



**Free Methodist Church USA
39th General Conference
RESOLUTION**

INSTRUCTIONS:

Complete requested information, adding additional pages as necessary. Save and e-mail completed form to your Annual Conference office.

INTRODUCED BY: Rev. Derik Heumann

ANNUAL CONFERENCE NAME: Southern Michigan Conference

WRITTEN BY: Rev. Derik Heumann, Lead Pastor, Evergreen Church

General Conference Secretary - OFFICE USE ONLY

Resolution No. 306

Received Date 12/19/2022:

Resolution Committee Grade: _____

BOA Consideration: _____

GC Consideration: _____

RELATED TO PARAGRAPH 159, 3310, and the creation of 3312

Referred to Ministry Team Number:

SUBJECT OR TITLE: Vocational Singleness and Celibacy

Final Vote: Yes No

Resolution on Vocational Singleness & Celibacy

Rev. Derik Heumann; Lead Pastor, Evergreen Church

WHEREAS, The Free Methodist Church is committed to the honor and support the institutions of God which include marriage, family, state, and church (§159), and

WHEREAS, along with Christian marriage there is an equal and holy calling throughout Scripture to a vocation of singleness and celibacy as demonstrated in the lives of Jesus and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 7:7-8), and

WHEREAS, the vocation of singleness and celibacy point us to the eschatological reality whereby people will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Mt. 22:30), just as marriage points us to the eschatological reality of the marriage between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:6-9, 21:9), and

WHEREAS, all people experience temporary states of singleness and celibacy throughout their Christian Journey whereby growth into Christlike maturity occurs, and

WHEREAS, marriage and sexual intimacy have been idolized and propped up as the telos of Christian discipleship and,

WHEREAS, this idolatry has resulted in single people feeling unwelcome, uncomfortable, or even forced into romantic relationships as the majority of ministries focus exclusively on marriages and families, and

WHEREAS, the number of people choosing to remain single is increasing, whether they experience opposite sex or same-sex attraction, and

WHEREAS, for those who experience same-sex attraction in the Church, the faithful options to Scripture are taking vows for either a mixed-orientation marriage with the opposite sex or vows of singleness and celibacy, yet

WHEREAS, there is no mention of celibacy in the *Book of Discipline* and the only mention of singleness is in the context after being divorced (§3311 Par. E), and

WHEREAS, in the SCOD Report to the 2019 General Conference there was a review on *Celebrating and Supporting the Lifestyle and Gifts of Celibacy and Singleness* posted to the FM Conversations webpage, yet

WHEREAS, the *Book of Discipline* is our primary authoritative source for theology and praxis within the Church and not our position papers or SCOD articles.

Therefore BE IT RESOLVED,

The following additions **IN BOLD** be made to ¶159, ¶3310 and the creation of ¶3312 into the *Book of Discipline*

As Regards the Institutions of God

¶159 As a people, we honor and support the God-ordained institutions of family, state and church.

We commit ourselves to honor the sanctity of **vocational singleness**, marriage, and the family:

We commit ourselves to value and nurture children, guiding them to faith in Christ;

We commit ourselves to seek to be responsible citizens, and we pray for all who lead.

This we do, by God's grace and power.

¶3310 We commit ourselves to honor the sanctity of **vocational singleness**, marriage, and the family." (¶159)

¶3312 The Christian and Vocational Singleness

A. Principles Regarding Singleness

Vocational Singleness and celibacy is an equal and holy calling alongside marriage. Not all will be called to marriage and vocational singleness must be seen as the honorable gift that it is. Singleness and celibacy are also universal experiences which occur at multiple points throughout one's life.

The Old Testament features three categories of temporary celibacy which grows more expansively into the New Testament. The first is the Levitical priests before a sacrifice (Lev. 22:4; 1 Sam. 21:4). Second is when the fighting men were preparing for war (Josh. 3:5, 7:13; 2 Sam. 11:6-11). Third is when the entire nation of Israel was preparing to receive the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19:14-15). These times of temporary celibacy served as a symbol of self-restraint, consecration, purity, and singular devotion unto God.

The New Testament develops a more expansive vision for vocational singleness and celibacy. Jesus develops the Old Testament understanding of celibacy from a teaching on marriage and divorce whereby he gives an alternative and equally sacred calling for the people of God (Mt. 19:1-12). Moreover, Jesus teaches how vocational singleness and celibacy point us to the eschatological reality whereby people will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Mt. 22:30), just as marriage points us to the eschatological reality of the marriage between Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32; Rev. 19:6-9, 21:9).

Jesus himself, along with the Apostle Paul, demonstrate for us a singularly focused, undivided life of devotion and communion with God which is enabled through a

vocational calling to singleness and celibacy. This calling is a reminder to the rest of the Church that in the age to come we will all be single as marriage between a man and a woman will pass away to a greater union between Christ and his Church. Vocational singleness then is a temporal anticipation of the future resurrected life in the new creation. These siblings in Christ who remains single and celibate embody and experiences a fuller realization of the kingdom of God which is why the Apostle Paul says the one who does not marry does better than the one who does (1 Cor. 7:38).

B. Nurturing Healthy Friendships

One way to create a culture within the Free Methodist Church whereby both married couples and singles can thrive together is to rebuild a biblical vision for friendship. This vision is modeled through the non-sexual, yet intimate relationships between God and Abraham, David and Jonathan, Naomi and Ruth, Jesus and his 12 disciples, Paul and Timothy, etc.

In contemporary Western culture, friendships get pushed beneath biological familial relationships. We must reimagine the covenantal bonds of spiritual friendship as brothers and sisters in Christ, embracing the old saying, “the blood of the covenant [of Christ] is thicker than the water of the womb.” Singleness is not a sentence to solitude, isolation, and loneliness but another way to live out the Christian life within the body of Christ. Singles need community and spiritual family within the Church just as much, if not more than those called to marriage.

Friendships between married and single people of both genders need to be fostered and developed for the flourishing of individuals. We were made for union with God and one another, to be seen, known, and loved. As a Church we must reach out and care for one another for we belong to a bigger Kingdom family with a shared mission to love God, love people, and make disciples.

Furthermore, for sexual minorities who seek to faithfully live out the commands of Christ, this often will mean a life of singleness and celibacy. When the whole of the Church reclaims a biblical vision for spiritual friendship which comes through an equal recognition of the vocations of marriage and singleness we experience an incredible foretaste of the New Creation.

Annual Conference Resolutions Committee Worksheet:

Mission: To love God, love people and make disciples.

Vision: To bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches.

1. Does the resolution have a direct relationship to the vision and mission of the Free Methodist Church?

Yes

2. How will the proposed change help us accomplish our vision and mission?

By acknowledging and elevating those who are vocationally called to a life of celibacy, and therefore, to be valued in the mission of Jesus, this resolution brings both breadth and depth which is currently absent from our existing statement.

3. The Resolutions Committee rates this resolution as:

(A) Support - recommend adoption

Other Comments: