

Chapter 4

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN GENERAL CONFERENCE

Preamble

200. In order that we may wisely preserve and pass on to posterity the heritage of doctrine and principles of Christian living transmitted to us as evangelicals in the Arminian-Wesleyan tradition, and to insure church order by sound principles of ecclesiastical polity, and to prepare the way for more effective cooperation with other branches of the church of Christ in all that makes for the advancement of God's kingdom among all people, we, the ministers and lay members of The Wesleyan Church meeting in official assemblies, do hereby ordain, establish, and set forth as the fundamental law, or constitution of The Wesleyan Church, the articles of religion, rules of Christian living, privileges and conditions of church membership, and articles of organization and government, here following:

Article 1. Name

205. The name of this communion is *The Wesleyan Church*. Wherever the use of this name is impossible or impractical, adaptation may be made by the authorized body (340:2).

Article 2. Articles of Religion

1. *Faith in the Holy Trinity*

210. We believe in the one living and true God, both holy and loving, eternal, unlimited in power, wisdom and goodness, the Creator and Preserver of all things. Within this unity there are three persons of one essential nature, power and eternity — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Gen. 1:1; 17:1; Ex. 3:13-15; 33:20; Deut. 6:4; Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28-29; Matt. 3:16-17; 28:19; John 1:1-2; 4:24; 16:13; 17:3; Acts 5:3-4; 17:24-25; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6; Eph. 2:18; Phil. 2:6; Col. 1:16-17; 1 Tim. 1:17; Heb. 1:8; 1 John 5:20.

2. The Father

212. We believe the Father is the Source of all that exists, whether of matter or spirit. With the Son and the Holy Spirit, He made man, male and female, in His image. By intention He relates to people as Father, thereby forever declaring His goodwill toward them. In love, He both seeks and receives penitent sinners.

**Ps. 68:5; Isa. 64:8; Matt. 7:11; John 3:17; Rom. 8:15;
1 Peter 1:17.**

3. The Son of God

214. We believe in Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, truly God and truly man. He died on the cross and was buried, to be a sacrifice both for original sin and for all human transgressions, and to reconcile us to God. Christ rose bodily from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there intercedes for us at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge all humanity at the last day.

Ps. 16:8-10; Matt. 1:21, 23; 11:27; 16:28; 27:62-66; 28:5-9, 16-17; Mark 10:45; 15; 16:6-7; Luke 1:27, 31, 35; 24:4-8, 23; John 1:1, 14, 18; 3:16-17; 20:26-29; 21; Acts 1:2-3; 2:24-31; 4:12; 10:40; Rom. 5:10, 18; 8:34; 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:3-8, 14; 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; 4:4-5; Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 1:15; Heb 2:17; 7:27; 9:14, 28; 10:12; 13:20; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2; 4:14.

4. The Holy Spirit

216. We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is of the same essential nature, majesty, and glory, as the Father and the Son, truly and eternally God. He is the Administrator of grace to all, and is particularly the effective Agent in conviction for sin, in regeneration, in sanctification, and in glorification. He is ever present, assuring, preserving, guiding, and enabling the believer.

**Job 33:4; Matt. 28:19; John 4:24; 14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13-15;
Acts 5:3-4; Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6.**

*5. The Sufficiency and Full Authority
of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation*

218. We believe that the books of the Old and New Testaments constitute the Holy Scriptures. They are the inspired and infallibly written Word of God, fully inerrant in their original manuscripts and superior to all human authority, and have been transmitted to the present without corruption of any essential doctrine. We believe that they contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man or woman that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. Both in the Old and New Testaments life is offered ultimately through Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and humanity. The New Testament teaches Christians how to fulfill the moral principles of the Old Testament, calling for loving obedience to God made possible by the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit.

The canonical books of the Old Testament are:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, The Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

The canonical books of the New Testament are:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude and Revelation.

Ps. 19:7; Matt. 5:17-19; 22:37-40; Luke 24:27, 44; John 1:45; 5:46; 17:17; Acts 17:2, 11; Rom. 1:2; 15:4, 8; 16:26; 2 Cor. 1:20; Gal. 1:8; Eph. 2:15-16; 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12; 10:1; 11:39; James 1:21; 1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 John 2:3-7; Rev. 22:18-19.

6. God's Purpose for Humanity

220. We believe that the two great commandments which require us to love the Lord our God with all the heart, and our neighbors as ourselves, summarize the divine law as it is revealed in the Scriptures. They are the

perfect measure and norm of human duty, both for the ordering and directing of families and nations, and all other social bodies, and for individual acts, by which we are required to acknowledge God as our only Supreme Ruler, and all persons as created by Him, equal in all natural rights. Therefore all persons should so order all their individual, social and political acts as to give to God entire and absolute obedience, and to assure to all the enjoyment of every natural right, as well as to promote the fulfillment of each in the possession and exercise of such rights.

Lev. 19:18, 34; Deut. 1:16-17; Job 31:13-14; Jer. 21:12; 22:3; Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:44-48; 7:12; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:27-29, 35; John 13:34-35; Acts 10:34-35; 17:26; Rom. 12:9; 13:1, 7-8, 10; Gal. 5:14; 6:10; Titus 3:1; James 2:8; 1 Peter 2:17; 1 John 2:5; 4:12-13; 2 John 6.

