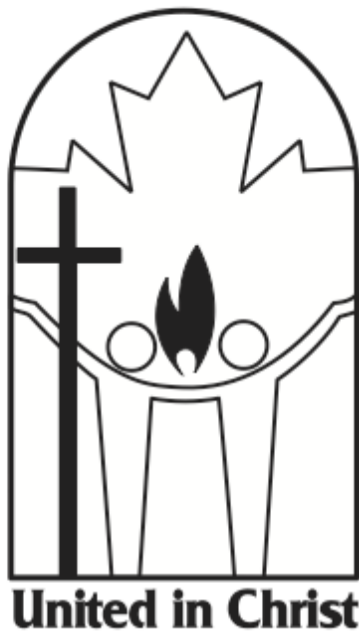


The United Brethren Church in Canada



Constitution, Confession of Faith, And Church Discipline

November 2023
Kitchener, Ontario

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Chapter 1

Origin and History of The United Brethren Church in Canada

The United Brethren Church in Canada is a part of the worldwide Church of the United Brethren in Christ. It is the first denomination in North America that was not transplanted from Europe. While there were European antecedents, the church originated in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia under the earnest evangelistic preaching of two men.

One of these leaders was Philip William Otterbein, who was born in Dillenberg, Germany, and was originally a minister of the German Reformed Church. When he came to America in 1752, he found formal religious practices the common standard among church people. His training and subsequent heart change prompted him to present a dynamic spiritual experience based on a faith relationship which permitted God to release His power through the indwelling Holy Spirit to a continuing transformation of the believer's life.

Martin Boehm was the other associate. He came from the Mennonite faith, and had been selected by lot to be a preacher among his people. He felt that he had no message to present until he had a personal experience of God's saving grace through faith. Then he was anxious to present the good news and became a flaming evangelist, proclaiming the salvation experience wherever he had the opportunity.

These two men, who had done extensive evangelistic preaching in interdenominational gatherings, met for the first time on Pentecost Sunday, 1767. A "great meeting" was held in the barn of Isaac Long near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. These great meetings were usually held over weekends in groves, barns, or wherever a large congregation could assemble. The congregation included preachers and laymen from various denominations, including the German Reformed, Lutheran, Moravian, Mennonite, Amish, and Dunker groups. The preacher for the afternoon service was Martin Boehm. On a high tide of spiritual peace and power at the close of the sermon, Otterbein, who was of greater stature than Boehm, threw his arms around the small man and exclaimed, "We are brethren," using the German language. From that greeting came the corporate name of the church, "United Brethren" to which was added "in Christ" at a later date.

These two leaders were joined by George A. Geeting from Maryland and other God-called leaders in attempting to evangelize the German-speaking churches located in the Pennsylvania, Virginia and Maryland colonies. There was no thought of organizing a separate fellowship, and no effort was made to do so until they were forced to it by circumstances. They cooperated in the appointment of great meetings where one or more of them would preach. Counseling and guidance were given to other preachers and laymen who joined the interdenominational venture. Itinerant preachers were selected to conduct services where possible.

There are records of organized small group meetings dating from 1774. Otterbein and other Reformed pastors were involved in class meetings that sought to awaken the Reformed churches spiritually. Opposition forced Otterbein to proceed along other lines. The church at Baltimore, Maryland, of which Otterbein was the pastor, became interested in an outreach and became the mother church for a number of societies. Articles for the operation of the Baltimore church program, adopted in 1785, made reference to societies under the superintendence of Rev. Otterbein. Preachers and exhorters were already in the field and looked to Otterbein for direction.

A formal conference was held in Baltimore in 1789 to gain a fuller knowledge of the field, to unify the work being done, and to plan for larger and more permanent results. Another conference was held in 1791 to advance the work started two years before. There are no records of additional conferences until 1800. From that point, sessions were held annually until 1815, when a General Conference was held. Since 1821, the general conferences have been held every four years.

The conference of 1800 adopted the name "Church of the United Brethren in Christ," and elected Otterbein and Boehm as bishops. They served in this capacity until their death. Christian Newcomer was

elected bishop for one year in 1813, and according to the church rules of 1814, he was again elected this time for a three-year period. The Discipline was formally accepted by the first General Conference in 1815, which provided for quadrennial sessions and the election of bishops. Since Newcomer had been elected in 1814 for three years, it was decided to hold the next conference in 1817. It was Newcomer who bridged the gap, from the loose evangelistic fellowship to a more organized movement. He was also the connecting link between the early leaders and the later itinerants.

People who had been associated with United Brethren in the east migrated west and settled in Ohio and Indiana. Societies were organized and services conducted by itinerant preachers. Christian Newcomer visited an area in Ohio in 1810 and held a meeting which was of the nature of an annual conference. Because of distance, the brethren in the west felt that annual meetings for all ministers were impossible; so the plan for a General Conference was adopted as reported above.

Services were conducted almost exclusively in the German language. The group inherited from the German culture the standard of opposition to secret societies. It was not until English-speaking people associated with the revival movement in Ohio that a pronouncement was necessary by the Miami Annual Conference of 1826. This moral reform standard became a part of the Constitution of 1841. The Discipline of the church in 1821 took an historic stand against slavery, which hindered the growth of the church in the South. This stand was also included in the Constitution of 1841.

A tentative constitution for the church was adopted by the General Conference of 1837, followed by a formal adoption of a constitution in 1841. General departments for the church were organized as needs arose. The work of publishing a church paper gave birth to the United Brethren Publishing House, established at Circleville, Ohio, in 1834. It was moved to Dayton, Ohio, in 1853. The first missionary activity was to send a caravan under the leadership of Rev. T.J. Conner and Dr. Jeremiah Kenoyer to the far west where they settled in Oregon. In 1853, the mission board was reorganized under the name of the Home, Frontier, and Foreign Missionary Society. A mission in Africa was established in 1855.

Various educational institutions were founded over the years, and in 1865, the Sunday School Association was organized. The Women's Missionary Association (Reorganized as the Women's Missionary Fellowship in 1989) was started in 1875.

After discussion for a number of general conferences over three problems--pro-rata representation, lay delegation in the General Conference and membership in secret societies--a division in the denomination occurred in the General Conference of 1889 which brought into existence two United Brethren fellowships. A new constitution and confession of faith accepting the above principles was adopted by the majority group, who termed themselves "liberals." They became known as the United Brethren in Christ, New Constitution, with headquarters in Dayton, Ohio. In the United States, this group united with the Evangelical Association in 1946 to form the Evangelical United Brethren Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church merged in the United States to form the United Methodist Church in 1968. In Canada the more "liberal" branch joined with the Congregationalists in 1906, and has been a part of the United Church of Canada since 1925.

The group that adhered to the Confession of Faith of 1815 and the Constitution of 1841 under the leadership of Bishop Milton Wright (father of Orville and Wilbur Wright of aviation fame) adopted the name "Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Old Constitution)." Church headquarters were moved from Dayton, Ohio, to Huntington, Indiana, in 1897. The local church buildings in Michigan and Oregon were awarded to the Old Constitution group, but properties in other states and in Ontario were lost, and all departments had to be reestablished. Educational activities centred in Hartsville College at Hartsville, Indiana, which was in sympathy with the Old Constitution fellowship.

The twentieth General Conference of 1889 reorganized the general departments--board of education, trustees for the United Brethren Publishing Establishment, and a board and secretary for the Domestic, Frontier, and Foreign Missionary Society. The Women's Missionary Association was reorganized during the quadrennium.

Huntington (then Central) College was chartered in 1897 and has operated at Huntington, Indiana, since that time. Huntington University currently has charitable status within Canada, and many Canadian students have graduated from the University over the years. A "School of Christian Ministries" was opened there during the 1970s, and the "Master of Arts in Christian Ministries" degree (or its equivalent) is required of all ministers as a prerequisite to their ordination.

