

A brief
Introduction to the
Free Church
of **England**

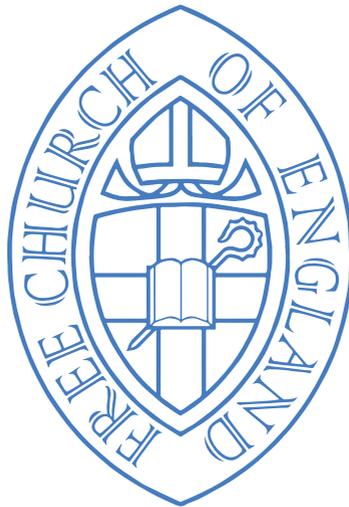


**A Christian Church
of Anglican Heritage**

www.fcofe.org.uk



A Brief Introduction
to the
Free Church
of
England





GOD IS GOOD!

*Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things.
Let this be known in all the earth.
(Isaiah 42:11)*

Every Christian community has its own story. This booklet tells you how and why the Free Church of England exists as a unique Church of Anglican heritage, and what our vision is in these troubled times. Further information can be found in the endnotes and suggestions for further reading at the end of this booklet.

Despite having congregations which were founded as long ago as 1844, the Free Church of England is not yet well known: it is as though God has been quietly holding us in reserve until his perfect time. We dare to believe that time may have now arrived. Today we are planting churches and standing shoulder to shoulder with other orthodox Christians around the world. We humbly believe that we have been preserved 'for such a time as this' (Esther 4:14).

The history is important (not least because it is a record of God's faithfulness), but more important is the fact that we are a family of Christian communities, made up of people who know that they have been saved by the atoning death of Jesus; congregations where people are nurtured in sound doctrine and holiness, and who have a wonderful message to proclaim to the world. As Psalm 78:4 says: 'We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.' That is the purpose of this booklet – to tell how God has dealt with us and our predecessors over many centuries. There have been times of disobedience and judgement, but throughout it all God has remained faithful and there have been times of great blessing, too.

Inspired and encouraged by the past, our focus nevertheless is on the present - to obey the call joyfully to proclaim the Gospel in our own generation.

We warmly invite you to join us.

LET'S BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING

What is a Christian? Quite simply - someone who believes in Jesus Christ, not just as a character in history, but as someone to whom they owe a lifelong debt of gratitude.

A Christian has discovered that Jesus is God's answer to the problems of sin, pain and alienation in all our lives, and, through repentance, faith and baptism, has accepted God's offer of forgiveness, unconditional love and eternal life in Jesus. The age-old problem of human sin is dealt with.

The first part of the Bible – the Old Testament – shows us God patiently preparing over the centuries for the work that Jesus would do. That work was not simply to teach beautiful things (which he did) but to lay down his life on behalf of us all. On the Cross Jesus bore all the consequences of our rebellions (large and small) against God in our place. His resurrection is the proof that his sacrifice was accepted and that the offer of new life that will last beyond death is now freely available. We can't put ourselves right with God, but he has done everything necessary to restore us to a loving – and everlasting - relationship with him.

All this was witnessed by the original group of men and women who were Jesus' disciples. They heard his teaching; they watched him heal the sick; they saw him die; they met him alive again (to their amazement); and they were the first to experience the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit.

At the heart of this original band of disciples were twelve men, whom Jesus called Apostles. A little later he called another man into this group – Paul of Tarsus. Together they are the authoritative witnesses and interpreters of what the events of Jesus' life, death and resurrection mean. Their writings constitute what we call the New Testament, the second part of the Bible.

A LIVING CONTINUITY

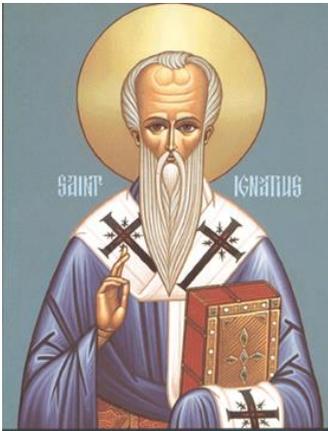
The Apostles didn't just write about the Good News of Jesus – they lived it and *proclaimed* it. As people responded and put their faith in Jesus as their Saviour, congregations of believers – soon called Christians¹ - sprang up in all directions from Jerusalem.

From her earliest days the Free Church of England has understood herself to stand in uninterrupted continuity with these Churches founded by the Apostles. The first official history of the Free Church of England, published in 1873, traced our origins back beyond the mission of St Augustine of Canterbury to convert the English in 597 AD to those first communities.² The early centuries of the undivided Church are our inspiration and guide; for example, the model held up for our bishops to emulate is 'the true, simple Episcopacy of the Second Century, the period immediately succeeding the Apostles of our Lord - the episcopacy of Polycarp

‘TEACH THE CHURCH OF THE ENGLISH ...
WHATEVER YOU HAVE BEEN ABLE TO LEARN
WITH PROFIT FROM THE VARIOUS CHURCHES’

Pope Gregory to Archbishop Augustine of Canterbury, ca. 600AD

and Ignatius'.³ At this time the bishop was the father and focus of unity of each local expression of the Universal Church. His essential ministry was to pastor his flock and guard, teach and pass on the faith and office that he had received from the Apostles. In this he was assisted by a council of presbyters and a team of deacons. The wider unity of the Church was maintained by interaction between the bishops.



*Bishop Ignatius of Antioch
(martyred ca. 110)*

This basic structure and all the great events of the first centuries of the Church's life – the rapid expansion of the Gospel into Asia, Africa and Europe; the Ecumenical Councils and the articulating from Scripture of the Creeds and foundational doctrines of the

faith; the courage of the martyrs; the rich diversity of the Fathers – all these are part of the legacy of members of the Free Church of England.

At the heart of this legacy is a commitment to the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. Jesus treated the books of the Old Testament as the Word of God 'which cannot be broken' (John 10:35) and the Church has always afforded the same status to the books that make up the New Testament. The books of the Bible are written by men, but are inspired by God, and have the power and authority to make us 'wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2 Timothy 3:15). It is therefore to the Bible that the Church is meant to turn to discover truth wherever error threatens. This is true on a personal basis for Christians seeking guidance in their daily lives. It is also true on a collective basis: whenever false teaching has crept into parts of the worldwide Church it has had to be challenged and corrected in the light of God's revelation in Scripture. Throughout history there have been numerous episodes when this has taken place. The presenting issue has varied in each case – for example, the nature of Christ (how he is both God and Man) in the 4th and 5th centuries; the basis of justification (how we are put right with God) in the 16th century in Western Europe; issues concerning human sexuality in the 21st century – but in each case faithful Christians have returned to God's Word and the Church's historic and consensual reading of it, and contended for revealed truth until the error is defeated.

The Free Church of England, then, shares this commitment to the supremacy of Scripture as God's Word written, together with the story of the Universal Church of East and West – and in particular the history of the Church in England - up until the 19th century, when, as will be explained below, it became necessary to organise our own congregations.

Within this story, the events of the 16th and 17th centuries are of particular significance as one of those periods when practices and beliefs that had built up over a few centuries in the Church in Western Europe needed challenging and correction in the light of the Word of God. The events of that time have given the Free Church of England and other Churches of Anglican heritage some of their continuing characteristics.

THE NEED FOR REFORM

By the end of the Middle Ages, the Church in England, though flourishing, had in a number of ways departed from the faith and practice of earlier times. Respected figures such as Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) attacked the corruptions of the clergy in general and of the Papacy in particular. The pastoral office of bishop was widely neglected – those who should have been serving the flock were often enjoying immense worldly privileges and lording it over them. The principal act of Christian worship, the Eucharist or Lord's Supper, had become the Mass.⁴ The strength of the Mass was that it kept Jesus' sacrifice as the focus of Christian worship: as St Paul had written, 'As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11). However, by the 1500s it had come to be seen as in some sense a *repetition* of Jesus' sacrifice.

This error was reinforced by the adoption of a particular way of defining precisely the manner in which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus. The connection was, of course, made by Jesus himself, but the Bible doesn't define how it comes about. Since Apostolic days the Church Fathers had used a range of imagery to explain the connection and were content to accept it as a mystery beyond human comprehension. In 1215, however, a Council held in Rome under Pope Innocent III had used the term 'transubstantiation' to define the manner of the change.⁵ This became the official teaching of the Roman Church and to deny it was to be guilty of heresy, punishable by death. Thus it was popularly believed that the priest turned bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ and then offered them to God as a repetition of the sacrifice of Calvary. Official teaching concerning the sacrament was more subtle than this, but little was done to correct mistaken understandings.⁶ On the contrary, people were encouraged to pay for Masses to be said to shorten the length of time their loved ones had to endure the pains of Purgatory – the place where it was believed the dead were 'purged' with fire to prepare them for heaven.⁷



'IF GOD SPARE MY LIFE, ERE MANY YEARS
I WILL CAUSE A BOY WHO DRIVES A
PLOUGH TO KNOW MORE OF THE
SCRIPTURES THAN YOU DO'
William Tyndale, Bible translator, ca.1494-1536

This 'power' gave immense status to the priesthood, who were further set apart by their celibate condition and the fact that in Western Europe all liturgical worship (including

the reading of the Bible) was in Latin and so was not understood by most worshippers. The laity usually only received Communion once a year – at Easter – and even then only partook of the sacramental Bread – the Wine being restricted to the clergy. There was also a widespread belief that people had to *earn* their salvation through good works and religious practices (fasting, pilgrimages, etc.).

