group by first showing to Jesus that they had a desire to truly know him (Wilkins 163). After Jesus pointed to his disciples (the people who were already considered a part of his group) he said, "[They] do the will of my Father in heaven" (12:50). This passage shows that belonging is connected to obeying the will of God; however, the disciples started obeying after they were taught. They were taught after they were a part of the group. The new membership policies and procedures of the Free Methodist Church require people to progress on the Christian conduct standards after they become members. "The principles of Christian conduct as expressed in paragraphs A/315-342 are to be the maturing life goals of all who are invited into membership" (1995 Book of Discipline A/351, 56).

David Kendall argued in favor of the clergy's philosophy of membership using Peter's view on holiness. "Once we belong to God, we receive our call to holiness" (1995 SCOD Report 57).

John Wesley's requirement for people to become a part of a Methodist "society" was "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins" (Vol. VIII:269-271). Once people became a part of the "society," John Wesley required participants to have a desire to avoid evil and have a commitment to obeying biblical instruction. Wesley did not already expect them to have met a behavioral requirement for joining. He

required a desire. Livermore argued Wesley did not require people to achieve a manner of living before they became members of societies (1995 SCOD Report 58-64).

Logan supports the clergy's viewpoint of membership by holding the opinion that placing an ethical conformity upon people before they are spiritually mature enough to accomplish the behavior will create guilt within them and drive them away from Christianity.

Abraham says that every person is unique; therefore, he/she cannot be given a manufactured kind of discipleship where one size fits all. Each individual experiences Jesus in different ways (101).

Donald Bastian suggests that people need time to internalize Christian rules. If they are forced to perform rules before they become internalized, the rules change to legalism (145).

### **Perspectives On Belonging**

The membership changes that were passed during the 1995 General Conference of the Free Methodist Church were based upon some of the above mentioned principles. These principles are based upon the idea that discipling is enhanced by belonging. Once people feel they belong to a local church family, they are more motivated to do the things expected by the group which they belong.

Two types of evidence supports the claim that new members in the Free Methodist church (since 1995) are belonging to their local churches and working on their Christian Conduct standards. Table 4.6, 13f, supports this principle. Fifty-six percent of

both clergy and laity observed an increase of new members feeling they belong to their local congregations (13f). Table 4.7 shows item 13f has statistically significant correlations with six other items: 1) new Christians given support to break habits that bind them (13d), concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits (13e), an increased understanding of principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church (13h), people growing in their spiritual maturity (13i), new members making the Christian conduct standards a part of their behavior (13j), and new members growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ (13k). In other words, when people feel like they belong, then more people progress in achieving 13d, 13e, 13h, 13i, 13j and 13k. Therefore, this evidence helps confirm that the 1995 membership changes helped new members have a sense of belonging to their local churches. Now that they feel they belong, they are more willing to work on the Christian Conduct standards and are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ.

### **Laity's Philosophy On Ethical Behavior Before Membership**

Lay responders indicated that people will not be motivated to grow in their Christian manner of living after they join (Table 4.9 items 11d, 11f and Table 4:10 items 12c, 12f). Half of the laity (and half the clergy) that I interviewed also expressed this same opinion concerning the behavioral progress of new members (Table 4.3).

Some of the literature review support the laity's view that prospective church members need to achieve a certain standard of behavior before they can become a full member. The early church required people to meet an ethical conformity before they joined the church (Placher 65; Webber 2-3). Robert Webber claims that the early church

fathers, like Irenaeus, believed the process of conversion consists of a series of readily identifiable stages of development. The period of inquiry presupposes an interest in the gospel; next, the catechumenate presupposes a certain degree of commitment; the period of intense spiritual preparation before baptism assumes a resolute determination and an inner resolve to identify with Christ; the rite of initiation (baptism) is a turning point, a crisis moment in which one plunges fully into a relationship with Christ; this results in the final period, that of incorporation into the church, participation in the body of Christ, and an acceptance of responsibilities implied by belonging to the family of faith (Liturgical Evangelism 13). In other words, the early church fathers believed in a long initiation process before prospective members should be considered full members of a church.

Cultural anthropologists Van Gennep, Turner, and Eliade agree that people should go through a behavioral change before they join so they will really feel like they are a part of a group (Van Gennep 11; Turner 95-97; Eliade x).

However, the laity's view that prospective members must achieve an ethical conformity (other than faith, conversion and baptism) is not supported by biblical foundations nor theological foundations. When John baptized Jesus, it demonstrated Jesus' support of John's emphasis on entrance into a new ethic, on acceptance of a new lifestyle (Badke 196). John's emphasis was on a commitment to a new lifestyle--not on having already achieved one. Jesus also required his disciples to demonstrate a manner of living as a way to do the will of the Father. Jesus did not require a manner of living until after he brought them into the group and taught them (Matt. 5-7).

We have seen the early Methodists also welcomed into societies those who simply “desired to flee the wrath to come.” The early Methodists were interested in change after people became a part of a nurturing society. Livermore argued that the Free Methodist Church, not John Wesley, used the General Rules as conduct standards for determining who can be a member of a local church (1995 SCOD Report 58-64).

Laity were correct in their view that Christian disciples should progress in their Christian manner of living. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:46-50, disciples are those who exemplarily do the will of the Father. The laity are right in their expectations of seeing new members grow in holiness; however, laity should not expect prospective members to achieve Christian maturity before full membership.