The first known Sunday school to be organized was near Corydon, Indiana, by Rev. John Pfrimmer in 1820. Various departments of the General Church have been organized over the years to oversee Sunday Schools, youth ministries and publications. The *Christian Conservator*, which had been published since 1885, became the official publication of the United Brethren Publishing Establishment in 1889. The name was changed to *The United Brethren* in 1954. The newest denominational headquarters building was completed in Huntington, Indiana in May of 1976.

A reorganization plan adopted by the 1981 General Conference resulted in the consolidation of some general departments. The departments of Church Ministries and Stewardship ceased to exist, and these responsibilities, along with the denominational Archives, were placed under the newly-created Department of Church Services. With the relocation of the Archives at Huntington College in 1988, oversight of the Archives was transferred to the Board of Education.

Over the years, the Parent Board of Missions (Domestic, Frontier, and Foreign Missionary Society until 1957) and the Women's Missionary Association have had oversight of the mission fields. Until 1961, these boards worked separately, but in that year the first step was taken to begin working more closely together—a Joint Board of Missions account was established. Action was taken at the 1965 General Conference to merge the two mission groups into one department to be known as the Department of Missions.

Mission fields served at that time included: Sierra Leone, West Africa; Hong Kong; Jamaica; and Honduras. Laurel Mission in Kentucky was a home mission station until 1973, when administration was transferred to Central Conference. A new field was established in Nicaragua in 1969, and the department became involved in medical work in India in 1974. In 1986, the board began overseeing several congregations in Mexico which affiliated with the United Brethren church. The board also opened a new work in Macau in 1987. The 1989 General Conference added the Mexico Mission District and the Macau Mission District to the Overseas District.

Mexico and the Philippines were granted National Conference status by the General Conference of 2005, and Guatemala became a National Conference at the 2009 General Conference in La Ceiba, Honduras.

In 1889, the majority of the churches organized were rural. Through a program of church extension, the annual conferences have established churches in industrial and metropolitan areas. Consolidation of some of the smaller churches in relocated areas has proved advantageous.

Through referendums, the church constitution was amended in 1957 and 1961, resulting in lay representation in the General Conference; in 1973, resulting in a provision for local churches to hold title to their own property and for the use of a nomination slate in electing elders to the General Conference; and in 1977, changing the eligibility for election to General Conference from three years in the conference district to three years' standing as an elder and substituting the term "ministers" for "preachers."

The United Brethren Church in Canada

The United Brethren presence in Canada initially came from three sources. While some UB families had moved into Canada in the migrations of the early 1800s, and certainly many were won to the Lord in evangelistic outreaches when UB ministers came, the initial foundation was laid by a non-United Brethren man, John A. Cornell.

Rev. Cornell was born in New York in 1782, and was of the same family as Ezra Cornell, the founder of Cornell University at Ithaca, New York. He moved to what is now Sheffield, Ontario in 1800, and was converted "the old fashioned way, while reading the Bible on his own." There seem to have been no other preachers in his neighbourhood when he began sharing his testimony in 1812, and people drove for miles to hear him. He preached for forty-two years at a dozen preaching points from Waterloo to Rockton, Ontario. In 1854, at the age of 72, he began to consider retirement.

The family of Jacob Erb (a United Brethren minister and later Bishop) lived in nearby Preston, and Cornell decided to find out more about these United Brethren the next time Rev. Erb came for a visit.

As early as 1825 Jacob Erb had come to Canada with another minister, Christian Smith. Erb had a cousin who was a minister in Erie Co., New York, and an uncle, Christian Hersey, who ministered in Williamsville, N.Y. His grandfather and other relatives lived in Preston and Berlin, Ontario (now Cambridge and Kitchener).

In 1826 Christian Newcomer himself traveled to New York and picked up Christian Smith, and the two of them crossed into Canada at Fort Erie to preach. There were certainly some UBs here already, for Newcomer records that he “met many acquaintances whom I had not seen for many years.” A year later Erb and Smith “formed some societies, but they were neglected, and as a consequence, were disbanded, although some excellent members, gathered into the fold by Mr. Erb, remain unto this day.”

When John Cornell and Jacob Erb met in Preston in 1854, Erb explained the history, doctrine and government of the United Brethren Church favourably, and Cornell proposed a connection with the UB Church. Erb reported to the newly established “Home, Frontier and Foreign Mission Society” in July, and by October Rev. Israel Sloane of Ohio was in the pulpit of Cornell’s Beverly Chapel at Sheffield. The grandson of John Cornell writes that there was some concern at the church that this was only their second minister in 42 years, that he was an American, and that it all seemed far too Methodistic, but that old “Uncle Johnny Cornell” encouraged the people. They were especially reassured when Bishop J.J. Glossbrenner spoke there, and many later considered him “the best preacher they had ever heard.”

While Israel Sloane was following up on Cornell’s work in Waterloo and Oxford Counties, Charles E. Price came to the Niagara area in April, 1855 to follow up on Jacob Erb’s earlier work. He soon established a number of preaching points. Peter Flack of Sandusky Conference had come to Sheffield to help Sloane two months before. Rudolph Light transferred from the “Old Conference” in Pennsylvania to “Canada West” in April of 1856 and began a “German Mission” in Berlin (now Kitchener).

On April 19, 1856, Bishop Glossbrenner organized the four above-named ministers with membership in American conferences, along with four new Canadian ministers (John A. Cornell, his son William, and C. Moore of the Beverly Church, and Abram B. Sherk of the Niagara area), into the Canada Mission Conference. The minutes show 18 appointments, seven organized societies, and 152 members.

The membership doubled each of the next two years, and Israel Sloane moved on to more “church planting” in California. Jacob Erb, quite fittingly, was called up to replace him as the Presiding Elder (Conference Superintendent) in 1858 and 1859. The 1861 minutes talk of 50 appointments, 33 classes, and 636 members. The membership hit 1000 in 1863 and stayed around that figure for the next twenty years. The churches were still located in the Niagara area and along Lake Erie, and around Kitchener and through to Port Elgin.

The debates that finally brought a split to the UB church in the States were also divisive in Canada. The older and most respected ministers were generally conservative (called Radicals), while the younger men labeled themselves as Liberals. C.W. Backus and his two brothers joined the Conference in 1880, and their father in 1885. C.W. was the only conservative of his family, and in reference to the vote for Presiding Elder in 1888 and again in 1889 he says it was “a straight fight, conservative or liberal.” Of the 26 names on the conference roll on March 28, 1889, twelve stayed with the Radical United Brethren at the next Annual conference in March of 1890. The Liberal group, thinking to get the advantage after the division in May 1889, called their Ontario Conference of 1890 into session four months early; November 14, 1889. They expelled the “Radical” ministers and assigned their own men to all the fields, locking the doors on many churches. C.W. Backus writes that “my own father and two brothers almost disowned me. All three wrote me some most abusive letters.” The liberal United Brethren branch joined with the Congregationalists in 1906 and then with the United Church of Canada in 1925.

While the March 1889 conference (prior to the division) had 14 circuits and 1635 members, the 1890 Radical sessions of the Ontario Conference had just six circuits and 703 members. The ownership of the Port Elgin church building proved to be the test case regarding property in Ontario. When the Appeals court judge in Toronto reversed an earlier decision which had awarded ownership to the Radicals, all church properties were taken by the Liberals. Other than at the Garrison Road Church in Fort Erie, where the Radicals bought the building back in 1901, all other Radical congregations were forced to build new church buildings all over again.

In 1915 Lloyd Eby of Kitchener planted two churches in Toronto, and was very well received. He often commented that the Toronto people were very gracious in accepting a minister of German descent during the war years. Later, he went on to plant other UB churches in the U.S. and then became a Bishop in the denomination. Another church was started in Guelph, Ontario by Ray Zimmerman in 1976. Current and future Church planting endeavours will target growing urban areas and significant ethnic populations within Ontario.