Also, for centuries there had been debates about the authority of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope: what was his precise authority and did it apply only to the Latin-using Churches of Western Europe or did it extend to the Churches of the East as well? What role should Councils of bishops play? By the mid-16th century the Popes were claiming universal jurisdiction, including over the newly discovered lands in Asia and the Americas. There were many corruptions and it was widely accepted that the situation needed to be addressed.

Eventually, a powerful wave of cleansing and renewal – the Reformation – swept over much of the Western Church in the 16th century. For the most part its aim was not to create a new Church, but to remove recent abuses and return to the biblical faith and practice of the Fathers and Councils of the Undivided Church, and hence restore true Catholicity. It has been said that for the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556), and all the Reformers, 'Protestantism ... was precisely a quest for Catholicism - that is, for solidarity with the catholic church that Jesus founded ... a conscious attempt to restore to the Church of the West the catholicity that it had so long lost'.⁸

The process of re-forming the Church was inevitably affected by the various local situations; Scandinavia was very different from Switzerland, for example.

The Achievements of the Reformation in England

In England the renewal process was caught up in the policies of the monarchs of the Tudor and Stuart dynasties and the 17th century Civil Wars. The details are well known and need not be repeated here. By 1662, when things had stabilised, the main achievements were:

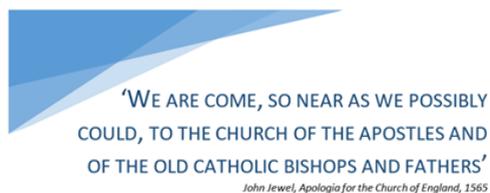
- the historic Church in England (and the other nations of the British Isles) was now independent of Rome, though her worship and life were now under the ultimate control of Parliament.⁹
- the Bible was freely available in English and was a central element of most acts of worship. A lectionary required it to be read through at least once each year. A recovery of biblical preaching was well under way. Reading the Bible at home was also a common part of popular devotion. Scripture was clearly affirmed as the sole source of all truths necessary for salvation.
- the core doctrine rediscovered at the Reformation – that we are justified (put right with God) not on the basis of our good works, but solely through the merits of Jesus' death for us, accepted by faith alone, was enshrined in the official teaching of the Church.¹⁰
- the multiplicity of Latin service books had been replaced by a single Book of Common Prayer in English (Welsh, Gaelic and Manx translations followed). This book, largely the work of Archbishop Cranmer, with some later modifications, re-worked the ancient liturgies and expressed in beautiful English the great doctrines of Scripture in a way that facilitated understanding and participation by all the worshippers. Services, led by robed clergy, were God-centred, and intended to enable people to worship him 'in the beauty of holiness'.¹¹ The liturgical calendar was retained so that worshippers were annually taken through the key points of the Gospel story.



Archbishop Thomas Cranmer distributing copies of the first authorised English Bible in 1539. (From the title page of the Great Bible.)

- With regard to the Eucharist, it was made clear that there is no repetition of Christ's sacrifice and that, while faithful communicants truly feed on Christ, the elements are not physically turned into his Body and Blood.¹²
- the ancient Orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon had been retained and continued, but re-focussed to give prominence to pastoral care and preaching, as well as sacramental ministrations. Clergy were allowed to marry.
- the historic Creeds – in particular the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds – were retained and used regularly in worship. Alongside them was adopted a series of short statements or 'Articles' (Thirty-nine in all) which did not claim to be a totally comprehensive statement of Christian doctrine, but provided a definitive statement on a range of issues that were particularly controverted in the 16th century. These in turn drew on the Scriptures, the consensus of the Church Fathers and some Continental Reformers.

Most clergy and people believed that their national Church represented a 'golden mean' – not in the sense of a compromise, but avoiding the errors of Rome on the one side and the excesses of radical Protestantism on the other. It has been said of the English Reformation Settlement that it 'could claim to embody the essence of the New Testament and mainstream patristic Christianity'.¹³ The whole synthesis gradually came to be known by the adjective 'Anglican', from the Latin *Ecclesia Anglicana*, meaning 'English Church' or 'Church of England'.¹⁴ Englishmen were proud of their Church and its worship and took it with them wherever around the globe they settled or colonised. From the 18th century onwards countless Anglican men and women sacrificed their lives as missionaries to take the Gospel to those who had not heard it. From their efforts has grown the worldwide Anglican family of Churches with an estimated membership today of around 70 million.¹⁵



THE 18th AND 19th CENTURIES

Although Anglican identity was formally settled by 1662, the life of the Church did not stand still. In the 18th and 19th centuries the Church of England was swept by two powerful movements – the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement - both of which contributed to the emergence of the Free Church of England as a distinct Christian community.