### **Reasons Laity Continue To Believe In The Old Behavioral Requirements**

Why did laity continue to hold onto the old behavioral requirements? As mentioned before, the majority of laity had to go through Christian conduct instruction (6e). This instructional process gave meaning to their becoming a Christian (Van Gennepe 11; Turner 95-97; Eliade x). Sociologist Dean Kelly says this kind of instruction can help people understand their purpose in life and find meaning (qtd. in Hunter 57). Persons tend to believe “what was good for me was good for everyone.”

Earlier we noted Bastian’s statement, “If people are forced to perform rules before they become internalized, the rules change to legalism” (145). It is possible that their instruction on Christian conduct may have created in some lay responders a “works righteousness” theology toward membership in the Free Methodist Church.

However, the clergy went through this same process. Clergy and laity agree that instruction on Christian living before people join is important for improving new members' discipleship (15f), but clergy believe a membership process should give new members time to grow into Christian maturity (manner of living). Laity believe behavior needs to be achieved before you join.

Why do these two groups have different philosophies about what is best for new members in a membership process as a means to enhance their discipleship? Clergy have studied Scripture and theology more than most laity. They have received more training. They have been exposed to more in-depth approaches to Christian initiation; therefore, clergy have a better understanding of the biblical and theological correctness of membership.

### **Lack Of Teaching Keeps Laity Holding On To Old Policies**

Why did the laity still follow the old style of membership? A majority of clergy did not teach their people (the laity) about the new way to look at membership. This point of view is based on the fact that the majority of clergy understood most of the membership changes and the majority of laity did not (item 10). Also, this conclusion is based on the fact that nearly every lay person I interviewed at the 1999 General Conference was not aware of the new membership policies and procedures established in 1995.

Why are clergy not teaching their people? Clergy may not have realized that their lay leaders needed instruction. Or, clergy may know how difficult it is to convince people that something needs to change when that something has special meaning to them.



Maybe they are not teaching their people about the new membership policies and procedures because they do not feel they have the proper resources to teach about all the membership changes. Although in 1999 the Free Methodist denomination produced a new membership training course called “Belonging,” this is the only resource I found that can support clergy teaching a membership class. But this resource is for new members and would not usually be studied by long term members. The Free Methodist denomination has not produced any resources for pastors to use to help lay leaders understand the membership changes and the reason for them.

### **Practical Applications To The Findings**

The results of this study show evidence that clergy need to help their laity understand the new membership policies and procedures so that their laity will in turn help new members belong to their congregations and to God. The membership covenant states in paragraph A/156, “Members of the Free Methodist Church, trusting in the enablement of the Holy Spirit and seeking the support of other members of the church, make the following confession and commitments as a covenant with the Lord and the church” (1995 Book of Discipline 20). This statement of the Membership Covenant makes clear how important believers helping other believers is to achieving holiness. During the full membership ritual (A/353.1, 58), the pastor asks his/her congregation, “Friends in Christ, I commend to your love and care these persons whom we this day recognize as members of our church. Do all in your power to strengthen their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love” (60). In other words, present members are to support new members in their growth in Christian faith and holiness; however, laity who have been Free Methodist for sixteen years or more may not be giving support to

those whom they do not see as full members because those members have not achieved acceptable behavioral standards (Friedman 212-215; Bellah 335).

### **How Clergy Can Help Laity Support New Members**

Clergy need to show laity the Biblical and theological foundations for the membership policies and procedures. Laity should understand that ethical conformity (besides Christian conversion) came after people were added to the fellowship of believers (Acts 2:41-42 Great Commission Growth Manual 4).

Mark Van Valin argued in his SCOD paper, “Church Membership: An Operative Theology,” clergy should bring the laity on board with their local church’s mission and purpose (2). Clergy can ask lay leaders to help them define these mission questions: 1) How can church membership serve to help the believer grow and not frustrate or discourage them? 2) How can we establish a realistic standard that reflects scriptural holiness yet does not alienate a contemporary world?

Clergy could ask their laity to help define a purpose statement that relates to church membership such as, “What do we want to happen to every man, woman, and child who comes in contact with our church?” Our Free Methodist statement answers with a determination to “invite, enfold, and equip” (Van Valin 3).

As clergy and laity develop their mission and purpose statement, they should keep in mind what growing churches are doing with their membership processes. First, in growing churches, training members is central to the mission and purpose of the church. They do not assume that commitment will just happen but believe it should be a part of

the membership process. Second, growing churches have a well-defined membership process that is a natural part of their evangelism discipleship and leadership training. They run it often, they run it well, and they have a well-articulated rationale for everything they do. Third, in many cases, growing churches have expectations of ministry, commitment, and service from their membership that are articulated beyond those expressed in the 1989 Book of Discipline. Fourth, growing churches have found that the high standards spelled out early during the membership process serve to set the tone for higher ownership, commitment, and maturity among the laity. Fifth, growing churches have found that growth due to such a well-developed membership process causes some inevitable “fallout” among the less committed. This results in slower immediate, quantitative growth but will pay off in more productive qualitative, long-range growth (Van Valin 4).