7. Marriage and the Family

222. We believe that every person is created in the image of God, that human sexuality reflects that image in terms of intimate love, communication, fellowship, subordination of the self to the larger whole, and fulfillment. God's Word makes use of the marriage relationship as the supreme metaphor for His relationship with His covenant people and for revealing the truth that that relationship is of one God with one people. Therefore God's plan for human sexuality is that it is to be expressed only in a monogamous lifelong relationship between one man and one woman within the framework of marriage. This is the only relationship which is divinely designed for the birth and rearing of children and is a covenant union made in the sight of God, taking priority over every other human relationship.

Gen. 1:27-28; 2:18, 20, 23-24; Isa. 54:4-8; 62:5b; Jer. 3:14; Ezek. 16:3ff; Hosea 2; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:9; John 2:1-2, 11; 1 Cor. 9:5; Eph. 5:23-32; 1 Tim. 5:14; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 19:7-8.

8. Personal Choice

224. We believe that humanity's creation in the image of God included ability to choose between right and wrong. Thus individuals were made morally responsible for their choices. But since the fall of Adam, people are

unable in their own strength to do the right. This is due to original sin, which is not simply the following of Adam's example, but rather the corruption of the nature of each mortal, and is reproduced naturally in Adam's descendants. Because of it, humans are very far gone from original righteousness, and by nature are continually inclined to evil. They cannot of themselves even call upon God or exercise faith for salvation. But through Jesus Christ the prevenient grace of God makes possible what humans in self effort cannot do. It is bestowed freely upon all, enabling all who will to turn and be saved.

Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Deut. 30:19; Josh. 24:15; 1 Kings 20:40; Ps. 51:5; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 17:9; Mark 7:21-23; Luke 16:15; John 7:17; Rom. 3:10-12; 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 2:5; Titus 3:5; Heb. 11:6; Rev. 22:17.

9. The Atonement

226. We believe that Christ's offering of himself, once and for all, through His sufferings and meritorious death on the cross, provides the perfect redemption and atonement for the sins of the whole world, both original and actual. There is no other ground of salvation from sin but that alone. This atonement is sufficient for every individual of Adam's race. It is unconditionally effective in the salvation of those mentally incompetent from birth, of those converted persons who have become mentally incompetent, and of children under the age of accountability. But it is effective for the salvation of those who reach the age of accountability only when they repent and exercise faith in Christ.

Isa. 52:13—53:12; Luke 24:46-47; John 3:16; Acts 3:18; 4:12; Rom. 3:20, 24-26; 5:8-11, 13, 18-20; 7:7; 8:34; 1 Cor. 6:11; 15:22; Gal. 2:16; 3:2-3; Eph. 1:7; 2:13, 16; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 7:23-27; 9:11-15, 24-28; 10:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10.

10. Repentance and Faith

228. We believe that for men and women to appropriate what God's prevenient grace has made possible, they must voluntarily respond in repentance and faith. The ability comes from God, but the act is the individual's.

Repentance is prompted by the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It involves a willful change of mind that renounces sin and longs for righteousness, a godly sorrow for and a confession of past sins, proper restitution for wrongdoings, and a resolution to reform the life. Repentance is the precondition for saving faith, and without it saving faith is impossible. Faith, in turn, is the only condition of salvation. It begins in the agreement of the mind and the consent of the will to the truth of the gospel, but issues in a complete reliance by the whole person in the saving ability of Jesus Christ and a complete trusting of oneself to Him as Savior and Lord. Saving faith is expressed in a public acknowledgment of His Lordship and an identification with His Church.

Mark 1:15; Luke 5:32; 13:3; 24:47; John 3:16; 17:20; 20:31; Acts 5:31; 10:43; 11:18; 16:31; 20:21; 26:20; Rom. 1:16; 2:4; 10:8-10, 17; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:8; 4:4-6; Phil. 3:9; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:25; Heb. 11:6; 12:2; 1 Peter 1:9; 2 Peter 3:9.

11. Justification, Regeneration and Adoption

230. We believe that when one repents of personal sin and believes on the Lord Jesus Christ, that at the same moment that person is justified, regenerated, adopted into the family of God, and assured of personal salvation through the witness of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that justification is the judicial act of God whereby a person is accounted righteous, granted full pardon of all sin, delivered from guilt, completely released from the penalty of sins committed, by the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith alone, not on the basis of works.

We believe that regeneration, or the new birth, is that work of the Holy Spirit whereby, when one truly repents and believes, one's moral nature is given a distinctively spiritual life with the capacity for love and obedience. This new life is received by faith in Jesus Christ, it enables the pardoned sinner to serve God with the will and affections of the heart, and by it the regenerate are delivered from the power of sin which reigns over all the unregenerate.

We believe that adoption is the act of God by which the justified and regenerated believer becomes a partaker of all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of a child of God.

Justification: Hab. 2:4; Acts 13:38-39; 15:11; 16:31; Rom. 1:17; 3:28; 4:2-5; 5:1-2; Gal. 3:6-14; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 3:9; Heb. 10:38.

Regeneration: John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5-8; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:26; Eph. 2:5, 10, 19; 4:24; Col. 3:10; Titus 3:5; James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:3-4; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1.

Adoption: Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5, 7; Eph. 1:5.

Witness of the Spirit: Rom. 8:16-17; Gal. 4:6; 1 John 2:3; 3:14, 18-19.