The Evangelical Revival



George Whitefield 1714-1771

This was a powerful spiritual renewal which had a profound influence on Christian life in both the British Isles and the North American colonies.

In England the renewal is usually traced back to the conversion and ordination of a young deacon called George Whitefield in 1735, followed by the conversion of presbyters Charles and John Wesley three years later. At its heart was the profound conviction that the faithful preaching of the Word of God – and particularly of the

doctrine of justification by faith – could lead to a life-changing experience of forgiveness and acceptance by Christ.



'YOU BLAME ME FOR WEEPING, BUT HOW CAN I HELP IT WHEN YOU WILL NOT WEEP FOR YOURSELVES, THOUGH YOUR IMMORTAL SOULS ARE ON THE VERGE OF DESTRUCTION?'

George Whitefield, 1714-1770

Whitefield, the Wesleys and their associates (most of whom were clergy of the Church of England) taught no doctrines other than those of the Anglican formularies (the Prayer Book, Thirty-Nine Articles, Ordinal and Homilies). Their teaching was welcomed in some parishes, but was the subject of much criticism elsewhere and increasingly their followers were forced out of the Church of England and had to organise themselves into various networks or 'Connexions'. One of these

had the support of an aristocratic widow, Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, who appointed George Whitefield as one of her chaplains. By the 1820s the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion was outside the Church of England but retained a distinct Anglican-style identity and was governed by an annual Ministers' Conference. This body was to play an important part in the Free Church of England story.



*Selina,
Countess of Huntingdon
1707-1791*

The Oxford Movement

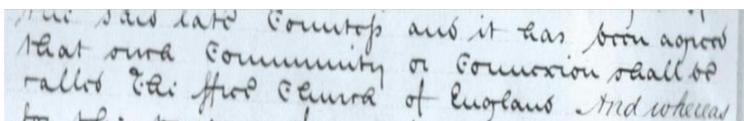
Like the Evangelical Revival, the second movement that contributed to the formation of the Free Church of England also began in Oxford, almost a hundred years later, in the 1830s. Initially this was a protest against Government interference in the life of the Church (occasioned by Parliament's suppression of a number of bishoprics in Ireland). Tracts were written (hence the name 'Tractarian' used of the movement and its leaders) which asserted the Church's inherent spiritual independence – a stance with which the Free Church of England has no problem. The Tractarians and their followers, however, increasingly looked to the pre-Reformation situation as the model of a spiritually independent Church – to the days before King Henry VIII had required the 'Submission of the Clergy' to his authority.¹⁶ In parallel with this came a desire to re-introduce the sense of 'the beauty of holiness' into a Church where worship was not always reverent. Increasingly this took the form of adopting worship practices and doctrines that had been removed at the Reformation.¹⁷ There was widespread anxiety and a fear that the National Church was going to lose many of the precious insights of the Reformation, resulting in the clear message of the Gospel being obscured. The issue gripped the popular imagination in a way that is difficult to imagine in our secular age.

Throughout much of the 19th century campaigns were fought and societies organised by both sides. There were attempts to pass legislation in Parliament to stem the rising tide of 'Anglo-Catholicism', as the Tractarian movement was increasingly known, but with little effect. Many felt that the only solution was

to withdraw from the Established Church and organise a 'free' Church of England, where the historic truths of Scripture could more easily be taught and defended.

The formation of the original Free Church of England

Finally, in 1844, congregations began to leave the Established Church. The movement spread and the first few congregations were soon joined by many more around the country. In the early years ministers were often provided by the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion to help ensure a continuing Anglican character. As numbers grew, it was clear that a more organised structure was needed, so in 1863 the annual Conference of the Countess' Connexion adopted a constitution for the new congregations under the name of 'the Free Church of England' and registered it in the High Court of Chancery.



Part of the original 1863 Deed Poll registering the Free Church of England

The organisation was to be episcopal, with the Church divided into Dioceses, each under the oversight of a bishop. What had hitherto been a loose association of independent congregations was now a formally constituted Church of Anglican identity.¹⁸ Although in a sense a new beginning, the continuity is essential; it has consistently been the claim of the Free Church of England that it is 'not a new Church, it [is] the old Church, purified and free.'¹⁹