### **Long-Range Discipleship Program**

The Free Methodist denomination can support clergy and laity in their efforts to promote long-range growth for their new members by developing a long-range discipleship program. The majority of clergy and laity indicated that a long-range discipleship program for all new members would promote effective discipleship (Table 4.14 item 14i).

Even SCOD recommended to the 1999 General Conference delegates that they vote in favor of the denomination creating a long-range discipleship program. The Conference agreed with the SCOD proposal to direct the denomination to engage “itself in a critical and timely comprehensive curriculum development forum to help pastors and

their congregations develop their own unique comprehensive discipleship plan to become a biblical and Spirit-empowered ‘church’” (1999 General Conference Paper No. 602. A). Positive steps on this assignment could help new members to belong.

This research study has substantiated the need for such an instructional tool in light of the significant correlations with Christian instruction and behavioral change mentioned in 13h and 13k. Christian instruction was showed to help people grow more in 13h, 13i, 13k and 13j.

### **Workshop On Discipling New Christians**

The denomination can further help clergy and laity by giving them training on effective ways to disciple new members through a membership process. After the long-range discipleship program, the second most demanded resource for promoting effective Christian growth was workshops for pastors and lay leaders on the discipling of new Christians (Table 4.14 item 14d). The fact that the majority of clergy and laity responders did not have a membership class, small group experience, nor a mentor before they joined the Free Methodist Church suggests the reason for the need (6a, 6b, 6c, and 6d).

### **Unexpected Conclusions**

I expected that I would find disagreements among the questionnaire responders, because the membership changes were controversial among some Free Methodist. I thought that clergy and laity might disagree on some issues. The interviews that I conducted showed some disagreement between clergy and laity; however, for the most

part, both clergy and laity were equally divided on the membership policies and procedures. So, I thought the data from the returned questionnaires would show half clergy/half laity in favor of the policies and procedures, and half clergy/half laity would not support them. The data from the returned questionnaires differed from the data obtained from the interviews I conducted.

I was concerned to see that a majority of clergy and laity did not receive a membership class, small-group support, nor were they given mentors during the time they joined a Free Methodist Church. The former membership procedures require preparatory membership and instruction before one could join as a full member. However, many of the participants in this study had not experienced the means we have identified as crucial in the discipling process. Official policies and procedures do not automatically translate into actions in the local church. Pastors need guidance and encouragement to implement discipling and possibly an accountability system. Since many clergy did not receive vital discipleship components during their membership process, what help and encouragement will they need to provide effective discipling to their flock? Just having the new membership policies and procedures in the Discipline will not automatically insure effective discipling.

### **New Member Growth In Discipleship Because Of New Policies**

The data from the questionnaires showed more favorable support to the membership policies and procedures than the data from the interviews. A strong percentage of both clergy and laity observed new member growth in discipleship because of the new policies and procedures.

### **Limitations Of This Study**

This research project was the first to look at how the 1995 membership policies and procedures impacted the discipleship of new members. It is mainly limited to the perspectives of 162 Free Methodist clergy and laity out of 73,391 throughout the United States (2000 Yearbook 440).

The researcher-designed questionnaire focused on the discipleship component of behavioral standards. The items for the questionnaires derived from the data I gained from the interviews I conducted with clergy and laity at the 1999 General Conference. They expressed concern about Christian conduct standards. Therefore, the questionnaire produced a substantial amount of data about behavioral standards and not an equal amount pertaining to the two discipleship components (dependent variables): small-group support and mentor relationships.

Moreover, this study would have been stronger if I had included more than one ordinal questions (Item 13). I could have gleaned more correlations between dependent variables under study. Most of the questions in the questionnaire were nominal questions.

Also, this study would have been stronger if I would have mailed another questionnaire six months after I sent the first one. This would have contributed more reliability and validity to my study method.

## FURTHER STUDIES

Several follow up studies could derive from this research. First, someone could conduct a study to see if people are receiving adequate training on the new membership policies and procedures. This study has shown that the membership changes are taking place in the local churches after five years. A further study could help determine whether or not positive change is continuing and building over time. Another study could examine how the membership changes have impacted small group development and mentoring relationships. This study only touched on these two discipleship components. Also, someone could conduct a study to examine various elements that could help pastors to be more effective on discipling new members through membership initiation processes.

## SUMMARY

A desired outcome of the Free Methodist Church is that “every local church is an enfolding congregation producing disciplined, growing, holy people” (New Day Desired Outcomes). The American Century Dictionary defines “enfold” as “to embrace” (187). People of Free Methodist congregations are to embrace one another within their local corporate body. This study showed that a significant percentage of clergy and laity are observing new members feeling they belong to their local churches. Moreover, these new members are making progress on the Christian conduct standards after they join. These two results give evidence that the new membership changes are working. The designers of the membership changes believed that when people feel like they belong their spiritual growth is enhanced. If the majority of laity can start to see the rationale

and importance of promoting the new membership policies and procedures, a greater sense of belonging among new members will occur. Therefore, clergy need to teach their flock about the membership changes and the rationale for them. By doing this, clergy build a better quality of disciples among old and new Free Methodists. If Free Methodist clergy and laity can begin to work together to bring universal understanding about policies and procedures for new members, the greater sense of belonging forged in new members could not only end the yearly reduction in overall membership, but insure an increase in spiritual maturity of new members present in future generations.



**APPENDIX A****Questions For Qualitative Data Collections****1 July 1999****Free Methodist Church General Conference – Anderson, IN**

Purpose Statement: To discern what effect the 1995 membership policies and procedures of the Free Methodist Church have on the discipleship of new members.

Three main questions:

1. How do clergy and lay leaders in the Free Methodist Church view the 1995 changes made in membership policies and procedures and how do those changes effect discipleship?
  - a. How do they understand the changes?
  - b. What are their attitudes toward those changes?
  - c. Do they connect the changes to the discipleship process?
2. How do clergy and lay leaders in the Free Methodist Church view the results of the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures on the discipleship of new members?
  - a. Has there been a change in procedures for discipling new members?
  - b. Are changes viewed positively or negatively?
3. In what ways do clergy and lay leaders believe the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures have impacted the discipling of new members?

**APPENDIX B**

**Pilot Questionnaire For Clergy**

## FOR CLERGY

**DIRECTIONS:** Below you will find a group of questions with multiple-choice answers (except the first question). Some questions you will be asked to give only one choice. But in most of the questions, you can give multiple answers. Thanks for taking time to answer these questions.

1) Which state do you now live (please write down your state)?

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**CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOU?**

2) What age group describes you?

- a) 18-39
- b) 40-65
- c) 65 or older

3) What is your gender?

- a) Male
- b) Female

4) How long have you been a member of a Free Methodist Church?

- a) 0 to 5 years
- b) 6 to 10 years
- c) 11 to 15 years
- d) 16 years or longer

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

5) Did you complete or receive the following **before** joining your church (check all that apply)?

- a) \_\_\_ Attended a membership class of 4 hours or less **before** I joined my church
- b) \_\_\_ Attended a membership class which met more than 4 hours **before** I joined my church
- c) \_\_\_ Attended a small discipleship or Bible study group **before** I joined my church
- d) \_\_\_ Was given a mentor or spiritual director **before** I joined my church
- e) \_\_\_ Was given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** I joined my church
- f) \_\_\_ Was encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** I joined my church
- g) \_\_\_ Made certain behavioral/conduct changes **before** I joined my church
- h) \_\_\_ Made an effort to change certain behaviors/conducts **before** I joined my church
- i) \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

6) Did you complete or receive the following **after** joining your church (check all that apply)?

- a) \_\_\_ Attended a membership class of 4 hours or less **after** I joined my church
- b) \_\_\_ Attended a membership class which met more than 4 hours **after** I joined my church
- c) \_\_\_ Attended a small discipleship or Bible study group **after** I joined my church
- d) \_\_\_ Was given a mentor or spiritual director **after** I joined my church
- e) \_\_\_ Was given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** I joined my church
- f) \_\_\_ Was encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** I joined my church
- g) \_\_\_ Made behavioral/conduct changes **after** I joined my church
- h) \_\_\_ Making progress on changing behavioral/conduct standards **after** I joined my church
- i) \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

7) Which of the following have you observed happening for your members (check all that apply)?

- a) \_\_\_ Members attending membership classes **before** they joined your church
- b) \_\_\_ Members attending discipleship classes or Bible studies **before** they joined your church
- c) \_\_\_ Members assigned mentors or spiritual directors **before** they joined your church
- d) \_\_\_ Members given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** they joined your church
- e) \_\_\_ Members encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** they joined your church
- f) \_\_\_ Members made behavioral/conduct changes **before** they joined your church
- g) \_\_\_ Members started making behavioral/conduct changes **before** they joined your church
- h) \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

8) Which of the following have you observed happening for other members? (check all that apply)

- a) \_\_\_ Members attending membership classes after they joined your church
- b) \_\_\_ Members attending discipleship classes or Bible studies **after** they joined your church
- c) \_\_\_ Members assigned mentors or spiritual directors **after** they joined your church
- d) \_\_\_ Members given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** they joined your church
- e) \_\_\_ Members encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** they joined your church
- f) \_\_\_ Members meeting certain behavioral changes **after** they joined your church
- g) \_\_\_ Members are making progress on meeting conduct standards **after** they joined your church
- h) \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CIRCLE ONE ANSWER**

9) Do you use a preparatory membership?

- a) yes
- b) no

10) Do you think your members have grown in their spiritual maturity since the membership changes were implemented five years ago?

- a) Definitely agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Definitely disagree

11) Do you think your members have grown in their relationships with Jesus Christ over the last five years?

- a) Definitely agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Definitely disagree

12) Do you think your members are growing into the behavioral standards (A/154-A/160, A/315-A/342) established by the church since 1995?

- a) Definitely agree
- b) Agree
- c) Disagree
- d) Definitely disagree

**CHECK ALL POINTS THAT APPLY**

13) Which of the following changes were made in membership procedures and policies by the 1995 General Conference? (Check all points that apply.)