12. Good Works

232. We believe that although good works cannot save us from our sins or from God's judgment, they are the fruit of faith and follow after regeneration. Therefore they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and by them a living faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

Matt. 5:16; 7:16-20; John 15:8; Rom 3:20; 4:2, 4, 6; Gal. 2:16; 5:6; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:11; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 1:3; Titus 2:14; 3:5; James 2:18, 22; 1 Peter 2:9, 12.

13. Sin After Regeneration

234. We believe that after we have experienced regeneration, it is possible to fall into sin, for in this life there is no such height or strength of holiness from which it is impossible to fall. But by the grace of God one who has fallen into sin may by true repentance and faith find forgiveness and restoration.

Mal. 3:7; Matt. 18:21-22; John 15:4-6; 1 Tim. 4:1, 16; Heb. 10:35-39; 1 John 1:9; 2:1, 24-25.

14. Sanctification: Initial, Progressive, Entire

236. We believe that sanctification is that work of the Holy Spirit by which the child of God is separated from sin unto God and is enabled to love God with all the heart and to walk in all His holy commandments blameless. Sanctification is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God. This prepares for the crisis of entire sanctification which is wrought instantaneously when believers present themselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through faith in Jesus Christ, being

effected by the baptism with the Holy Spirit who cleanses the heart from all inbred sin. The crisis of entire sanctification perfects the believer in love and empowers that person for effective service. It is followed by lifelong growth in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The life of holiness continues through faith in the sanctifying blood of Christ and evidences itself by loving obedience to God's revealed will.

Gen. 17:1; Deut. 30:6; Ps. 130:8; Isa. 6:1-6; Ezek. 36:25-29; Matt. 5:8, 48; Luke 1:74-75; 3:16-17; 24:49; John 17:1-26; Acts 1:4-5, 8; 2:1-4; 15:8-9; 26:18; Rom. 8:3-4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:13, 24; 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 3:10, 12-13; 4:3, 7-8; 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 10:14; 12:14; 13:12; James 3:17-18; 4:8; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 1:7, 9; 3:8-9; 4:17-18; Jude 24.

15. The Gifts of the Spirit

238. We believe that the Gift of the Spirit is the Holy Spirit himself, and He is to be desired more than the gifts of the Spirit which He in His wise counsel bestows upon individual members of the Church to enable them properly to fulfill their function as members of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit, although not always identifiable with natural abilities, function through them for the edification of the whole Church. These gifts are to be exercised in love under the administration of the Lord of the Church, not through human volition. The relative value of the gifts of the Spirit is to be tested by their usefulness in the Church and not by the ecstasy produced in the ones receiving them.

Luke 11:13; 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:38-39; 8:19-20; 10:45; 11:17; Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-14:40; Eph. 4:7-8, 11-16; Heb. 2:4; 13:20-21; 1 Peter 4:8-11.

16. The Church

240. We believe that the Christian Church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only Head of the Church. The Church includes both those believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those who remain on the earth, having renounced the world, the flesh and the devil, and having dedicated themselves to the work which Christ committed unto His church

until He comes. The Church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ's instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body of believers formally organized on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship and worship. The Wesleyan Church is a denomination consisting of those members within district conferences and local churches who, as members of the body of Christ, hold the faith set forth in these Articles of Religion and acknowledge the ecclesiastical authority of its governing bodies.

Matt. 16:18; 18:17; Acts 2:41-47; 9:31; 11:22; 12:5; 14:23; 15:22; 20:28; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:28; 16:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Eph. 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:9-10, 21; 5:22-33; Col. 1:18, 24; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 12:23; James 5:14.

17. The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

242. We believe that water baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sacraments of the church commanded by Christ and ordained as a means of grace when received through faith. They are tokens of our profession of Christian faith and signs of God's gracious ministry toward us. By them, He works within us to quicken, strengthen and confirm our faith.

We believe that water baptism is a sacrament of the church, commanded by our Lord and administered to believers. It is a symbol of the new covenant of grace and signifies acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ. By means of this sacrament, believers declare their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Matt. 3:13-17; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 3:5, 22, 26; 4:1-2; Acts 2:38-39, 41; 8:12-17, 36-38; 9:18; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16; Rom 2:28-29; 4:11; 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-29; Col. 2:11-12; Titus 3:5.

We believe that the Lord's Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death and of our hope in His victorious return, as well as a sign of the love that Christians have for each other. To such as receive it humbly, with a proper spirit and by faith, the Lord's Supper is made a means through which God communicates grace to the heart.

Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; John 6:48-58; 1 Cor. 5:7-8; 10:3-4, 16-17; 11:23-29.

18. *The Second Coming of Christ*

244. We believe that the certainty of the personal and imminent return of Christ inspires holy living and zeal for the evangelization of the world. At His return He will fulfill all prophecies made concerning His final and complete triumph over evil.

Job 19:25-27; Isa. 11:1-12; Zech. 14:1-11; Matt. 24:1-51; 25:26:64; Mark 13:1-37; Luke 17:22-37; 21:5-36; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:6-11; 1 Cor. 1:7-8; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11, 23; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; 2:1-12; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 9:27-28; James 5:7-8; 2 Peter 3:1-14; 1 John 3:2-3; Rev. 1:7; 19:11-16; 22:6-7, 12, 20.

19. *The Resurrection of the Dead*

246. We believe in the bodily resurrection from the dead of all people—of the just unto the resurrection of life, and of the unjust unto the resurrection of damnation. The resurrection of Christ is the guarantee of the resurrection which will occur at Christ's Second Coming. The raised body will be a spiritual body, but the person will be whole and identifiable.

Job 19:25-27; Dan. 12:2; Matt. 22:30-32; 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 14:14; 24:1-53; John 5:28-29; 11:21-27; 20:1—21:25; Acts 1:3; Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14; 15:1-58; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:1-11; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; Rev. 20:4-6, 11-13.

20. *The Judgment of All Persons*

248. We believe that the Scriptures reveal God as the Judge of all and the acts of His judgment are based on His omniscience and eternal justice. His administration of judgment will culminate in the final meeting of all persons before His throne of great majesty and power, where records will be examined and final rewards and punishments will be administered.

Ecl. 12:14; Matt. 10:15; 25:31-46; Luke 11:31-32; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom. 2:16; 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 2 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 9:27; 2 Peter 3:7; Rev. 20:11-13.

21. Destiny

250. We believe that the Scriptures clearly teach that there is a conscious personal existence after death. The final destiny of each person is determined by God's grace and that person's response, evidenced inevitably by a moral character which results from that individual's personal and volitional choices and not from any arbitrary decree of God. Heaven with its eternal glory and the blessedness of Christ's presence is the final abode of those who choose the salvation which God provides through Jesus Christ, but hell with its everlasting misery and separation from God is the final abode of those who neglect this great salvation.

Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:34-46; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 13:3; John 8:21-23; 14:2-3; 2 Cor. 5:6, 8, 10; Heb. 2:1-3; 9:27-28; 10:26-31; Rev. 20:14-15; 21:1—22:5, 14-15.

Article 3. Covenant Membership Commitments

260. To be identified with an organized church is the blessed privilege and sacred duty of all who are saved from their sins and are seeking completeness in Christ Jesus. From the Church's beginnings in the New Testament age, it has been understood that such identification involves putting off the old patterns of conduct and putting on the mind of Christ. In maintaining this Christian concept of a transformed life, The Wesleyan Church intends to relate timeless biblical principles to the conditions of contemporary society in such a way as to respect the integrity of the individual believer, yet maintain the purity of the Church and the effectiveness of its witness. This is done in the conviction that there is validity in the concept of the collective Christian conscience as illuminated and guided by the Holy Spirit. The following items (265) represent historic, ethical and practical standards of The Wesleyan Church. While it is hoped that our people will earnestly seek the aid of the Spirit in cultivating a sensitivity to evil which transcends the mere letter of the law, it is expected that those entering into Covenant Membership shall follow carefully and conscientiously these guides and helps to holy living. Disregard of the principles embraced in these Covenant Membership Commitments subjects a member to Church discipline (268).

265. Those admitted to Covenant Membership in our churches commit themselves to demonstrate their life in Christ in such ways as:

Toward God

(1) To reverence the name of God and to honor the Lord's Day by divine worship and spiritual edification, participating in those activities which contribute to the moral and spiritual purposes of this day.

Gen. 2:3; Ex. 20:3, 7-11; Deut. 5:11-15; Isa. 58:13-14; Mark 2:27; Acts 20:7; Heb. 4:9.

(2) To seek only the leading of the Holy Spirit and to abstain from all forms of spiritism, such as the occult, witchcraft, astrology and other similar practices.

Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:10-14; Acts 19:18-19; Gal. 5:19-20.

Toward Self

(3) To exercise faithful stewardship through the wise use of their time and material resources, practicing careful self-discipline in order to further the mission of Christ's church (remembering the principle of tithing which is basic to the New Testament standard of stewardship) and to demonstrate compassion to those in need.

Prov. 3:9; Mal. 3:10; Matt. 25:34-40; Acts 20:35; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7; Eph. 5:16; Col. 3:17; James 2:15-16; 1 John 3:17.

(4) To demonstrate a positive social witness by abstaining from all forms of gambling and by abstaining from using or trafficking (production, sale or purchase)* in any substances destructive to their physical, mental and spiritual health, such as alcoholic beverages, tobacco and drugs (other than proper medical purposes of drugs); and by refraining from membership in secret societies and lodges which are oath bound, believing that the quasi-religious nature of such organizations divides the Christian's loyalty, their secret nature contravenes the Christian's open witness and the secret nature of their oaths is repugnant to the Christian conscience.

Ex. 20:17; Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12. Gambling violates the principle of Christian stewardship and the tenth commandment, is harmful to the individual in that it is emotionally addictive, is a

*See 6805 in Appendix B.

poor example to others, and pollutes the moral climate of society.

Prov. 20:1; Rom. 6:12; 14:21; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; 10:23; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:22. Christians are to regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. While no “thing” of itself is sinful, the Christian should avoid the use of anything which would not help build the fellowship of the church, would not help the believers to realize their full potential in Christ, or which would enslave them. In the light of the scientific knowledge of our day concerning the actual and potential harm of these substances, total abstinence is more in keeping with these biblical principles than is moderation.

Ex. 20:3; Matt. 5:34-36; John 18:20; Acts 4:12; James 5:12. These prohibitions do not restrict membership in labor, civic or other organizations which do not contradict loyalty to Christ and the Church. When in these relationships Christian principles are violated, members shall be dealt with because of such violations and not because of the membership itself.

Toward Family

(5) To follow the teachings of the Scriptures regarding marriage and divorce. We affirm that sexual relationships outside of marriage and sexual relationships between persons of the same sex are immoral and sinful. We further affirm that heterosexual monogamy is God’s plan for marriage, and we regard sexual sin of the spouse, such as adultery, homosexual behavior, bestiality or incest, as the only biblical grounds for considering divorce, and then only when appropriate counseling has failed to restore the relationship.