The Reformed Episcopal Church

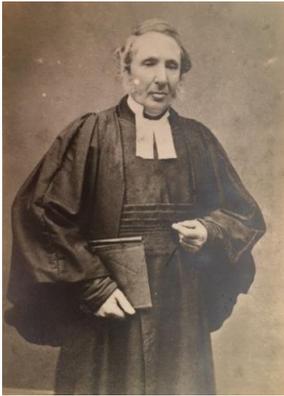
Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the Tractarian controversy was also causing tensions in the Anglican Churches in Canada and the USA. In North America, however, there was another element, not so prominent in the UK – a longing for Christian unity. Many Christians were distressed at the way in which Churches of all traditions tended to divide repeatedly, producing hundreds of competing denominations. Conferences and writers addressed the need to find a way for divided Christians to come together in a Church in which 'Catholic' and 'Evangelical' would be seen not as opposites but as

complementary aspects of the Christian faith.²⁰ Things came to a head when, in 1873, Bishop George Cummins, of the (Anglican) Diocese of Kentucky, was severely criticised in the press for giving expression to the longing for Christian unity by taking part in a service of Holy Communion with Presbyterians and other non-Episcopalians (an event which would widely be seen as unexceptional today). As a result of the criticism he received, Cummins felt the time had come to withdraw from the Protestant Episcopal Church and bring into existence a Christian community with an unbroken historical connection to the earliest Christian era through the Church of England, but in which Christians of different traditions could unite. In December 1873 he and a number of presbyters and laity organised themselves into the Reformed Episcopal Church, (REC) which today is a thriving community, with Dioceses and parishes across the United States and Canada and in several other parts of the world.



George Cummins 1822-1876, first Presiding Bishop of the Reformed Episcopal Church

An alliance was quickly established between the Free Church of England and the newly-formed Reformed Episcopal Church. The Free Church of England at this stage still lacked bishops in apostolic succession, so the Reformed Episcopal Church graciously agreed to provide for this need. Before his death in 1876 Cummins had ordained two bishops who in turn ordained others as the movement spread. In 1876 one of these, Bishop Edward Cridge from Canada, was authorised by the Reformed Episcopal Church to travel to England to consecrate Benjamin Price and John Sugden of the Free Church of England as bishops in the Church of God. It is from them that the present Free Church of England episcopate descends, with bishops from other Churches having taken part as co-consecrators from time to time.²¹ Soon after, a branch of the Reformed Episcopal Church was established in the United Kingdom. After living in parallel for many years, the Free Church of England and the UK branch of the Reformed Episcopal Church united in 1927.



*Benjamin Price, 1805-1896,
first Bishop Primus of the FCE*

One of the texts agreed at the union was a Declaration of Principles, originally drafted in 1873. This Declaration, which reaffirms the Anglican formularies, derives from three principal sources: (1) a core statement of beliefs proposed in the 1850s as 'Evangelical Catholicism' - a basis around which episcopal and non-episcopal Christians could unite; (2) shorthand statements drafted in 1873 intended to safeguard a Scriptural view of Church, Ministry and Sacraments; and (3) clauses expressing the need for doctrinal vigilance and a desire to reach out to other

Christians.²² The style may reflect 19th century polemics, but the intention is to create a welcoming community, where forgiveness and new life can be found, grounded on Scripture and the doctrines of grace, and preserving the essential faith and characteristics of the Early Church.

Since then 'the Free Church of England otherwise called the Reformed Episcopal Church' (to use the legal name of the united denomination) has continued to maintain a biblically orthodox witness and mission within the Anglican tradition. Generations of men, women and children have come to faith in Christ as their Saviour, and been nurtured in the Word and Sacraments within her fellowship. The bitterness of earlier controversies has faded, but a commitment to honour God by 'holding fast the faithful Word' (Titus 1:9) continues to the present day.

THE CHURCH TODAY

We humbly believe that any Christians who long for the British Isles to be won again for Christ and who love their Saviour, their Bible and the Church, should take seriously the possibility of joining the Free Church of England. We believe we have preserved all that is essential in the Church of the Apostles and Fathers, refocused and given new clarity and power by the insights of the



‘CULTIVATE, THEN, BRETHREN, A DEEPER
AND BROADER AND MORE INTIMATE
ACQUAINTANCE WITH YOUR OWN
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY’

Benjamin Price, first Bishop Primus, 1867

Reformation. As a Church committed by her Constitution to conform to ‘the ancient laws and customs of the Church of England’ the Free Church of England offers a home to those loyal

Anglicans (and others) who now feel alienated from their Churches by the fundamental changes of recent decades affecting doctrine and ministry. But beyond responding to the present crisis in the Anglican Communion, the Free Church of England has an ongoing mission to bring the Gospel to the millions of people in the UK and beyond who have never heard it.

The Free Church of England has an excellent inheritance, relevant to today’s needs. Her liturgical ‘gold standard’ is a thoroughly Scriptural Prayer Book (very close to that of 1662) which provides principles for future liturgical revision, as a vehicle for worship and not entertainment, led by robed clergy.²³ She believes that the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are God-given means of grace and that it is the duty and privilege of clergy faithfully to expound the Scriptures as the life-bringing Word of God. She has a Constitution and body of Canon Law for the regulation of Church life, discipline and order which have stood the tests of time and experience and which are registered with the High Court of Chancery and the Charity Commission.