- a)  To my knowledge, no changes were made.
- b)  Prospective members must first be preparatory members before they can become full members
- c)  Prospective members do not have to be preparatory members before becoming full members
- d)  Each Free Methodist Conference votes to determine whether its local churches will require preparatory membership for prospective members
- e)  Prospective members must meet certain behavioral standards before they become full members
- f)  Prospective members do not have to meet certain behavioral standards before they become full members
- g)  Prospective members must have had a conversion experience before they can become full members within the Free Methodist Church
- h)  New members achieve these behavioral standards/conduct standards (that the Free Methodist Church established A/154-A/160, A/315-342) on their own
- i)  All members of a local church are responsible for helping new members achieve these behavioral standards/conduct standards

**CHECK THOSE YOU AGREE WITH**

14) Which statement most accurately reflects your perspective on the membership changes? (Check those you agree with)

- a)  The changes are too general to apply
- b)  The changes prevent people from struggling with what it means to be a Christian
- c)  The changes did not include a program that helps new members continue their discipleship long range
- d)  The changes help disciple new members because new members don't have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join
- e)  The changes hurt the discipleship of new members because new members don't have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join
- f)  The changes are good because people need to be allowed to join the church where they are in their spiritual maturity, because the Holy Spirit needs time to build Christian's spiritual maturity.
- g)  The changes help people feel connected to the church; therefore, they are more willing to work on their spiritual maturity.
- h)  The changes help those who felt excluded feel included.
- i)  The changes do not push new members to grow in their spiritual maturity
- j)  The membership changes give a free license for members to do anything they want
- k)  The membership changes are too stringent

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

15) What changes in your local church have you noticed since the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures have taken effect? (Check all that apply)

- a)  I have noticed little or no change
- b)  More people becoming members of the church even though they are still drinking and smoking
- c)  Fewer new Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco
- d)  My church is helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
- e)  More new Christians being given the support needed to break habits that bind them
- f)  Less concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits
- g)  More new Christians who are feeling like they belong to your congregation and to God
- h)  New members are not allowed into the group of members who have been a part of your local church for 5 years or more
- i)  An increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church
- j)  More people are growing in their spiritual maturity.
- k)  New members are making the conduct standards established by the Free Methodist Church a part of their regular behavior
- l)  New members are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ

16) As a pastor of a church, what do you **need** to be more effective in discipling new believers? (Check all that apply)

- a)  More small discipleship groups
- b)  More Bible studies
- c)  To give more time in helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
- d)  Lay members giving more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
- e)  To give more time to helping new members meet the conduct standards established by the Free Methodist Church
- f)  For laity to give more time to helping new members meet the conduct standards established by the Free Methodist Church
- g)  A long range discipleship program for all new members
- h)  For the Denomination to establish more specific guidelines on membership policies and procedures
- i)  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL THAT YOU AGREE WITH**

17) What do you think should be provided for improved discipleship? (Check all that you agree with)

- a)  New members disciple better if they go through preparatory membership
- b)  New members disciple better if they don't go through preparatory membership
- c)  New members disciple better if they have assigned mentors or spiritual directors
- d)  New members disciple better if they don't have assigned mentors or spiritual directors
- e)  New members disciple better if they are given a lot of doctrinal instruction before they join
- f)  New members disciple better if they are given a lot of doctrinal instruction after they join
- g)  New members disciple better if they are not given any doctrinal instruction before they join
- h)  New members disciple better if they are not given any doctrinal instruction after they join
- i)  New members disciple better if they achieve the behavioral standards set by the Free Methodist Church (A/154-A/160, A/315-A/342) on their own
- j)  New members disciple better if they achieve the behavioral standards set by the Free Methodist Church (A/154-A/160, A/315-A/342) with the encouragement and guidance of other members
- k)  New members disciple better if they meet behavioral standards before they join
- l)  New members disciple better if they meet behavioral standards after they join

**CHECK THE ONES YOU HAVE HEARD**

18) What have you heard others mention about the changes in the 1995 membership policies and procedures? (Check the ones you have heard)

- a)  New members are not receiving enough discipleship instruction
- b)  New members are not working on their conduct standards after they join
- c)  It is good to allow persons to become members of a church no matter what their spiritual maturity is – as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord
- d)  It is good to allow people who feel excluded to feel included
- e)  These new changes make people feel connected
- f)  The new policies allow new members to change their behavior standards/conduct standards over-time.
- g)  New members are allowed time to grow in their spiritual maturity
- h)  New members are not pushed to grow in their spiritual maturity
- i)  The new membership policies and procedures give new members a license to go whatever they want to do



**APPENDIX C**  
**Pilot Questionnaire For Laity**

## FOR LAITY

**DIRECTIONS:** Below you will find a group of questions with multiple-choice answers (except the first question). Some questions you will be asked to give only one choice. But in most of the questions, you can give multiple answers. Thanks for taking time to answer these questions.

- 1) Which state do you now live (please write down your state)?
- 

**CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOU?**

- 2) What age group describes you?  
 a) 18-39  
 b) 40-65  
 c) 65 or older
- 3) What is your gender?  
 a) Male  
 b) Female
- 4) How long have you been a member of a Free Methodist Church?  
 a) 0 to 5 years  
 b) 6 to 10 years  
 c) 11 to 15 years  
 d) 16 years or longer