Ex. 20:14, 17; 22:19; Lev. 20:10-16; Matt. 5:32; 19:19; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18.

(6) To preserve the sanctity of the home by honoring Christ in every phase of family life and by demonstrating Christlike love (always avoiding spousal or child abuse), and by living peacefully with one another, thereby encouraging the nurture and education of the children in the Christian faith so as to bring them early to the saving knowledge of Christ.

Prov. 22:6; Mark 10:9; Eph. 5:28; 6:4.

Toward The Church

(7) To work together for the advancement of God's kingdom and for the mutual edification of fellow believers in holiness, knowledge and love; to walk together in Christian fellowship by giving and receiving counsel with gentleness and affection; by praying for each other; by helping each other in sickness and distress; and by demonstrating love, purity and courtesy to all.

Rom. 15:1-2; Eph. 4; 1 Thess. 5.

(8) To grow in the knowledge, love and grace of God by participating in public worship, the ministry of the Word of God, the Lord's Supper, family and personal devotions and fasting.

Mark 2:18-20; Acts 13:2-3; 14:23; Rom. 12:12; 1 Cor. 11:23-28; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 10:25; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 3:18.

(9) To preserve the fellowship and witness of the Church with reference to the use of languages. The Wesleyan Church believes in the miraculous use of languages and the interpretation of languages in its biblical and historical setting. But it is contrary to the Word of God to teach that speaking in an unknown tongue or the gift of tongues is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit or of that entire sanctification which the baptism accomplishes; therefore, only a language readily understood by the congregation is to be used in public worship. The Wesleyan Church believes that the use of an ecstatic prayer language has no clear scriptural sanction, or any pattern of established historical usage in the Church; therefore, the use of such a prayer language shall not be promoted among us.

Acts 8:14-17; 1 Cor. 12:1—14:40; Gal. 5:22-24.

Toward Others

(10) To do good as much as is possible to all people as God gives opportunity, especially to those in the body of Christ; by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the destitute, by visiting or helping those who are sick or in prison; by instructing, correcting or encouraging them in love.

Matt. 25:31-46; Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:13; 10:23-25.

(11) To respect the inherent individual rights of all persons, regardless of race, color or sex.

1 Cor. 8:13; 12:13; Gal. 3:28; 1 Tim. 5:21.

(12) To live honestly, be just in all dealings and faithful in all commitments.

Ecc. 5:4-5; Rom. 12:17; Phil. 4:8-9; 1 Peter 2:12.

268. These are the Covenant Membership Commitments of our Church. We believe all these to be consistent with the principles of Christ as taught in the Word of God, which is the only and sufficient rule both of our faith and practice. If any among us do not observe them, and/or habitually break any of them, we will admonish such persons in love with the hope of restoring them to lives of harmony with the above Covenant Membership Commitments. If such efforts of restoration continue to prove fruitless, official action should be taken toward termination of said persons' church membership. However, the church members are encouraged to continue efforts toward the spiritual restoration of these persons.

Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:6-7, 9-13; 2 Cor. 2:5-7; 5:18-20; 6:14-18; Gal. 6:1-10; Eph. 4:25-32; Titus 3:10-11.

Article 4. Elementary Principles

270. Christ is the only Head of the Church, and the Word of God the only rule of faith and conduct.

272. No person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and obeys the gospel of God our Savior, ought to be deprived of church membership.

274. Every person has an inalienable right to private judgment in matters of religion, and an equal right to express personal opinions in any way which will not violate the laws of God or the rights of others.

276. All church trials should be conducted on gospel principles only; and no minister or member should be excommunicated except for immorality, the propagation of unchristian doctrines, or for neglect of duties enjoined by the Word of God.

278. The pastoral or ministerial office and duties are of divine appointment, and all ordained ministers in the church of God are equal; but

ministers are forbidden to be lords over God's heritage, or to have dominion over the faith of the saints.

280. The Church has a right to form and enforce such rules and regulations only as are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, and may be necessary or have a tendency to carry into effect the great system of practical Christianity.

282. Whatever power may be necessary to the formation of rules and regulations is inherent in the ministers and members of the Church; but so much of that power may be delegated from time to time, upon a plan of representation, as they may judge necessary and proper.

284. It is the duty of all ministers and members of the Church to maintain godliness and oppose all moral evil.

286. It is obligatory upon ministers of the gospel to be faithful in the discharge of their pastoral and ministerial duties, and it is also obligatory upon the members to esteem ministers highly for their works' sake, and to render them a righteous compensation for their labors.

Article 5. Observance of Sacraments

290. All persons to be baptized shall have the choice of baptism by immersion, pouring or sprinkling. Since children are born into this world with natures inclined to sin, and yet the prevenient grace of God provides for their redemption during the period before reaching the age of accountability, those parents who so choose may testify to their faith in God's provision by presenting their small children for baptism, while those who prefer to emphasize baptism as a testimony by individual believers to their own act of faith may present their children for dedication.

Mark 10:13-16; Acts 2:38-39; 16:15; 18:8.

293. The Lord's Supper shall be observed in each local Wesleyan church at least once each three months.

Article 6. Membership

295. The privileges and conditions of covenant membership in the Church are constitutional, and changes therein may be made only by constitutional enactment. The General Conference may at its own discretion establish categories of membership other than covenant membership. Nothing shall be included in the membership ritual that is

contrary to the following definitions, conditions and privileges of membership.