Parents and godparents at a baptism



The ordination of a presbyter

The Free Church of England exists as a family of earnest, generous and orthodox congregations (with members from a range of ethnic backgrounds) – organised into Dioceses and spread across England and the Isle of Man – worshipping in a range of buildings, some historic, some modern. She rejoices in a body of ministers – Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons – who, having themselves experienced the grace of God in its regenerating and saving power, have solemnly pledged themselves faithfully to minister the Word of God and the Sacraments of the New Covenant.

In ordering the ministry the Free Church of England, like the majority of world Christianity, reflects the biblical balance on gender. She takes seriously the fact that the Bible shows women and men to be equal but complementary. Our gender is part of what we offer back to God within the totality of our living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). The Free Church of England therefore only ordains men to the three historic Orders or admits them to the public preaching office of Reader. Patterns of training for Reader and ordained ministry have varied from time to time according to needs and resources.

From the 1850s the Free Church of England has responded to approaches from orthodox Anglicans around the world and has planted or received churches in other countries. Today we have an Overseas Diocese in South America, and congregations in Russia and France. Other overseas work is envisaged.

The laity play a full part in the life of the Church, meeting regularly with the bishops and presbyters in Diocesan Synods and in the annual Convocation and committees, as well as serving as Churchwardens or on local Church

Councils. There is a Central Trust which oversees properties, investments, stipends and pensions, but local congregations in the main need to be self-supporting in relation to the costs of the ministry and the upkeep of their buildings.

Supported by this infrastructure, the Free Church of England, as a Church free from Parliamentary control, has the flexibility to respond to a rapidly changing missionary situation. She can take the Gospel and plant Churches in any corner of the land. She can offer a haven to dispossessed members of other churches, within a stable and long-established framework, creating Dioceses of healthy, local Anglican Churches. To those coming to faith for the first time, she offers the fullness of biblical, apostolic Christianity.

Our local congregations – some of them long-established, others newly-planted - seek to be communities where every member is supported and encouraged to grow in their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and in holiness, as they seek to conform their lives to the standards set out for us in the Scriptures.²⁴ When people sin and fall short, God's mercy holds out an opportunity for repentance and restoration.



**'I SOLEMNLY ASSERT MY CONVICTION
THAT ... GOD'S HAND HAS ... PRESERVED
US FOR SOME YET UNREVEALED PURPOSE'**

Frank Vaughan, Bishop Primus, 1949

INTERNATIONAL LINKS

The Free Church of England is part of several worldwide fellowships. As well as having its own overseas congregations, as the UK member of the Reformed Episcopal family it has been in communion with the REC in North America from the 1870s and now with other Reformed Episcopal Dioceses around



the world. That relationship has recently been extended to the

Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), of which the REC in Canada and the United States is now part, and which in 2016 declared itself to be in full communion with us, and pledged to work with us in proclaiming the Good News and making disciples.²⁵

The Free Church of England's vision – the defence and spread of biblical, Anglican-heritage Christianity - has recently been given a new expression by the GAFCON (Global Anglican Future Conference) movement. The Free Church of England has therefore identified with the realignment that is taking place



among Anglican Churches worldwide and was represented at the GAFCON gatherings in Nairobi (2013) and Jerusalem (2018). Under the GAFCON umbrella we work with bishops of other orthodox Anglican jurisdictions in the UK and also with the bishops of the REC Dioceses in Germany and Croatia, as together we explore new patterns of oversight, church planting and theological training. There are also links with other Churches and networks, including Churches of Syrian and Anglican heritage in India.



In England, the Free Church of England takes her place alongside other mainline Christian bodies within Churches Together in England.



Her Orders are accepted as valid by the Church of England, which thereby implicitly acknowledges her as a *bona fide* alternative Anglican Church within the British Isles.²⁶



THE FUTURE TASK AND AN INVITATION

The Free Church of England, then, has a rich heritage and great potential to be an instrument in God's hands for growing his Kingdom in the UK and beyond.

There are various routes to join us in this wonderful task. Individuals who don't live near an existing congregation can apply to become *Scattered Members*. Small groups of fewer than ten people can form a *Cell*, for prayer, Bible study and outreach. Larger existing groups of Christians may either join



The next generation at a FCE Holiday Club

directly or become *Associate Congregations* as they explore whether to proceed to full membership. Church Plants either grow from an independently founded Cell or are planted by (and initially under the leadership of) an existing congregation.