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- 5) Did you complete or receive the following **before** joining your church (check all that apply)?
- a) \_\_\_ Attended a membership class of 4 hours or less **before** I joined my church
- b) \_\_\_ Attended a membership class which met more than 4 hours **before** I joined my church
- c) \_\_\_ Attended a small discipleship or Bible study group **before** I joined my church
- d) \_\_\_ Was given a mentor or spiritual director **before** I joined my church
- e) \_\_\_ Was given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** I joined my church
- f) \_\_\_ Was encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** I joined my church
- g) \_\_\_ Made certain behavioral/conduct changes **before** I joined my church
- h) \_\_\_ Made an effort to change certain behaviors/conducts **before** I joined my church
- i) \_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- 6) Did you complete or receive the following **after** joining your church (check all that apply)?
- a)  Attended a membership class of 4 hours or less **after** I joined my church
  - b)  Attended a membership class which met more than 4 hours **after** I joined my church
  - c)  Attended a small discipleship or Bible study group **after** I joined my church
  - d)  Was given a mentor or spiritual director **after** I joined my church
  - e)  Was given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** I joined my church
  - f)  Was encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** I joined my church
  - g)  Made behavioral/conduct changes **after** I joined my church
  - h)  Making progress on changing behavioral/conduct standards **after** I joined my church
  - i)  Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Which of the following have you observed happening for other members (check all that apply)?
- a)  Members attending membership classes **before** they joined your church
  - b)  Members attending discipleship classes or Bible studies **before** they joined your church
  - c)  Members assigned mentors or spiritual directors **before** they joined your church
  - d)  Members given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** they joined your church
  - e)  Members encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **before** they joined your church
  - f)  Members made behavioral/conduct changes **before** they joined your church
  - g)  Members started making behavioral/conduct changes **before** they joined your church
  - h)  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- 8) Which of the following have you observed happening for other members? (check all that apply)
- a)  Members attending membership classes **after** they joined your church
  - b)  Members attending discipleship classes or Bible studies **after** they joined your church
  - c)  Members assigned mentors or spiritual directors **after** they joined your church
  - d)  Members given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** they joined your church
  - e)  Members encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church **after** they joined your church
  - f)  Members meeting certain behavioral changes **after** they joined your church
  - g)  Members are making progress on meeting conduct standards **after** they joined your church
  - h)  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CIRCLE ONE ANSWER**

- 9) Were you a preparatory member before becoming a full member?
- a) yes
  - b) no
- 10) Do you think that you have grown in your spiritual maturity since joining your church?
- a) Definitely agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Definitely disagree
- 11) Do you think you have grown in your relationship with Jesus Christ since joining the church?
- a) Definitely agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Definitely disagree
- 12) Do you think you are growing into the behavioral standards established by the church?
- a) Definitely agree
  - b) Agree
  - c) Disagree
  - d) Definitely disagree

**CHECK ALL POINTS THAT APPLY**

- 13) Which of the following changes were made in membership procedures and policies by the 1995 General Conference? (Check all points that apply.)
- a)  To my knowledge, no changes were made.
  - b)  Prospective members must first be preparatory members before they can become full members
  - c)  Prospective members do not have to be preparatory members before becoming full members
  - d)  Each Free Methodist Conference votes to determine whether its local churches will require preparatory membership for prospective members
  - e)  Prospective members must meet certain behavioral standards before they become full members
  - f)  Prospective members do not have to meet certain behavioral standards before they become full members
  - g)  Prospective members must have had a conversion experience before they can become full members within the Free Methodist Church
  - h)  New members achieve these behavioral standards/conduct standards (that the Free Methodist Church established A/154-A/160, A/315-342) on their own
  - i)  All members of a local church are responsible for helping new members achieve these behavioral standards/conduct standards

**CHECK THOSE YOU AGREE WITH**

- 14) Which statement most accurately reflects your perspective on the membership changes? (Check those you agree with)
- a)  The changes are too general to apply
  - b)  The changes prevent people from struggling with what it means to be a Christian
  - c)  The changes did not include a program that helps new members continue their discipleship long range
  - d)  The changes help disciple new members because new members don't have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join
  - e)  The changes hurt the discipleship of new members because new members don't have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join
  - f)  The changes are good because people need to be allowed to join the church where they are in their spiritual maturity, because the Holy Spirit needs time to build Christian's spiritual maturity.
  - g)  The changes help people feel connected to the church; therefore, they are more willing to work on their spiritual maturity.
  - h)  The changes help those who felt excluded feel included.
  - i)  The changes do not push new members to grow in their spiritual maturity
  - j)  The membership changes give a free license for members to do anything they want
  - k)  The membership changes are too stringent

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

- 15) What changes in your local church have you noticed since the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures have taken effect? (Check all that apply)
- a)  I have noticed little or no change
  - b)  More people becoming members of the church even though they are still drinking and smoking
  - c)  Fewer new Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco
  - d)  My church is helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
  - e)  More new Christians being given the support needed to break habits that bind them
  - f)  Less concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits
  - g)  More new Christians who are feeling like they belong to your congregation and to God
  - h)  New members are not allowed into the group of members who have been a part of your local church for 5 years or more
  - i)  An increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church
  - j)  More people are growing in their spiritual maturity.
  - k)  New members are making the conduct standards established by the Free Methodist Church a part of their regular behavior
  - l)  New members are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ
- 16) What do pastors and churches need to be more effective in discipling new believers? (Check all that apply)
- a)  More small discipleship groups
  - b)  More Bible studies
  - c)  Pastors giving more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
  - d)  Lay members giving more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
  - e)  The laity and clergy giving more time to helping new members meet the conduct standards established by the Free Methodist Church
  - f)  A long range discipleship program for all new members
  - g)  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL THAT YOU AGREE WITH**