297. The conditions of covenant membership are:

(1) Confession of a personal experience in regeneration, and a pledge to seek diligently until sanctified wholly if that grace has not been obtained.

(2) Christian baptism.

(3) Acceptance of the Articles of Religion which are summarized in 299, the Covenant Membership Commitments, the Elementary Principles, and the authority of *The Discipline* in matters of church government.

(4) A covenant to support the Church, to live in fellowship with the members thereof, and to seek God's glory in all things.

(5) The approving vote of the members of the receiving church who are present and voting, unless the church by vote shall delegate this right to the church board. In both cases, it shall be by majority vote, provided that when objections are urged against the reception of a member, it shall require a vote of two-thirds of those present and voting to receive.

299. Candidates for covenant membership shall declare their agreement with the following summary of the Articles of Religion:

We believe in God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

We believe that Jesus Christ the Son suffered in our place on the cross, that He died but rose again, that He now sits at the Father's right hand until He returns to judge every person at the last day.

We believe in the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God.

We believe that by the grace of God every person has the ability and responsibility to choose between right and wrong, and that those who repent of their sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified by faith.

We believe that God not only counts the believer as righteous, but that He makes such persons righteous, freeing them from sin's dominion at conversion, purifying their hearts by faith, perfecting them in love at entire sanctification, and providing for their growth in grace at every stage of spiritual life, enabling them through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live victorious lives.

302. The rights of covenant membership are:

(1) The fellowship of the saints and the encouragement, admonition and spiritual guidance of the ministry.

(2) The access to the sacraments and ordinances of the Church.

(3) The right to vote and the eligibility to hold any office for which a person in covenant membership is eligible, if not under discipline.

(4) The right to trial and appeal if charged with failure to maintain the conditions of membership, with the specific provision that joining another religious body shall of itself sever membership in the Church.

(5) A covenant member in good standing in any Wesleyan church is entitled to membership privileges in any Wesleyan church to which a transfer of membership may be desired, subject to 297:5.

305. Church membership may be terminated only by one or more of the following:

(1) Voluntary withdrawal.

(2) Joining another religious body or a secret order.

(3) Expulsion after proper trial and conviction.

(4) Persistent neglect of church relationship as defined by *The Discipline*.

Article 7. The Ministry

310. The General Conference shall from time to time enact provisions for the training, qualification and ordination of the ministry. Every Wesleyan minister must be a member of some Wesleyan church, and each ordained minister must be a member of a district. An ordained minister is a minister of the gospel fully invested with all the functions of the Christian ministry.

313. The constitutional rights of ministers in The Wesleyan Church if not under discipline shall include the following:

(1) To preach the gospel and in the case of ordained ministers to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper, to perform all parts of divine worship, and to solemnize the rite of matrimony.

(2) To be eligible, in the case of ordained ministers, for election to any office in the Church for which ordained ministers are eligible.

(3) To contract the pastoral relationship with local Wesleyan churches subject to the other provisions of this Constitution (313:6; 323:1-2).

(4) To enjoy the use for religious meetings of the church building or buildings of the pastoral charge to which appointment has been made by the district conference.

(5) To serve the assigned pastoral charge without interference by

unauthorized activities of another minister of The Wesleyan Church.

(6) To transfer in the manner prescribed by *The Discipline* from one district to another, subject to the approval of the district superintendent and the general superintendent supervising the area which includes the district into which the transfer is sought.

(7) To have recourse, even if under discipline, to a proper court of jurisdiction in any matters involving complaint against the minister's character or ministerial conduct and to appeal the decision of such court.

Article 8. Organization and Government

Local

315. Pastoral Charges. The members of the denomination shall be grouped into local churches, one or more of which shall constitute a pastoral charge. The following are the constitutional rights of each pastoral charge:

(1) To receive and expel or discontinue members subject to the provisions of *The Discipline*. This right vests severally in each local church. (Cf. 365.)

(2) To call its own pastor, subject to confirmation by the district conference.

(3) To grant or revoke local licenses for various ministries as provided in *The Discipline*. This right may be delegated to the church board. (Cf. 365.)

(4) To recommend persons for various ministries to the district conference. This right may be delegated to the church board.

(5) To elect its own officers and to remove the same for cause. Except as provided in 365, no pastor or other official has any right to appoint an officer or declare an office vacant. This right belongs to the church alone, and vests severally in each local church.

(6) To elect trustees and through such trustees to supervise, control and maintain its property for the use and benefit of the ministry and members of The Wesleyan Church and subject to its regulations and appointments as from time to time legislated and declared. This right vests severally in each local church.

(7) To be represented in the voting membership of its district conference, if not under discipline.

(8) To have recourse to a proper court of jurisdiction in any matters of controversy between itself and other local, or district, or general units or agencies of the denomination. This right vests severally in each local church.

District

317. The General Conference shall organize the work at large into districts, which shall operate under its jurisdiction and promote the interests of the denomination, and whose voting membership shall include the following: All ordained ministers on the appointed, retired, reserve and educational leave lists; licensed ministers elected to ordained minister's status; all commissioned and licensed ministers serving as pastors of Wesleyan churches; all commissioned and licensed ministers serving as full-time associate or assistant pastors of Wesleyan churches; members of the district board of administration who are not members by some other right; and lay delegates elected as provided in *The Discipline*. In addition the district conference shall include such nonvoting members as *The Discipline* shall provide. The principle of equal representation of the ministry and the laity in the district conference shall be maintained.