There was an Alberta Mission District active between 1906 and 1917, headed by Rev. & Mrs. E.A. Olmstead of Michigan and James Cotton of Nebraska. Some UBs from Oregon and Ontario had moved there earlier, and Bishop Barkley organized them into a Conference in 1909. F.G. Matthews joined them from the Free Methodists, and two young men were soon granted local conference licenses. "Difficult times" rapidly erased all of the ministers from the scene except Matthews, as Cotton died of blood poisoning, two joined the Canadian Armed Forces for World War I, the Olmsteads returned to Michigan, and several families returned to Oregon. Bishop Alwood thought no one was left, so F.G. Matthews was the sole member of the 1917 Alberta Annual Conference, without even a Bishop. During the 1920s Rev. Matthews pastored the Bloem Avenue UB Church in Toronto and Paul Olmstead (son of E.A. Olmstead) pastored the UB Church in New Dundee, Ontario.

In 1991 it was discovered that the Charities Sections of the Canadian Income Tax Act had changed to the point that the United Brethren Church in Canada was by law a completely separate body from the Church of the United Brethren in Christ in the United States. It was necessary for the Canadian Church to adopt its own Constitution and administrative structure, and to elect its own leadership. Committees were set up to fashion the new Constitution and to negotiate a joint ministry agreement concerning international ministries in conjunction with the Church of the United Brethren in Christ in the United States. A Constitutional Convention was held, and at noon on June 7, 1992 Bishop C. Ray Miller officially proclaimed into existence the United Brethren Church in Canada.

In 2001 the delegates to the General Conference from the seven United Brethren National Conferences (including Canada) voted into existence "The Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International." It is a genuinely international entity by which international decisions can be made. Part of that new structure included the requirement that each National Conference elect its own top leader (bishop, superintendent, etc.), and the United Brethren Church in Canada elected its first national bishop in 2002.

The focus of the church has most recently been on church planting, with church plants started in Port Colborne, Port Elgin, Cambridge, Guelph and a Vietnamese Church in Guelph.

Certainly we must concur with the Prophet Samuel, "Thus far has the Lord helped us..." (1 Samuel 7:12) and with Paul when he said, "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13,14).

Chapter 2

Confession of Faith

1

The Triune God

In the name of God, we declare and confess before men that we believe in the only true God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; that these three are one--the Father in the Son, the Son in the Father, and the Holy Ghost equal in essence or being with both; that this triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, visible as well as invisible, and furthermore sustains, governs, protects, and supports the same.

2

Jesus Christ, the Son

We believe in Jesus Christ; that He is very God and man; that He became incarnate by the power of the Holy Ghost in the Virgin Mary and was born of her; that He is the Saviour and Mediator of the whole human race, if they with full faith in Him accept the grace proffered in Jesus; that this Jesus suffered and died on the cross for us, was buried, arose again on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God to intercede for us; and that He shall come again at the last day to judge the quick and the dead.

3

The Holy Spirit, Comforter and Guide

We believe in the Holy Ghost; that He is equal in being with the Father and the Son, and that He comforts the faithful, and guides them into all truth.

4

The Church

We believe in a holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

5

The Holy Bible and Salvation

We believe that the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God; that it contains the only true way of our salvation; that every true Christian is bound to acknowledge and receive it with the influence of the Spirit of God as the only rule and guide; and that without faith in Jesus Christ, true repentance, forgiveness of sins, and following after Christ, no one can be a true Christian.

6

The Salvation Message

We also believe that what is contained in the Holy Scriptures, to wit: the fall in Adam and redemption through Jesus Christ, shall be preached throughout the world.

7

The Christian Ordinances

We believe that the ordinances, viz. baptism and the remembrance of the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, are to be in use and practiced by all Christian societies; and that it is incumbent on all the children of God particularly to practice them; but the manner in which ought always to be left to the judgment and understanding of every individual. Also, the example of washing feet is left to the judgment of every one to practice or not; but it is not becoming of any of our preachers or members to traduce any of their brethren whose judgment and understanding in these respects is different from their own, either in public or in private. Whosoever shall make himself guilty in this respect shall be considered a traducer of his brethren, and shall be answerable for the same.

Chapter 3

Constitution

We, the members of The United Brethren Church in Canada, in the name of God do, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, as well as to produce and secure a uniform mode of action in faith and practice, also to define the powers and the business of local churches and the National Conference, and to participate in joint international ventures as recognized by this church, ordain the following articles of Constitution of The United Brethren Church in Canada:

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Article I Name and Address

- .1 The official name of the organization shall be The United Brethren Church in Canada.
- .2 The official address of the organization shall be 501 Whitelaw Road, Guelph, Ontario N1K 1E7

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Article II Purposes and Charitable Objects

- .1 To advance, preach, teach and serve according to The United Brethren Church in Canada's Confession of Faith, Constitution, Christian tenets, discipline, doctrines, observances and historical culture associated with The United Brethren Church in Canada.
- .2 To establish, maintain and support places of worship with services conducted in accordance with the Confession of Faith and the tenets, discipline, doctrines, observances and culture of The United Brethren Church in Canada.
- .3 To establish, support and maintain missions and/or train missionaries to serve others in local communities, nationally and abroad, demonstrate social concern and provide support through various actions in keeping with the faith, tenets, values and practices of The United Brethren Church in Canada.
- .4 To establish, support, contribute to, provide and/or maintain faith based education and training opportunities for children, youth and adults in faith based schools, colleges, universities, and other faith based environments of instruction and training in keeping with the beliefs, tenets and historical culture of The United Brethren Church in Canada.

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Article III Personnel

.1 Voting and Non-Voting Denominational Members (Members and Adherents)

Voting Denominational Members are those persons who have been baptized and subsequently applied for and received membership status in a Local Church within The United Brethren Church in Canada. They regularly attend worship and church sponsored activities, contribute financially and actively support their local church.

Only Voting Denominational Members are allowed to participate in any referendum or hold official elected/appointed positions within in The United Brethren Church in Canada

Adherents are persons who attend regularly, contribute financially and/or donate time and service to a local church. He/she has not met voting membership requirements and may consider ones-self as an adherent of The United Brethren Church in Canada.

.2 Canadian National Conference Members

A voting Canadian National Conference Member is an official representative to the National Conference as defined in The United Brethren Church in Canada Discipline or Bylaw. An Official Member is recognized at National Conference meetings by the official roll call. Official Members may include recognized local church members who are delegates, lay leaders, active and retired pastors, chaplains, missionaries, as well as elected or appointed National Conference leaders and officials.

.3 Meetings

The Canadian National Conference meets annually for its “National Conference” at a time and place determined by schedule that is ratified annually. The Bishop and the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) may hold a “Mid-Year Conference” or other National Conference meetings at any time as determined by need. The ELT meets as scheduled

.4 Appointments and Meetings

The United Brethren Church in Canada will make appointments and schedule its major meetings for the following fiscal year at its National Conference (annual general meeting). Appointments and scheduling between National Conferences are the responsibility of the E.L.T.

.5 Rights of Members (Local Church and National Church)

All rights of members are defined according to the current officially adopted version of The United Brethren Church in Canada Discipline.

.6 Directors and Officers

Include Bishop, Secretary, Treasurer and Executive Leadership Team.

.7 Voting

Acceptable methods of voting shall be reviewed and determined by Bylaw from time to time as

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Article IV Duties

.1 Governance and Business Operations

The Canadian National Conference is the governing body of The United Brethren Church in Canada. The membership, structure and purpose of the Canadian National Conference are defined by The United Brethren Church in Canada Discipline or Bylaw. The United Brethren Church in Canada Discipline or Bylaw may only be amended by action of Canadian National Conference.