- 17) What do you think should be provided for improved discipleship? (Check all that you agree with)
- a)  New members disciple better if they go through preparatory membership
  - b)  New members disciple better if they don't go through preparatory membership
  - c)  New members disciple better if they have assigned mentors or spiritual directors
  - d)  New members disciple better if they don't have assigned mentors or spiritual directors
  - e)  New members disciple better if they are given a lot of doctrinal instruction before they join
  - f)  New members disciple better if they are given a lot of doctrinal instruction after they join
  - g)  New members disciple better if they are not given any doctrinal instruction before they join
  - h)  New members disciple better if they are not given any doctrinal instruction after they join
  - i)  New members disciple better if they achieve the behavioral standards set by the Free Methodist Church (A/154-A/160, A/315-A/342) on their own
  - j)  New members disciple better if they achieve the behavioral standards set by the Free Methodist Church (A/154-A/160, A/315-A/342) with the encouragement and guidance of other members
  - k)  New members disciple better if they meet behavioral standards before they join
  - l)  New members disciple better if they meet behavioral standards after they join

**CHECK THE ONES YOU HAVE HEARD**

- 18) What have you heard others mention about the changes in the 1995 membership policies and procedures? (Check the ones you have heard)
- a)  New members are not receiving enough discipleship instruction
  - b)  New members are not working on their conduct standards after they join
  - c)  It is good to allow persons to become members of a church no matter what their spiritual maturity is – as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord
  - d)  It is good to allow people who feel excluded to feel included
  - e)  These new changes make people feel connected
  - f)  The new policies allow new members to change their behavior standards/conduct standards over-time.
  - g)  New members are allowed time to grow in their spiritual maturity
  - h)  New members are not pushed to grow in their spiritual maturity
  - i)  The new membership policies and procedures give new members a license to go whatever they want to do

**APPENDIX D**

**Cover Letter For Researcher-Designed Questionnaire**

**Dear Free Methodist –**

**Please complete the enclosed questionnaire while you have it in hand. Your answers to this questionnaire will help us focus on our denomination’s discipleship program.**

**The questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.**

**After you have completed the questionnaire, please place it within the self-addressed, stamped envelope and mail to me.**

**Thanks for your response,**

**Pastor Barton T. Herndon.**



**APPENDIX E**

**Cover Letter From Bishop Snyder**



## Free Methodist Church of North America

### Board of Bishops

*Roger W. Haskins   Leslie L. Krober   Joseph F. James   Richard D. Snyder*

November 1999

Dear Pastor:

Greetings in the Lord! I hope you are well and that your work is progressing in the ways of the Holy Spirit.

As you know, the 1995 General Conference made significant adjustments in our approach to membership assimilation. You have probably made several adjustments in your approach to teaching prospective members and in communicating to the church the more principle-based approach to this subject.

Bart Herndon, an elder in the Free Methodist Church, is a doctor of ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary, and is working on a dissertation project which is designed to study various aspects of change in membership issues. His study can be of significant value to us, and I am asking you to participate with Bart by completing the materials that he has sent to you.

It will be beneficial to him if you will take time now to complete the questionnaire and return it to him. I want to express thanks to Bart and to you for working to help the Free Methodist Church do a better job in its discipleship ministries.

May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Richard D. Snyder

RDS:bf

**Dear responder, thanks for completing this questionnaire. Your answers are helping our church. (C)**

- 1) State of residence: (where do you live)  
\_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Age: (circle your answer)
  - a. 18-39
  - b. 40-65
  - c. 65 or older
- 3) Gender: (circle your answer)
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
- 4) Years a member of a Free Methodist Church? (circle your answer)
  - a. 0 to 5 years
  - b. 6 to 10 years
  - c. 11 to 15 years
  - d. 16 years or longer
- 5) Do you use a preparatory membership?(circle answer)
  - a. yes
  - b. no
- 6) Circle whether you are a:
  - a. Pastor
  - b. Associate Pastor
  - c. Lay Person

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

Which of the following did you participate in or receive:	6a) Before joining the church?	7) After joining the church?
a) A membership class that met for 4 hours or less		
b) A membership class which met more than 4 hours		

c) A small discipleship or Bible study group		
d) A mentor or spiritual director		
e) Instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church		
f) Encouragement and support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christians conduct standards of the Church		
g) Other:		

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

Which of the following have you observed happening for persons joining your church:	8) Before joining the church?	9) After joining the church?
a) Membership classes meeting 4 hours or less		
b) Membership classes meeting more than 4 hours		
c) Members assigned mentors or spiritual directors after joining your church		

d) Members were given instruction to understand the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church		
e) Members were encouraged and given support for making the behavioral changes necessary to live out the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church		
f) Members attended small discipleship or Bible study groups		
g) Members made behavioral changes		
h) Members made progress on making behavioral changes		
i) Other:		

- d) \_\_\_ Each Free Methodist Conference votes to determine whether its local churches will require preparatory membership for prospective members
- e) \_\_\_ Prospective members must meet certain behavioral standards (described in the "Christian Conduct" section of The Discipline) before they become full members
- f) \_\_\_ Prospective members do not have to meet the behavioral standards (described in the "Christian Conduct" section of The Discipline) before they become full members
- g) \_\_\_ New members achieve these behavioral standards (established by the Free Methodist Church) basically on their own with God's help
- h) \_\_\_ All members of a local church are responsible for helping new members achieve these behavioral standards
- i) \_\_\_ Prospective members must have had a conversion experience before they can become full members within the Free Methodist Church