320. In transacting the business of the district conference the ministers and lay members shall deliberate as one body; but on the final vote on any question, at the call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide, and the ministers and lay members shall vote separately; and it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

323. The constitutional rights of each district shall include the following:

(1) The right to take charge of all the ministers and churches within its bounds, as modified by 360:3e and 365 (except those serving the General Church as the General Conference shall define who shall be amenable to the General Board of Administration, and except the district superintendent who shall be amenable to the General Board of Administration), and subject to the right of the ministers and churches to enter into pastoral engagements.

(2) To alter the agreement entered into by any pastor and charge, or veto the action of the church and appoint another pastor on said charge when it deems this to be for the best interest of the charge or pastor involved or when the general interest of the work of the district would be better served by such change; and the said church or charge shall receive the pastor appointed by the district conference, provided that any such alteration of a previous arrangement between a pastor and church shall be separately reported and passed by vote of the district conference to be effective.

(3) To elect and ordain ministers, and to receive ordained ministers from other denominations subject to the restrictions of *The Discipline*.

(4) To receive or decline persons recommended to it for various ministries by the pastoral charges within its bounds.

(5) To organize and receive local churches within the boundaries of the territory assigned to it by the General Conference, and to fix the boundaries of its circuits and stations.

(6) To take such actions and adopt such rules as it shall judge necessary to promote the interest and prosperity of the Church and to amend or rescind the same, provided it shall not add to or take from any provision of the Constitution or of *The Discipline*, and provided further that if three members of a district shall take exception to its action on the ground that it violates this restriction, they may make an appeal therefrom through the channels prescribed by *The Discipline*.

(7) To elect its own officers as outlined in *The Discipline* and to dismiss them for cause.

(8) To elect in the manner prescribed by *The Discipline* its own board of trustees and through them to receive, hold, encumber and dispose of all district property within the bounds of the district, including local property held by the district, according to the provisions of *The Discipline* and the laws of the state. All properties held by the district shall be held in trust for the use and benefit of the ministry and members of The Wesleyan Church and subject to its regulations and appointments as from time to time legislated and declared.

(9) To be represented in the lay and ministerial voting membership of the General Conference, if not under discipline.

(10) To have recourse to a proper court of jurisdiction in any matters of controversy between itself and other district, local or general units or agencies of the denomination.

General

325. General Conference Membership. The General Conference shall be composed of an equal number of ordained ministers and lay members elected by the several districts, and each district superintendent and a lay delegate elected on the district superintendent's behalf; the presidents of the general educational institutions; such officers serving the General Church as the General Conference may establish by legislation, provided that it shall at the same time enact provisions to secure such further representation as shall be necessary to continue the principle of equal lay and ministerial membership; and of voting and/or nonvoting delegates from units under the General Department of World Missions according to a plan approved by the General Board of Administration.

327. General Conference Delegates.

(1) Each district, if not under discipline, shall be entitled to send one

ordained minister and one lay member as delegates to the General Conference and additional ministerial and lay delegates according to membership on a basis of representation to be fixed by the General Conference.

(2) The delegates shall be elected by ballot. The ministerial delegates must be ordained, and at the time of their election, as also at the time of General Conference, must be members of the district which elected them.

(3) The lay delegates shall be chosen from the members of the Church in full relation within the bounds of the district they represent, and at the time of the General Conference they must be members of a church within the bounds of the district which elected them.

330. General Conference Sessions.

(1) The General Conference shall meet quadrennially, except that in cases of emergency or other unusual circumstances the General Board of Administration shall have the power to shorten or lengthen the interval. Each session shall be held at a time of the year specified in *The Discipline* at a place determined by the General Board of Administration; in case of emergency the General Board of Administration shall have power to change the time.

(2) The president or other elected officer of the General Conference whenever two-thirds of the districts shall request it, or the General Board of Administration, by such vote as the General Conference shall determine, shall call an extra session of the General Conference, fixing the place thereof and the time of assembling later than the next session of each district conference.

332. General Conference Presidency. The various sittings of the General Conference shall be presided over by the general superintendents in such order as these may determine; but in case no general superintendent be present, the General Conference shall elect by ballot an ordained minister as president pro tem.

334. Other Officers. The General Conference shall elect by ballot a secretary and such other officers as it shall decide upon.

336. General Conference Quorum. At all times when the General Conference is in session, it shall require a majority of all the delegates elected by the districts to form a quorum to do business, but a smaller number may adjourn from time to time, until a quorum is obtained.

338. General Conference Voting. The ministers and lay members shall deliberate in the sessions of the General Conference as one body, but upon the final vote on any question except proposed amendments to the Constitution, on a call of one-fourth of the members, the house shall divide and ministers and lay members shall vote separately; and it shall require a majority vote of each branch to pass any question upon which the division has been called.

340. General Board of Administration.

(1) There shall be a General Board of Administration to carry out the will of the General Conference during the quadrennium. Such Board shall be composed of the general superintendent(s) and such other general officers as shall be designated by the General Conference together with an equal number of ordained ministers and lay members chosen by the General Conference to represent equitably the several administrative areas of the Church. The number of such representative members shall be determined by the action of the General Conference.