Business and operations of the Canadian National Conference is delegated to the Executive Leadership Team (ELT). The ELT is made up of the Bishop and Executive Team Leaders appointed by the Bishop and ratified by the Canadian National Conference. The ELT conducts business on behalf of the Conference in accordance with the Discipline, Bylaw and policies of the Canadian National Conference. ELT acts as trustees on behalf of the Conference as required. The ELT and its members report annually to Conference.

.2 Bylaws

The Canadian National Conference allows Conference voting members to vote on any bylaw (Discipline item). A bylaw goes into effect when sanctioned by a majority of the votes cast at this meeting. Repealing a bylaw also requires majority support for the action.

.3 Borrowing, Selling and Other Corporate Powers

No Restrictions. Borrowing, investing, selling, issuance of bonds and all other corporate powers and limitations are determined by bylaw.

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Article V Property and Dissolution

.1 Assets:

All church property of member local churches is owned by The United Brethren Church in Canada and registered in trust to the appointed trustees of the local executive or to the board of each local church that acts as trustee. Each local church is responsible for maintenance, upkeep and debt/mortgage reduction of each property. Any property mortgage, sale, purchase or major renovation requires prior approval of The United Brethren Church in Canada.

Other assets include furniture, fixtures, equipment, and all remaining monetary assets held by the local church after all outstanding debts and obligations are resolved.

.2 Dissolution of a Local Church

Upon dissolution, all remaining assets of a local church are transferred to The United Brethren Church in Canada.

.3 Dissolution of The United Brethren Church in Canada

Upon dissolution of The United Brethren Church in Canada all assets are distributed among the current active local churches. Liquid assets are divided among the remaining local member churches in accordance with the portion of the total official membership on each church roll at the time of dissolution. Each local church assumes ownership of the church property that it occupies, holds in trust, uses and maintains.

16

Article VI Not For Profit

- .1** This organization shall be carried on without the purpose of gain for its members, and any profit or other gains to the organization shall be used in promoting its objects.

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Article VII Amendments

- .1** There shall be no alteration of the foregoing Constitution unless by two-thirds vote of the National Conference, provided the alteration is also ratified by a two-thirds majority of the ballots cast in a ratification by the adult members of The United Brethren Church in Canada. The Confession of Faith may be changed in the same manner, but only with the permission of the General Conference of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, International.

Chapter 4

Joining the Church

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Adult Membership

1. Age

Persons eighteen years of age and older may become adult members.

2. Qualifications

The following must be determined to be true before persons can be accepted into membership:

- a. They acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word, and that it alone reveals how to receive eternal life.
- b. They have experienced the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.
- c. They are determined to grow in Christ and live in obedience to Christ.
- d. They have been baptized, or are willing to be baptized as soon as is convenient.
- e. They are willing to be governed by the church Discipline.
- f. They are willing to give of their time, abilities, and resources to support the various church interests, according to their ability.

3. Voting Rights

Adult members are eligible to vote in all local elections, on referendum proposals, and in elections of delegates to the National Conference and International General Conference.

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Youth Membership

1. Age

Persons age twelve through eighteen may join as youth members.

2. Qualifications

The following must be determined to be true before persons can be accepted into membership:

- a. They acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word, and that it alone reveals how to receive eternal life.
- b. They have experienced the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.
- c. They are determined to grow as a Christian and live in obedience to Christ.
- d. They have been baptized, or are willing to be baptized as soon as is convenient.

3. Voting Rights

Youth members have voice in local church matters but are ineligible to vote.

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Watch-care Membership

1. Age

Children under the age of twelve may be nurtured in the church in its watch-care membership, with the goal of leading them toward a commitment to Christ.

2. Qualifications

Before children are accepted into watch-care membership, the following must be determined to be true:

- a. They acknowledge that the Bible is God's Word, and that it alone reveals how a person can receive eternal life.
- b. They are willing to learn what the Bible says about being a Christian.
- c. They will try to meet the requirements for church membership.

3. Parental Consent

Children shall not be admitted as watch-care members unless consent has been given by the parents or guardians.

4. Reporting

Because watch-care membership does not require a profession of faith, such members shall not be reported as members in full standing. Instead, they will be reported as members in watch-care.

5. Voting Rights

Watch-care members are not eligible to vote in church elections.

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Receiving Members

Each church may determine the procedure for accepting qualified persons into membership.

It is important that new members and the congregation bond. Thus, the church should find a satisfactory way to communicate to its entire body the favourable answers to the following questions.

1. Receiving Adult Members

As a church, we believe in the deity of Jesus Christ, the regeneration of the soul, a wholly surrendered and Spirit-filled life, and growth in grace and knowledge of the truth. We believe that there must be perseverance in Christian living and faithfulness in Christian witness to promote harmony in our relationship with the Saviour.

Our beliefs are further indicated by the questions which follow:

(The minister shall then ask the prospective member the following questions:)

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

If so, answer, "I do."

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that He accepts you as His child?

If so, answer, "I so believe."

c. Are you determined by the grace of God to follow Christ, renouncing the world and all ungodliness, seeking to live a life of holiness and devotion to God and His cause?

If so, answer, "I am."

d. Are you willing to be governed by our church Discipline, and are you willing to be placed under the authority of the local church?

If so, answer, "I am."

e. Are you willing to give of your time, talent, and means to the support of the various interests of this church according to your ability?

If so, answer, "I am."

f. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized at your earliest convenience? (Those who have not received believer's baptism will be encouraged to do so.)

2. Receiving Youth Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that therein only is revealed the knowledge of the way of salvation?

If so, answer, "I do."

b. Have you asked God to forgive you your sins, and do you now believe that He accepts you as His child?

If so, answer, "I so believe."

c. Do you promise to attend the services of the church and to read the Bible and pray, so that you may become more and more like Jesus?

If so, answer, "I promise."

d. Have you received water baptism? If not, are you willing to be baptized?

3. Receiving Watch-care Members

a. Do you believe the Bible to be God's Book through which He speaks to us, and that in the Bible is shown the only way we can be saved from sin?

If so, answer, "I do."

b. Are you willing to be taught the Bible and what it means to be a Christian, and will you faithfully try to meet the requirements for membership in this church?

If so, answer, "I will."

405

Transfer of Members

The Spiritual Care Commission may approve a letter of transfer to another United Brethren church. Upon completion of the transfer, the person's name shall be removed from the roll.

406

Withdrawal of Members

When members desire to withdraw from the church, they may be given a letter of withdrawal by the local church leadership (possibly a Spiritual Care Commission). When appropriate, this letter may be accompanied by a statement of recommendation to a specific church, regardless of denomination.

407

Revising the Roll

1. The local board may remove members from the roll with a two-thirds vote in the following situations:
 - a. The church leadership (Spiritual Care Team) has not known the person's location for the past three years, and the local board determines that sufficient attempts have been made to locate the person.
 - b. A member's lifestyle, conduct, or doctrine violate the commitment agreed to in becoming a member. This action can be taken only if attempts to restore, correct, or reconcile the person do not succeed.
2. Youth—Upon reaching age 18, youth may be received into adult membership by meeting the qualifications for adult membership. No youth shall remain on the youth roll after age 19. The youth roll should be corrected annually.
3. Watch-care—At the age of twelve, children who have made a commitment to Christ and show a continued interest in the church may become youth members by complying with the requirements for youth church membership. Watch-care members who persistently refuse to seek Christ or to receive religious instruction may be dropped from the roll.

Chapter 5

Duties of Members

The church recognizes the validity of a collective Christian conscience. For that reason, the church has taken stands on various issues in an attempt to provide guidelines for Christian conduct. They are stated in paragraphs 113-115.