A Remembrance Day service

We rejoice in the sovereign grace and mercy of God shown to us over many years, despite our failures and disobedience. We are aware of our weaknesses, and rejoice because they show that any growth and blessing comes from God and not from ourselves (c.f. 2 Corinthians 11:30; 12:9f). God is able to use the weak and foolish to shame the wise and strong (1 Corinthians 1:27). Like the Apostles, our greatest possession is the Gospel of the saving work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, confirmed by his resurrection and

the gift of the Holy Spirit. Only through faith in him can we be put right with God.

As we said at the beginning of this booklet, though we are inspired and encouraged by the past, our focus is the present, with an eye to the future: to proclaim this Gospel to the next generation and to nurture those who respond and find eternal life in Christ.

This is the task to which we commit ourselves until the Lord returns.

We warmly invite you to join us.



**'TELL THEM TO GO FORWARD
AND DO A GRAND WORK'**

Bishop Cummins' deathbed exhortation, 1876

*For further information on the current organisation and activities of the Church, visit our website: **www.fcofe.org.uk**, where the location and contact details of the congregations can be found. Contact via the website or direct to the Bishops or Denominational Office is also welcome.*

Further Reading:

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Frank Vaughan, *A History of the Free Church of England otherwise called the Reformed Episcopal Church*, 1st ed. Bath, 1936, 2nd ed. Bungay 1960, 3rd ed. Wallasey 1994.

Endnotes

¹ Acts 11:26.

² F.S. Merryweather, *The Free Church of England: Its History, Doctrines and Ecclesiastical Polity*, London, Partridge & Co., 1873, p.1..

³ George David Cummins, 'Primitive Episcopacy', in Frank Vaughan, *A History of the Free Church of England otherwise called the Reformed Episcopal Church*, Bath, pub. by authority of Convocation, 1936 (1st ed.), p.155f. This is the pattern that can be seen to be taking shape in St Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus.

⁴ The name 'mass' seems to come from the Latin formula of dismissal at the end of the service: 'Ite, missa est'. Though widely used, it does not seem a particularly appropriate name for the central act of Christian worship.

⁵ The council is known as the Fourth Lateran Council. The concept of transubstantiation is based on a philosophical distinction between the essential 'identity' of an object – its substance – and its outward properties – its accidents (appearance, smell, colour, etc.). The concept was problematic even in the Middle Ages and was generally rejected at the Reformation as implying a 'corporeal' or 'physical' presence, rather than a 'spiritual' one. Modern Roman Catholic teaching tends to emphasise the reality and unique nature

of Christ's presence, rather than its manner. The way in which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ has never been dogmatically defined by the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

⁶ Today the Roman Catholic Church, in the context of one of its official dialogues has expressed regret for 'any impression they may have given of a repetition of Christ's sacrifice in the Mass', in *The Grace Given You in Christ (Catholics and Methodists Reflect Further on the Church)*, North Carolina, World Methodist Council, 2008, p.55. The Roman Church has also addressed many of the other issues, especially at the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965.

⁷ This doctrine is not part of the official teaching of the Eastern Churches.

⁸ J.I. Packer, 'Thomas Cranmer's Catholic Theology', in G.E. Duffield (ed.), *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, Appleford, Sutton Courtney Press, 1964, pp.xi-xii.

⁹ The first official apologia for the newly independent Church of England regretted the separation: 'we do not despise the church of these men (however it be ordered by them now-a-days), partly for the name sake itself, and partly for that the gospel of Jesu Christ hath once been therein truly and purely set forth. Neither had we departed therefrom, but of very necessity and much against our wills' (John Jewel, *An Apology of the Church of England*, text in *The Works of John Jewel*, Cambridge, Parker Society, 1848, vol. 3, p.77. In practice the persecution and killing by each side of its opponents and the threat of military invasion to restore obedience to Rome (e.g. the Spanish Armada) meant that there was bitter hostility between 'Catholics' and 'Protestants'.

¹⁰ Article XI and the *Book of Homilies*. In 1999 the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation agreed a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification which, it was claimed, overcame the long standing disagreement on this important doctrine. The statement has been welcomed by Methodists and Anglicans, though some churches are cautious as to whether genuine agreement has been reached.

¹¹ 1 Chronicles 16:29; 2 Chronicles 20:21; Psalms 29:2, 96:9.

¹² The feeding is 'after an heavenly and spiritual manner', using the phrase from Article XXVIII.

¹³ J.I. Packer, *A Kind of Noah's Ark? The Anglican Commitment to Comprehensiveness* (Latimer Studies 10, 1981) republished in *Anglican Evangelical Identity: Yesterday and Today*, London, The Latimer Trust, (2008), p.144.

¹⁴ North of the Border the equivalent was *Ecclesia Scoticana*.

¹⁵ <http://www.anglicancommunion.org>.