**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**

**10) Which of the following statements accurately describe membership procedures and policies since the changes made by 1995 General Conference? (Check all that apply)**

- a) \_\_\_ No changes were made
- b) \_\_\_ Prospective members must first be preparatory members before they can become full members
- c) \_\_\_ Prospective members do not have to be preparatory members before becoming full members

**CHECK THOSE WITH WHICH YOU AGREE**

**11) Which statement most accurately reflects your perspective on the 1995 membership changes?(check answers)**

- a) \_\_\_ The changes are too general to apply
- b) \_\_\_ The changes hinder people from struggling with what it means to be a Christian
- c) \_\_\_ The changes did not include a program that helps new members continue their discipleship long range

- d) \_\_\_ The changes enhance the discipling of new members because new members don't have to meet certain behavioral changes before they join the church
- e) \_\_\_ The changes hurt the discipleship of new members because new members don't have to make certain behavioral changes before they join
- f) \_\_\_ The changes are good because people need to be allowed to join the church where they are in their spiritual maturity, because the Holy Spirit needs time to build the Christian's spiritual maturity
- g) \_\_\_ The changes help people feel connected to the church; therefore, they are more willing to work on their spiritual maturity
- h) \_\_\_ The changes help those who felt excluded feel included
- i) \_\_\_ The changes do not push new members to grow in their spiritual maturity
- j) \_\_\_ The membership changes give a free license for members to do any behavior they want
- k) \_\_\_ Too stringent

matter what their spiritual maturity is – as long as they have a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord

- d) \_\_\_ It is good to allow people who feel excluded to feel included
- e) \_\_\_ These new changes make people feel connected
- f) \_\_\_ The new policies and procedures allow new members to change their behavior standards over time
- g) \_\_\_ People are allowed time to grow in their spiritual maturity
- h) \_\_\_ New members are not pushed to grow in their spiritual maturity
- i) \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK THOSE WITH WHICH YOU AGREE**

**12) What have you heard others mention about the changes in the 1995 membership policies and procedures?**

- a) \_\_\_ New members are not receiving enough discipleship instruction
- b) \_\_\_ New members are not working on their conduct standards after they join
- c) \_\_\_ It is good to allow persons to become members of a church no

**CIRCLE THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER FOR EACH ITEM.  
1=Noticeable Decrease,  
2=Some Decrease, 3=About the Same, 4=Some Increase,  
5=Noticeable Increase.**

<b>13) What changes have you noticed in your local church since the 1995 changes in membership policies and procedures?</b>	<b>1 2 3 4 5</b>
a) I have noticed little or no change	1 2 3 4 5
b) People becoming members of the church even though they are still drinking or smoking	1 2 3 4 5
c) New Christians striving diligently to be freed from the use of alcohol and tobacco	1 2 3 4 5
d) New Christians being given the support needed to break habits that bind them	1 2 3 4 5

e) Concern about living a life that is free from unhealthy, binding habits	1 2 3 4 5
f) New Christians who are feeling like they belong to congregation and to God	1 2 3 4 5
g) New members are not allowed into the group of members who have been a part of your local church for 5 years or more	1 2 3 4 5
h) An increased understanding of the principles behind the standards of conduct held by the Free Methodist Church	1 2 3 4 5
i) People are growing in their spiritual maturity	1 2 3 4 5
j) New members are making the Christian conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church a part of their regular behavior	1 2 3 4 5
k) New members are growing in their relationships with Jesus Christ	1 2 3 4 5

**ORDER BY RANK THE TOP THREE NEEDS GIVING 3 TO THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEM**

**15) What tools and resources do pastors and churches need to be more effective in discipling new believers? (Number your answers)**

- a) \_\_\_ Study resources to be used in small discipleship groups for new Christians
- b) \_\_\_ Teaching resources for membership classes
- c) \_\_\_ Teaching resources for helping new Christians understand the reasons for the Christian Conduct standards of the Free Methodist Church

- d) \_\_\_ Workshops for pastors and lay leaders on the discipling of new Christians
- e) \_\_\_ Bible study resources for new Christians
- f) \_\_\_ Readable booklets on Free Methodist church history, theology, and commitments
- g) \_\_\_ Videos on Free Methodist church history, theology, and commitments
- h) \_\_\_ Pastors giving more time to helping new members articulate what the Holy Spirit is doing in their lives
- i) \_\_\_ A long range discipleship program for all new members
- j) \_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK ALL YOU BELIEVE ARE IMPORTANT**

**16) What do you think should be provided for improved discipleship? (Check your answers)**

- a) \_\_\_ Required preparatory membership
- b) \_\_\_ No preparatory membership
- c) \_\_\_ A mentor or spiritual director for every new member
- d) \_\_\_ Comprehensive doctrinal instruction **before** persons join the church
- e) \_\_\_ Comprehensive doctrinal instruction **after** persons join the church
- f) \_\_\_ Instruction on Christian living **before** a person joins the church
- g) \_\_\_ Instruction on Christian living **after** a person joins the church
- h) \_\_\_ Laity and clergy giving more time to helping new members meet conduct standards

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