The following duties of members and standards of conduct are drawn up for the better regulation of our church and we believe they are founded on the Word of God and incumbent on all who are members to observe, both ministers and laypersons (Hebrews 13:7,17). Anyone who violates or habitually neglects these rules shall be referred to the local church's membership committee for appropriate attempts to instruct, reconcile, and reform. If all attempts for reformation fail, persons in violation of these duties and standards may be removed from the roll through the due process of notification and revision.

111

Christian Disciplines

Every member shall attend to the ordinances of the church—namely, baptism (Matthew 28:19, Acts 2:38) and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29); shall be diligent in prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and the study of God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15). Further, it is the responsibility of all members of the church to serve with time and talent, and to contribute to the financial interests of the church in proportion to their ability, as God has prospered them.

112

Family Piety

Heads of families should observe daily family worship including grace at the table, Bible reading and prayers, and encourage other worship opportunities. They should set a good example in all Christian virtues.

113

Love to Others

All persons should walk as in the presence of God and accustom themselves to a close communion with God in all of their employments (Colossians 2:6; Psalm 1:1,2; Romans 8:1-6). They should never speak evil of their fellow beings (Ephesians 4:25, 29, 31; Titus 3:2; James 3:5-10), but practice love toward others (Mark 12:31), rendering service to others (Luke 10:28-37), Galatians 5:13), and endeavoring to be a follower of Christ in deed (Colossians 3:17, 23), in order that a spirit of unity may exist (Ephesians 4:3).

114

Lord's Day Observance

Following the example of the early disciples and New Testament church, everyone should make provision for exercises of devotion on Sunday, the Lord's Day, and inasmuch as possible shall attend all services for hearing read the Word of God, singing spiritual songs and hymns, Christian fellowship, and giving of tithes and offerings (John 20:19, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Hebrews 10:25). Members are admonished to neither buy nor sell needlessly on the Lord's Day.

115

An Effective Witness

Since every Christian is called to be a witness to Christ (Acts 8:26-39) in the midst of ungodly people and circumstances (Acts 1:8), and since it is largely through the testimony of believers that others are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ, we urge every member of the church to assume the obligation of seeking the lost and winning them to Christ.

In order that they may be prepared to witness for Christ by life as well as by word, we admonish our members of all ages to maintain a position of nonconformity to the world (Romans 12:2) and to lay aside the evil things of this life (James 1:21); and further, to guard carefully their Christian testimony—

1. By engaging only in such business and social activity that is consistent with the Christian life (Colossians 3:17, 23).
2. By observing modesty in dress, in speech, and in all other personal conduct as becomes a child of God (1 John 2:15-17; 1 Peter 3:3, 4).
3. By renouncing the world and all ungodliness, seeking to lead a life of holiness and devotion to God and His cause (2 Corinthians 7:1; 2 Timothy 2:19, 21).

116

Necessity of Union

Let us be deeply sensible, from what we have known, of the evil of a division in principle, spirit or practice and of the dreadful consequences to ourselves and others. If we are united, what can stand before us? If we are divided, we shall injure ourselves, the work of God, and the souls of our people. To secure a closer union among ourselves, let us:

- .1 Be deeply convinced of the absolute necessity of union (Ephesians 4:3).
- .2 Pray earnestly for and speak truly and freely to each other (James 5:16).
- .3 When we meet, never part without prayer, if prayer is at all practicable.
- .4 Take care not to despise each other's gifts (Romans 12:3-8).
- .5 Never speak lightly of each other (James 4:11).
- .6 Defend each other's character in everything, so far as is consistent with truth (Ephesians 4:31).
- .7 Labour in honour, each preferring another before himself (Philippians 2:3).
- .8 Seriously examine the cause, evils, and cures of heart and church divisions (Galatians 5:26).
- .9 Observe and follow the principles for reconciliation or excommunication laid down by Jesus in Matthew 5:21-26 and 18:15-17 whenever an offense exists between members of the congregation.

117

Receiving the Pastor

All local churches shall receive the senior pastor appointed by the Pastoral Ministry Leadership Team of the National Conference (Colossians 4:10; Philippians 2:29; Hebrews 13:7, 17). (See 334.11)

118

Obedience to Government

It is the duty of every member to lead a quiet, peaceable, and godly life among mankind, as it becomes a Christian to live in peace and to be subject to the higher or ruling powers, as the Word of God requires (Romans 13:1-7; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17).

119

Legal Testimony

We believe that the mode of testifying to the truth, when required to do so in a legal form, by way of affirmation is on us solemnly, conscientiously and fully binding before God to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth (Matthew 5:33-37).

120

Going to Law

Any member refusing, in case of debt or dispute, to refer the matter to arbitration, or who shall enter into a lawsuit with another member before these measures are taken, may be expelled, except in criminal and other cases which require and justify a process at law (1 Corinthians 6:1-8; Proverbs 25:8-10; Matthew 5:25-26).

Lodges and Other Heretical Groups

The Bible teaches that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, and that Christians are neither to participate in things done in secret (Ephesians 5:10-15) nor to show favouritism (James 2:1). Therefore, United Brethren members must not be members of any other church, group, or organization which teaches a way of salvation incompatible with the United Brethren Confession of Faith, such as a Masonic lodge or the Order of Oddfellows. Members who do, and who refuse to sever the relationship after having been confronted by the pastor and at least one other board member, shall be regarded as having withdrawn their membership from the church (John 14:6, 2 Corinthians 6:14,15). *“Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?” “Therefore come out from them, and be separate, says the Lord, Touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you. I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-15, 17-18).

Chapter 6

Family Standards

131

Family: Definition

We recognize that a family can take four forms:

1. A married couple (male husband and female wife) who may or may not have children.
2. A single parent household, in which a male or female parent is charged with the responsibility of raising and nurturing his/her natural or adopted children.
3. A widow or widower who is left without children at home.
4. A single person who has chosen to live on his/her own as a separate household.

132

Singleness

Scripture affirms singleness. Some people experience singleness as a calling. Others experience singleness as a result of the circumstances of life. From Scripture, we understand the following:

1. Neither marriage nor sexual intimacy is essential for wholeness. All persons find wholeness in Christ alone (Galatians 2:20).
2. Jesus and Paul, both single adults, spoke of the advantages of singleness in order to serve God without distraction (Matthew 19:12, I Corinthians 7:32ff).
3. It is not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18, Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, Psalm 68:6a, Hebrews 10:25). Therefore, the Church must function as the family of God, providing space for all people, especially singles, to find community and to pursue their calling (Matthew 12:48-50, Ephesians 2:19-22).

133

Marriage

1. Marriage was instituted by God and is regulated by Him. For this reason, the Church must resist all attempts to alter marriage from what the Bible has revealed about it.
2. God ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and Himself in a religious or civil ceremony.
3. The purpose of marriage is companionship between a man and a woman (Genesis 2:18) in a permanent relationship which ends when one of the partners dies.
4. The marriage relationship reflects the relationship between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:22ff).
5. It is out of the marriage relationship that God intended for children to be produced and nurtured.
6. A Christian should marry only another Christian (I Corinthians 7:39, II Corinthians 6:14). Their relationship is to express God's original intention for marriage: the wife's role alongside her husband as an equal.
7. United Brethren licensed ministers classified with the authority to conduct weddings shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one genetic, biological man and one genetic, biological woman.
8. Facilities and property of churches within The United Brethren Church in Canada shall only host weddings between one genetic, biological man and one genetic, biological woman.

134

Cohabitation

1. We believe that simulating the marriage relationship by living together without the covenantal commitments associated with marriage circumvents God's plan for family life (Genesis 2:18).
2. Even when the couple's intention is to remain sexually pure, cohabitation increases the temptation for sexual sin and fails to avoid the appearance of evil (1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

3. Members must avoid cohabitation prior to marriage.

135

Illicit Sexual Relations

The Bible firmly establishes sex within the framework of marriage. This design must not be:

1. Substituted (e.g. pornography).
2. Duplicated (e.g. adultery, polygamy).
3. Pre-empted (e.g. premarital sex, cohabitation).
4. Altered (e.g. same-sex relations).
5. Coerced (e.g. sexual assault, abuse).
6. Exploited (e.g. pedophilia, sex trafficking).
7. Corrupted (e.g. non-human sexual relations).