¹⁶ Led by Archbishop Warham of Canterbury, on 15th May 1532 the English Convocations surrendered to Henry VIII's demands and promised to make no new

Canons without royal licence. In January 1534 this was incorporated in the Submission of the Clergy Act. To the present day, the Church of England requires Parliamentary approval to amend its Canons.

¹⁷ Some of these would now seem unobjectionable, such as the use of ashes on Ash Wednesday and palms on Palm Sunday. Others threatened the clarity of biblical doctrine.

¹⁸ The intention was that the existing chapels of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion would transfer to the new Free Church of England. This did not happen and today the Countess' Connexion has no Anglican identity.

¹⁹ Frank Vaughan, *Prospect and Retrospect: the Centenary Charge*, 1944, (printed by the Wallasey and Wirral Newspaper Co., Wallasey, Cheshire), p.6.

²⁰ The Evangelical Alliance, formed in 1846, was a fruit of this movement (Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance*, Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001). The formation of Old Catholic Churches in the 1870s was also, in part, an attempt to find a Christian consensus. 'Evangelical Catholicism' (and variants) was a term frequently used in mid 19th century publications.

²¹ Details can be found in the Free Church of England Year Books.

²² The Declaration is available at <http://fcofe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/declaration.pdf>. It should be read in conjunction with an authoritative statement from the Reformed Episcopal bishops around the world, explaining its meaning in the modern context: (<http://recus.org/PastoralLetter2018.html>).

²³ It is a tribute to the richness and balance of the Prayer Book that it can be hailed by the 19th century bishop J.C. Ryle (of strongly Protestant views) as an 'excellent book ... a matchless form of public worship, most admirably adapted to the wants of human nature' and acknowledged by the Roman Catholic Church as part of 'the worthy Anglican liturgical patrimony, understood as that which has nourished the Catholic faith throughout the history of the Anglican tradition' (J.C.Ryle, *Knots Untied*, London, James Clarke & Co, (32nd ed. 1959), p.16; *Divine Worship: The Missal. The Celebration of Holy Mass for use in the personal Ordinariates established under the Apostolic Constitution Anglicanorum Coetibus*, London, Catholic Truth Society, 2015, p.120. Clergy are required to robe for official services, but can use their discretion for less formal acts of worship (e.g. Family Services).

²⁴ In seeking to be faithful to Scripture, the Free Church of England teaches that heterosexual marriage between one man and one woman is the only God-given place for sexual intercourse. We seek to be pastorally supportive of people who experience

same-sex attraction, but Free Church of England buildings may not be used for the blessing of same-sex relationships, nor may our clergy participate in or officiate at them.

²⁵ A practical expression of this is the assistance currently being given by Always Forward, the church planting arm of the ACNA.

²⁶[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/recognition_of_orders.pdf)

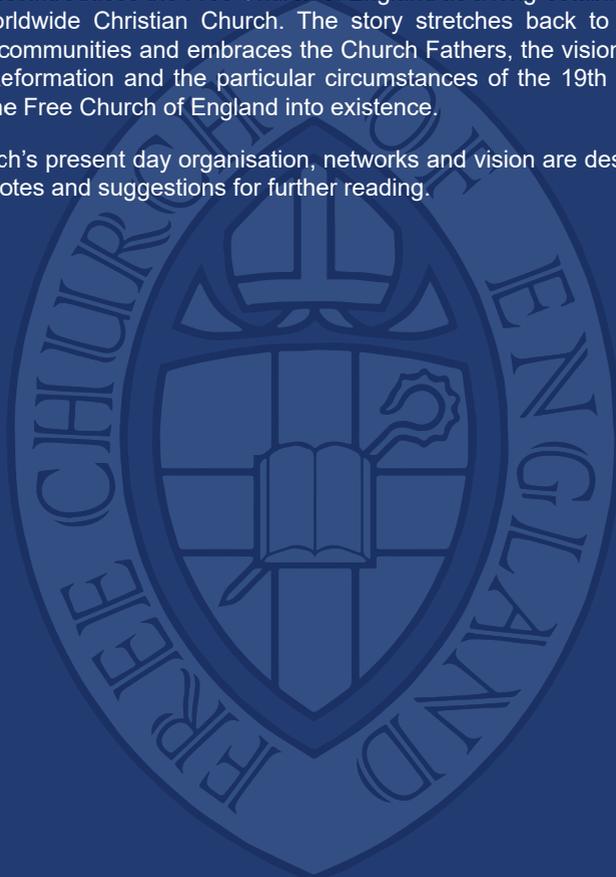
[10/recognition_of_orders.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/recognition_of_orders.pdf), p.16. The Church of England's 'Ecumenical Canons' (B43 and B44) apply to the FCE, allowing various forms of local collaboration by mutual consent, where conscience permits.

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