(2) The General Board of Administration is the chief governing body of the Church in the interim of the General Conferences, and as such is empowered to perfect all plans necessary to the performance of its duties; it shall constitute or create the basic board of control of each and all of the Wesleyan societies and institutions now incorporated or hereafter incorporated under the laws of any state of the United States or of any province of Canada or under any other jurisdiction where such is permitted by the laws of said jurisdiction. The General Board of Administration shall have jurisdiction over mission units under the General Department of World Missions. It shall have the authority to approve a discipline for each unit achieving recognition as a fully established general conference and for each mission unit. In so doing, it shall have the power to adapt the name of the Church within the restrictions of paragraph 205, and to adapt the provisions of *The Discipline* of the North American General Conference, including both constitutional and statutory law, provided that it does not contravene the Essentials of The Wesleyan Church. In authorizing the adaptation of the name for a unit achieving recognition as an established general conference, it shall first consult with the highest interim administrative bodies of the other established general conferences which are members of the International Conference of The Wesleyan Church.

350. The General Superintendency.

(1) The General Conference shall elect by ballot from among the ordained ministers one or more general superintendents, who shall be considered as the general spiritual and administrative leader(s) of the Church.

(2) They shall be elected for a four-year term of office to begin on the date determined by the General Conference.

(3) The General Superintendents shall preside over the sittings of the General Conference and over the district conferences assigned to their supervision. At the district conference over which a General Superintendent is presiding, the district superintendent shall serve by being seated at the presiding

officer's table to advise and assist the chair. In the event a General Superintendent is unable to be present at a district conference, a representative appointed by the General Superintendent shall serve as chair, and if neither the General Superintendent nor an appointed representative is present, it is the duty of the district superintendent to preside or to take responsibility for the same.

(4) Further duties of the General Superintendent(s) shall be defined by the General Conference.

Article 9. Powers and Restrictions of the General Conference

360. The General Conference shall have full power:

(1) To designate a criterion for parliamentary procedure for itself and for the other bodies of The Wesleyan Church.

(2) To elect such officers as it shall choose and to define their duties and responsibilities.

(3) To make and administer rules and regulations for The Wesleyan Church subject to the Constitution and the following restrictions:

(a) It shall not have power to revoke, alter or change our Articles of Religion, Elementary Principles or any Covenant Membership Commitment, or the conditions of membership, or to establish any standards of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standards of doctrine.

(b) It shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to destroy the principle of equal representation of ministers and lay members in the representative bodies of the Church; or to do away with the right of each General Conference to elect its own officers, or the maintenance of an itinerant ministry.

(c) It shall make no rule, except as provided in 365, that shall deny any church the right to receive, discontinue or expel its own members subject to their right of appeal; or to elect and remove its own officers; or that shall deny to the district conference the final disposition of all pastoral arrangements, except those districts in which the General Conference or the General Board has transferred the supervision to a general superintendent or other related general official, or that shall deny to preachers and churches initial negotiations concerning the same.

(d) It shall make no rule, except as provided in 365, that will discriminate against any member or minister on account of ancestry, color or sex.

(e) It shall make no rule that will interfere with the supervision of established districts (in distinction from mission districts) over the ministers and churches within their bounds, unless said district (or districts) is under discipline.

(f) It shall not have the power to deprive any member or minister of the right of trial by an impartial committee, or of the right of appeal.

Article 10. Coordination of Local, District and General Discipline

365. Paragraphs 315:1 and 360:3c (stating the local church's authority over local church membership); 315:3,5 and 360:3c (stating the local church's authority over local licentiates and church officers); 323:1 and 360:3c, e (stating the district's authority over ministers and churches); and 323:1 (stating the district's authority over ministers and churches and the General Church's authority over certain officials) are not intended to require multiple trials and appeals dealing with the same person with amenability on more than one level. Further, these paragraphs do not deal with the potential of a lay person committing offenses with effects beyond the local church or of a minister or local church committing offenses with effects beyond the district of which they are a part. Therefore, the General Conference shall enact legislation to deal properly with such cases.

Article 11. The Supreme Judiciary

370. There shall be a judicial council to be known as the Board of Review whose number of members, qualifications, terms of office, and method of election shall be determined by the General Conference.

375. The Board of Review shall have authority:

(1) To determine the constitutionality of any act of the General Conference upon appeal of the general superintendents, or one-fifth of the members of the General Conference.

(2) To hear and determine any appeal from the decisions of the general superintendents as to the constitutionality of an action by a district or upon a point of Church law.

(3) To hear and determine the legality of any action by any General Church board upon appeal of one-third the members thereof, or by request of the general superintendents.

(4) To settle questions in dispute between districts upon appeal by a two-thirds vote of a district that claims it has a grievance against another district.

(5) To determine the validity of any complaints against books used in the course of study or in our schools.

(6) To settle and determine the legality of issues arising between a district and the General Conference.

380. A decision of the Board of Review shall be final unless the General Conference votes to overrule the same by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting.

Article 12. Amendments to the Constitution

385. Upon the recommendation of a two-thirds vote of all members of the several district conferences who are present and vote on a proposed change of any matter involving the Constitution, the next ensuing General Conference may by a two-thirds vote ratify the same and it shall become constitutional law. Also, when the General Conference shall originate and recommend by a two-thirds vote any such change, as soon as all members of the several district conferences present and voting shall have concurred by a two-thirds aggregate vote, the same shall be declared constitutional law.