All are clearly contrary to the expressed will of God concerning the union of man and woman together in this most sacred and binding of human relationships (I Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:20-32; Deuteronomy 22:23-27)

136

Sex and Gender Distinctions

1. Created in the Image of God

a. All human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The imbuement of the image of God within a human person is not dependent upon that person's sex; God created male and female in His image.

b. Because of the fall, God's perfect created order for humans has become disordered in various ways (Genesis 3, Romans 6:12-18). This affects every aspect of human experience: sexual, physical, psychological, social, and spiritual.

c. Even in the midst of sexual or biological disorder, all humans bear the image of their Creator.

d. Each person should strive to glorify God as one made in His image and according to His design. Such a commitment will lead to eternal rewards, but may also involve temporary suffering.

2. Intersex Persons

a. Individuals whose biological sex is unclear (because at birth their genetic sex does not match their physical sex-related characteristics or they possess physical characteristics of both male and female) are known as intersex persons.

b. It is being created in God's image that defines humanity. This reaches far beyond sexuality to encompass every aspect of the human person. Neither maleness nor femaleness is equivalent to the image of God.

c. The Church should affirm all persons equally as image bearers of God. This does not mean abandoning the idea of sexual distinctiveness among humans, but recognizes that even in the midst of sexual or biological disorder, all humans bear the image of their Creator.

d. The Church should support and encourage intersex persons as co-image bearers to live in holiness and to follow Christ in a way that brings honour and glory to God.

3. Transgender Persons

a. Persons who struggle with gender identity experience within themselves the suffering that comes when God's good work of creating the human mind and body is disordered as the result of the Fall.

b. A person may not experience perfect reconciliation between mind and body in this life. However, God may work through an individual's gender identity struggle for His glory (II Corinthians 12:7-9).

c. Those who struggle with gender identity suffer along with all believers while waiting for our glorified bodies (I Corinthians 15:42-44). The Church needs to come alongside them and collectively strive to be oriented toward the triune God, in whose image each person is created.

d. The Church must guard against any attempt to demean or trivialize individual suffering related to struggle with gender identity.

e. The Church cannot celebrate the choice to alter one's sex or gender, because this harms individual identity.

f. God created humankind male and female. A distinction between the sexes needs to be honoured and maintained, even as specific gendered behaviour and characteristics may vary from one culture to another.

g. Gender dysphoria is experienced when a person struggles with gender identity. It may exist at different levels of severity in different persons. Those suffering from gender dysphoria need to confide in their brothers and sisters in Christ and seek competent Christian counseling when appropriate. Persons addressing their own gender dysphoria need to understand the importance of God's order and design for human sexuality and exercise discretion and care when deciding how to live faithfully in the midst of a very real inner struggle.

h. Believers who may not experience this particular hardship need to take care to manifest the fruit of the Spirit when interacting with persons who do, both within and outside of the Church, encouraging them to find their ultimate identity in Christ.

i. The Church must compassionately minister to those struggling with sexual identity issues by becoming a place of understanding, healing, and hope. The Church must affirm the value of individuals who are struggling while pointing them to Christ, the healer of all brokenness.

137

The Local Congregation and Human Sexuality

1. All persons, irrespective of physicality, gender, or sexual orientation, are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. Honouring all persons as created human beings who are deeply loved by God.
 - b. Extending hospitality to all persons who are drawn to its public gatherings.
2. All persons have been wounded in their sexuality and are in need of the full redemption of Christ. God desires that human beings live in loving, committed, life-giving, healing relationships in all aspects of life. Therefore, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. The redemption and wholeness of all persons.
 - b. The healing of relationships.
3. All persons can be tempted to use other people for their own sexual desires, contrary to the loving will of God. Therefore, out of honor for God and each other, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. Encouraging the creation and maintenance of healthy, biblical sexual boundaries.
 - b. Recognizing that celibacy can be a more radical, sacrificial expression of love than sexual intimacy.
4. All persons need opportunity for safety and authenticity. As redeemed persons, we are called to humbly address sin and seek reconciliation and redemption when it occurs, whether in our lives or in the lives of others. Therefore, a congregation should focus on:
 - a. Protecting each other from harm, particularly when we are in each other's care.
 - b. Healing those who have been abused.
 - c. Redeeming perpetrators of abuse.

138

Family Life

Married couples (husband and wife) should cultivate a relationship of mutual love and respect (Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25, 33). They should remember their unique oneness (Mark 10:6-9), their equality (Genesis 1:27, Galatians 3:28), the complementary nature of their union (Genesis 2:18), and their responsibility to help bring each other to full Christian maturity in all areas of life (Ephesians 5:22-28).

A husband should follow the Bible's admonition to love his wife in the way Jesus loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25). Such Christian love, as described by the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), demands that the husband respond openly and cooperatively with his wife (Ephesians 5:21, 28-31).

As the head of the Christian home (1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:25), the husband and father should exercise his delegated authority without being authoritarian, and should fulfill his responsibility under Christ by providing for the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of each family member (1 Timothy 5:8). In the case of a single parent, he/she will be considered the “head of the house” along with the responsibilities that accompany this position.

The wife should follow the Bible’s admonition to be submissive, though not subservient, to the headship of her husband (Ephesians 5:22-24) by cooperating with his efforts to provide the home with authority and stability under Christ.

Together, the husband and wife should exercise proper discipline tempered with love (Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews 12:5-11, Colossians 3:21). They should also create and maintain a Christian atmosphere within the home (Ephesians 6:4, 2 Timothy 3:14- 15). Such an atmosphere should consist of the following:

- .1 Communication with the heavenly Father through spontaneous prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17), especially at mealtimes, whether in seeking His aid or giving thanks.
- .2 Daily, directed worship as a way for the family to express love and trust in God, and to sense His presence in the home (Matthew 18:20).
- .3 Spontaneous and directed teaching of Bible truths at every opportunity (Deuteronomy 6:20-21a).
- .4 Christian symbols and works of art in the home (Deuteronomy 6:6, 9).
- .5 A consistent example in Christian living (1 Corinthians 11:1).
- .6 Children and young people should obey their parents in all things in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:20). This was the example of Jesus (Luke 2:51).
- .7 Christian parents are encouraged to present their children to the Lord before the church body for the blessing (or dedication) of children and the affirmation of Christian parenting.

139 Abuse

We believe that abuse in any form, either inside or outside of the family, destroys the dignity and value God has placed in people.

140 Divorce

1. Divorce was never in God’s original plan, and is really one of the consequences of the fall of man. According to Jesus in Mark 10:5, the Mosaic directive concerning divorce came only as a concession to man’s hardheartedness.
2. In the New Testament, Jesus indicated that divorce may be granted on the basis of fornication (Matthew 5:32, 19:9).
 - a. Fornication includes all forms of sexual sin, such as adultery, prostitution, sodomy, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism.
 - b. Continual and deliberate sexual sin by a marriage partner is a justifiable cause for divorce.
3. The Apostle Paul cites another exception which applies to the marriage of a believer and an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12- 15).
 - a. If an unbelieving partner chooses to dissolve the marriage, the believing partner may yield to the divorce.
 - b. This same exception also applies when a believer renounces faith in Christ or assumes the position of an unbeliever and chooses to dissolve the marriage. Such persons are considered unbelievers because they place themselves outside the divine directive.
4. Even though the Bible admonishes Christian spouses not to divorce each other (1 Corinthians 7:10- 11b), there may be situations in which a spouse decides a divorce is essential, e.g., when the spouse or children suffer severe physical or emotional abuse.
 - a. The Bible seems to suggest that the spouse may make the decision to divorce, but must then remain unmarried or be reconciled to the former partner (1 Corinthians 7:11).
 - b. God does not advocate divorce in such situations, but when it does occur, He regulates it.
 - c. The principle remains—no divorce—but the Bible recognizes that the ideal is not always observed because of hardheartedness.

- d. In all cases, however, every effort should be made to bring about repentance, restoration and reconciliation. Bringing about reconciliation which leads to harmony and compatibility is always preferable to divorce.

141

Remarriage

We believe the Christian has biblical grounds for remarriage in the following situations:

1. When the spouse dies. In this case, the partner may remarry a believer (1 Corinthians 7:39).
2. When the marriage and divorce occurred prior to salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:1-7).
3. When the spouse is guilty of marital unfaithfulness and will not repent and live faithfully with the partner, and the offended partner is innocent of such conduct. Marital unfaithfulness includes adultery, prostitution, sodomy, incest, bestiality, homosexuality, and lesbianism.
4. When an unbelieving partner has willfully deserted a believing partner (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).
5. When the spouse has assumed the position of an unbeliever by choosing to divorce the believing partner. In this case, the believing partner may remarry another believer (1 Corinthians 7:12-15).

142

The Beginning of Life

1. In human procreation, God invites us to participate in His good work of creation in a unique and significant way. Human life is God's gift, and it is sacred at every stage from its end to its earliest beginning.
2. The Church bears living testimony to the sacredness of life by:
 - a. Promoting the flourishing of every person's life through works of justice, mercy, and evangelism.
 - b. Standing with and for those whose lives are vulnerable. Never is a human life more vulnerable than during its beginning and near its end.
3. God values each human being in their full humanity at every stage of their life. Therefore, we are committed to promote human flourishing at every life stage and to protect the lives of all human persons through their entire life span beginning at the moment of conception. Scripture portrays this in at least four ways.
 - a. Every human is made a bodied person in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27).
 - b. God provides for each person throughout the course of their life, regardless of accomplishments or faith, sustaining life by sending rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (Matthew 5:45).
 - c. God loves each and every human person, shown most clearly in God's saving mission through the Incarnation of God the Son: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son" (John 3:16).
 - d. God's salvation entails the restoration and renewal of the whole person, shown through the full, authentic humanity of Jesus the Messiah (Hebrews 2:5-18).
4. God's people bear testimony to the sacredness of life by caring for pregnant women as well as the unborn. No other human relation shares the characteristics of a pregnant woman and the human life she carries: one life biologically dependent upon another human life, and neither life more intrinsically valuable than the other.
 - a. Scripture states the embryo's separate and intrinsic value as a unique creation of God. Psalm 139:13 – "You...knit me together in my mother's womb... I am fearfully and wonderfully made." Jeremiah 1:5 – "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart." Moreover, science affirms that the embryo, having its own uniquely identifiable characteristics, including DNA, is a developing human separate from its mother.
5. The physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of a pregnant woman are significant in the best of circumstances. These needs are even more acute in circumstances when pregnancy is the result of rape or incest, or when continuing a pregnancy places a woman's life at risk. During such unimaginably difficult times, the Church envisions and strives to embody the love and tenderness of God for the weak and the vulnerable just as it does when promoting and protecting the lives of the unborn.

143

Family Planning

1. Children are a gift from the Lord. We recognize the family as an environment of unique nurture and support in which all members together pursue their calling in Christ Jesus.
2. Children may be received into the family in a variety of ways, including natural conception, assisted reproduction, adoption, and foster care. These aspects of reproduction and growing families are some of the deepest and most meaningful aspects of our lives. In this light, they can also be the most painful, complex, and difficult.
3. Believers may for valid reasons determine not to have children, or to place a child for adoption. For those who choose to have children, if there is a desire to time pregnancies or to space children a certain number of years apart, that is a decision parents are free to make, and through prayer and discernment they may wisely plan for the addition of any children God blesses them with. (Proverbs 16:3; James 1:5)

144

Adoption and Foster Care

1. As believers we have the privilege of being adopted into the family of God.
2. In scripture we see the heart of God for the fatherless and are told to fight and care for the orphan (Psalm 146:9). The church is encouraged to do this, in parenting or support roles. Valuable avenues to family growth may include embryo, private, international and domestic adoption, and foster care.
3. Often there is some aspect of loss and tragedy included in situations of adoption and foster care, and the responsibility to provide care can be challenging and difficult. The church is encouraged to be equipped, and offer emotional and financial support as they are able, in providing for the needs of these children and parents (Isaiah 1:17). In doing so, Jesus' value of children is lived out, and is considered the same as caring for Jesus himself (Matthew 18:1-6).

145

Infertility

1. We recognize the pain and grief that accompanies infertility and empathize with couples affected by it.
2. Couples affected by infertility may request the elders gather together to lay hands on them to pray for healing (James 5:14).
3. Infertile couples are advised to seek the wisdom of the Holy Spirit (James 1:5) and supportive church community in moving forward with faith in considering methods to welcome children into their family, including assisted reproductive technology, adoption, and foster care.

146

Assisted Reproduction

1. Assisted reproduction includes the use of medical procedures or technology to aid human procreation.
2. The use of assisted reproductive technology may take a variety of forms, which will necessarily change as new procedures develop. Therefore, rather than addressing the nature of specific procedures, the church advises its members to prayerfully consider the following guidelines when deciding whether to make use of assisted reproductive technology:
 - a. Its use should be motivated by love.
 - b. Its use should bring glory to God.
 - c. Its use should protect and preserve life from the moment of conception.
 - d. Its use should promote justice toward and prevent the exploitation of each person involved in the process.
 - e. Its use should protect the integrity of the family.

147

Abortion

1. We believe that human life is sacred from the moment of conception until natural death. Consequently, abortion cannot be recognized morally and scripturally as a means of birth control.
2. We are aware that any consideration of abortion occurs in a place of crisis and significant consequence, and that forgiveness is available in Christ.
3. The church recognizes that abortion may be medically necessary in rare and tragic circumstances, taking into account the life of the mother and baby.
4. The church needs to demonstrate sensitivity and care toward those who have had abortions in the past in order to facilitate an atmosphere of grace and healing.

148

Human Reproduction and the Responsibility of the Church

1. Scripture is clear that God's church is responsible to bring Jesus' love, light, hope, and healing to people who are hurting, struggling, and in need while also maintaining deeply biblical convictions about human life and reproduction. These two convictions are not in conflict. They are to be simultaneously embraced and held in creative tension in order for the Church to be a faithful witness to the world.
2. We understand that a deep range of emotions pertain to reproductive issues. The Church's commitment is to:
 - a. Be a generous support in bearing the burdens of those in trial or crisis (Gal. 6:2; Rom 12:15).
 - b. Show extravagant welcome (Romans 12:13; 15:7), companionship (Romans 12:10), and sacrifice (Hebrews 13:16) to those in need.
3. While maintaining our compassion and support for people during difficult and often confusing reproductive crises, we must always maintain our commitment to the authority of Scripture (Isaiah 40:8, 2 Timothy 3:16). At times this may necessitate embracing convictions that contrast with prevailing cultural and social norms and rejecting certain reproductive technologies or procedures.
4. It is our high view of God's gift of life (Psalm 139:13-16), the sacredness of the human body (Genesis 1:26-27), and the beauty of God's design of human reproduction (Genesis 1:28, 2:23-24) that compels us to maintain and celebrate our biblical convictions about human reproduction as we care for and value the least of these.

144

Euthanasia

1. Because of the commandment, "Thou shalt not murder" (Exodus 20:13, Deuteronomy 5:17), the church cannot condone the taking of life for the purposes of escaping the suffering and difficulties caused by sickness, disease, injury, old age, infirmity, or for any other such reasons.
2. Because of the dignity of human life and the Christian's privilege of dying and going to be with Christ, the Christian or the Christian's family members, in the event that the person lacks the capacity to do so, should have the privilege of rejecting artificial means for the sustaining of life when the maintenance of life is dependent upon these artificial means.

Chapter 7

Social Standards

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Human Relations

The United Brethren Church respects human personality, which is inherent in every race, nation and creed. We believe in the Bible's instruction that there is no basis whatsoever for a belief in the superiority or inferiority of any people. Therefore, the church protests against any action or practice that produces discrimination based upon racial, national, creedal or social differences, since "*from one man he (God) made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth*" (Acts 17:26). The church admonishes all members to commit their attitudes, actions and influences in faithful witness to this truth and to oppose every influence, whether it be economic, social, moral or religious which would debase, impair, or bring into bondage those whom God has created in His own likeness.

The church believes that there must be equal rights and justice for all. All members should register their concern and opposition to any form of prejudice that would prevent any individual or ethnic group from free and full participation in the privileges and benefits of our society. We advocate through due process of law and within the framework of the democratic system the elimination of poverty; the abolishment of unemployment; a fair wage in every vocation; fair practices between employer and employees; adequate provisions for the aged and for those who are unemployable; the opportunity for decent housing for all; and a proper concern for total human need in our contemporary world.

The church acknowledges that mankind's basic need is for the saving grace of Jesus Christ and is therefore committed to the telling of the Good News of the gospel to all persons. But the church also recognizes the commandment to love all men in the name of Christ. Therefore, the church admonishes all members to strive for a society characterized by unselfish compassion and service to all. (*Philippians 2:3; Matthew 25:31-41; Luke 6:31; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 Peter 3:8-12*)

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Peace/Bearing Arms in War

We positively record our disapproval of engaging in voluntary, national, aggressive warfare; yet we recognize the rightful authority of the civil government and hold it responsible for the preservation and defense of our national compact against treason or invasion by any belligerent force.

We affirm the right of our members to serve and bear arms in the national armed forces. We also support the right of the honest conscientious objector to refuse to bear arms in military service, and to instead choose humanitarian service to his/her nation.

We wish to go on record as a church as being much in favor of national and international peace; and we urge our leaders to always pursue peace.

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Drug Abuse

Christians are directed in the Bible to be temperate in all things. This implies discipline in all emotions, passions, and appetites. It means the proper use of wholesome food and drink. (*Proverbs 20:1; Isaiah 5:22; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 5:11, 6:10, 6:19; and 1 Thessalonians 5:22*)

1. Alcoholic Beverages

The use of alcoholic beverages is often personally injurious to its users and is often at the core of significant family and social problems. The use of alcoholic beverages is often found to be contrary to the best interest of personal and social morality, economy, and welfare. Holy Scripture teaches us to exercise good stewardship of our bodies. Scripture also teaches us to avoid abusive indulgence of alcoholic beverages (Proverbs 20:1; 23:29-35).

The United Brethren Church in Canada believes, and experience demonstrates, that the abuse of alcoholic beverages is harmful to our physical bodies and is a detriment to the best stewardship and witness of our lives. Therefore, we urge all of our members to avoid using alcoholic beverages. We also urge our leaders to teach as well as counsel about the hazards of abusing alcoholic beverages and that deliverance is possible through the ministry of the Spirit.

2. Tobacco & Cannabis

The Bible reveals that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and instructs believers to live pure lives. The church believes and experience demonstrates that the use of tobacco is injurious to the physical body and is a detriment to the best stewardship and witness of our lives. Therefore, all members are urged to abstain from recreational cannabis and from using tobacco in any form.

We urge our leaders to teach about the hazards of tobacco use and that deliverance is available through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

3. Narcotic, Hallucinogenic, Mind-Altering, and Mood-Altering Drugs

The scientific, medical, law enforcement, and welfare segments of our society have given witness to the corrupting and devastating results of narcotic, hallucinogenic, mind-altering, and mood-altering drugs. Members of the church are to exercise abstinence from using these drugs in any form or for any purpose, except under the most strict prescription and observation of skilled members of the medical profession.

154 Gambling

The Bible teaches that the love of money is destructive and that productive work fits into God's plan for life. Gambling, on the other hand, stimulates the desire to get something for nothing and it seeks material gain by a fatalistic faith in chance. The church has observed that organized and commercial gambling is a threat to business, breeds crime and poverty, and is destructive to the best interests of good government.

Because gambling is a menace to personal character, social morality, and biblical stewardship, we therefore urge all members to abstain from participating in gambling in any form, including lotteries, and to raise a proper protest against the spread of illegal and legalized gambling. (*Proverbs 28:19-20; I Timothy 6:7-11; Luke 16:10-13; I Corinthians 4:2*)

155 Pornography

1. Pornography is a sin that is deeply damaging to individuals, relationships, and society. All members are to abstain from using pornography.

2. We oppose the use of pornography for these reasons:

a. Sex is a unique and wonderful gift from God that is to be experienced, expressed, and enjoyed within the context of a lifelong marriage covenant (Genesis 2:22-24, Matthew 19:4-6).

b. Sexual nakedness was never meant to be observed except within the context of marriage (Genesis 9:22-23, Exodus 28:42, Leviticus 18:6-18, Habakkuk 2:15).

c. Pornography removes sex from its proper context by creating arousal apart from marriage.

d. Pornography fuels the sin of lust (Matthew 5:27-28, Job 31:1).

e. Pornography substitutes self-gratification for the relational intimacy and self-giving inherent in the sexual act.

f. Pornography is destructive to marriages and families.

g. Pornography contributes to such systemic social ills as the abuse and objectification of people made in the image of God.

h. Pornography funds and encourages the sex trade industry.

3. Those struggling with pornography or an addiction to sexually explicit materials should seek help from God through the counsel of Christian therapists as well as the support and accountability of fellow followers of Christ (James 5:16).

4. Church leaders are urged to teach on the dangers of pornography and to create avenues to help Christians who are struggling with pornography (Galatians 6:1-3).

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The Occult

The Holy Scriptures teach us to seek supernatural guidance from God only. Therefore, all members are to abstain from any participation in the occult. This includes all types of fortune-telling, astrology, communication with spirits and witchcraft. (*Deuteronomy 18:9-22; Galatians 5:19-21; Acts 19:13-20*)

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Decision-Making Foundations

.1 Personal Convictions

The Bible is the primary source of correct guidance, and the final authority by which Christians should determine proper conduct regarding moral issues. The Bible's specific prohibitions must always be obeyed. In areas where Scripture does not give explicit directions or absolutes, the following guidelines will assist members in making wise lifestyle decisions based on biblical principles.

- a. Pray for guidance (James 1:5).
- b. Study all biblical passages related to the issue (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- c. Review the laws of the land regarding the issue (Romans 13:1-7). The Bible instructs believers to obey the laws of the land in which they live, but not to use those laws to justify disobeying biblical principles (Hebrews 13:17).
- d. Seek the counsel of mature Christians (Proverbs 15:22, 27:17).
- e. Carefully weigh and consider current scientific and medical evidence regarding the issue (Proverbs 18:15).
- f. Consider any harmful effect your action may have on others (Luke 17:1-2).
- g. Consider any harmful effect on your testimony (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 10:32-33).
- h. If in doubt, act according to your conscience and continue developing your convictions (Romans 14:23).

.2 Corporate Convictions

The United Brethren church recognizes its responsibility to help members apply biblical commands and principles to contemporary issues.

The Bible gives clear instruction on many issues, but on other issues, it leaves room for Christians of equal spiritual commitment and insight to disagree. The church's historic position has been to stand firm on biblical absolutes, allow freedom where the Bible allows freedom, and maintain unity when disagreements arise.