



This is who we are ...

So, as a Christian Church of Anglican heritage, the Free Church of England is characterised by particular ways of worship and organisation, but most of all by a commitment to the historic Christian faith which it is our duty, privilege and joy to share with others.

It is also our apostolic mission to enable all our people to develop into effective ambassadors of Christ in the Church and in the world.

We are an Anglican family made up of people of all ages, from many different backgrounds with different gifts and abilities.

We have discovered that God loves us, and in turn we love each other and those around us.

Everyone is welcome to join us and experience that love for themselves!

What is the Free Church of England?

Explaining the Free Church of England

A Christian Church of Anglican heritage

How does the Free Church of England differ from the Church of England?

The Free Church of England is, as its name suggests, a 'free' version of the Church of England: we share much of the same history and heritage.

However, the Church of England has many complex relationships with the British 'Establishment'. For example, the UK Parliament has to give approval whenever the Church of England wants to change any of its canons (laws). That does not apply to us. We are 'free' of any State control.

Also, the Church of England contains people with a wide range of beliefs, not all of which seem compatible with the Bible.

While we often have cordial relationships at different levels, we believe it right to pursue our own mission and witness, as we have for over 175 years.



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A Christian Church

Christians are followers of Jesus Christ. We believe in the facts of Jesus' life and ministry as his chosen inner team of disciples - the Apostles - witnessed and recorded them: his birth from the Virgin Mary, his ministry of teaching and healing, his death by crucifixion, his bodily resurrection, his ascension, and his sending of the Holy Spirit on his people.

We believe, too, in the meaning of these events as the Apostles explained them; for example, that Jesus' death was a sacrifice for our sins; that his ascension means that he now reigns with God the Father; that he lives in his people by the operation of the Holy Spirit; that he will one day judge everyone. The term we use for book that contains all of these teachings and many more is "the Scriptures" (or "the Bible").

Because Jesus honoured the Scriptures as the Word of God, so do we. On their authority we believe that we can not be put right with God by our own efforts, but only through faith in Jesus who died in our place on the Cross.

This is – and always has been – a joyful message for people of every age, ethnicity, culture and language. God loves us and it is possible to know him and enter eternal life through Jesus.

Of Anglican Heritage

While the heart and content of the Christian faith are unchanging, the Church has never insisted on its outward expression being absolutely identical everywhere.

The word 'Anglican' comes from the Latin adjective 'Anglicana' meaning 'English'. The historic Church in England was called the 'Ecclesia Anglicana'. So, to be Anglican, simply means that the style of our worship and church life has been shaped by the story of the Christian community in England.

In fact, the Anglican way of being Christian has itself proved very adaptable and has spread all over the world, so that today the vast majority of Christians of Anglican heritage live in the Global South and are of a wide range of ethnicities.

Understanding Our Core Characteristics



Rooted in the Scriptures

We do not teach as necessary to salvation anything that cannot be proved from the Scriptures.



Ancient Church Fathers

We are respectful of the teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church where these are agreeable to the Scriptures. We are enriched by the insights that God has given to previous generations of Christians.



Liturgical Worship

When we gather to worship God we use patterns and prayers drawn from the Scriptures. In the 16th century these were collected in a Book of Common Prayer in beautiful, historic English. Today modern English and other languages are also used. Worship should be reverent but joyful. It is led by clergy wearing robes of office.



Sacramental Church

We are a sacramental Church. Jesus commanded us to perform two unique actions (called 'Sacraments').

The first is Baptism - the immersing in or pouring on of water at a special service to admit people to the Christian community.

The second is the Lord's Supper (also called Holy Communion or Eucharist) – eating bread and drinking wine as a means of proclaiming Jesus' death until he returns and 'after a heavenly and spiritual manner' partaking of his Body and Blood.



Episcopal

The New Testament shows us the earliest Christian communities being led by 'overseers' – *episkopoi* in Greek. By the early second century we find the church in each place grouped around an overseer (bishop), with a council of elders (presbyters) and a team of assistants (deacons). Each new bishop was ordained by the laying on of hands of existing bishops and in turn ordained deacons and presbyters as necessary. This is the ministry and pattern that we have inherited and continue.

We Have A Mission

Go and make disciples of all nations

Jesus commanded his disciples to take the Good News (the 'Gospel') to the whole world. It is therefore our responsibility to share our faith in all sorts of ways, from informal conversations to planting new churches, so that as many people as possible may experience God's love.

- ✓ We have a heart to touch our communities.
- ✓ We are deliberate about planting churches to assist and encourage people to develop a vibrant faith walk.

We are vigilant against error. It is important to maintain a constant witness against any innovations in doctrine (what we believe) and worship, which might deface or obscure the primitive Faith.

- ✓ We are welcoming and accepting. Everyone is invited to let the love of Christ and his transforming power impact you, your life issues, your hurts, your needs, and your soul.

I have come that you may have

LIFE, and have it **ABUNDANTLY**.



–Jesus



Some Words of Encouragement

Don't expect to understand everything at once. Give yourself time to become familiar with the prayers and structure of the services. The more you grasp the words and flow, the more you are free simply to let go and concentrate on God.

Don't be afraid to ask questions about what things mean or why we say or do them. If the first person you ask doesn't know, keep asking till you find someone who does!

Worship is not the same as entertainment. Of course it is good to feel uplifted and joyful, but the purpose of worship is to adore God for who he is and what he has done, irrespective of our feelings on a particular occasion.



Our Worship

Other services

There are many other services: Parade Services, Baptism, Confirmation, Weddings, Funerals. Each has its own style and ethos. What matters is that those taking part are open to experience God's love.

Robes

For many of our services the person leading it will wear special robes of office. This is an ancient practice and is a reminder that the Minister is not acting on his own authority but on behalf of God.

Posture and Gestures

In worship we are not spectators. We use our bodies to express aspects of our relationship with God, so we sit, kneel or stand at different parts of the service. Some people may raise their hands or make the sign of the cross.



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Joyful Worship

To worship God is the highest activity that any human being can engage in. At the heart of being a Christian is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. But the Bible has lots of images (such as branches on a vine, parts of a body) to teach us that, when we believe in Jesus, we automatically belong to a worldwide family. One of the greatest privileges we share is to be able to worship God with our brothers and sisters.

The Bible does not set out a particular 'service' for us to follow, but is full of songs, prayers, imagery and guidance which Christians around the world use to worship God – some forms are simple, some are rich and elaborate.

For a thousand years in the UK nearly all worship was in Latin, because this was the common language of the Church in Western Europe. In the 16th century this was translated into beautiful historic English and (with new prayers added) compiled into a collection of services (or 'liturgies') called The Book of Common Prayer. This is still our 'gold standard' but in many of our churches there are simpler forms for the benefit of newcomers who are unfamiliar with this kind of liturgical worship.



Why Liturgy?

Having a liturgy puts into our mouths what we should be saying to God and so helps us get our relationship with him right. It also helps us to remember God's Word and God's promises.

Because we say some of the same words each week, after a while we start to memorise them. We can then concentrate on their meaning. Also, having these words stored in our memory can really help during those times when we don't know what to pray or what to say to God.

Sometimes saying some of the words and prayers that we have memorised will help us get started.

Understand that the liturgy is meant to feed you just as much as the sermon.

Understanding Our Worship Expressions



Morning & Evening Prayer

Both services have the same structure. They begin with some verses of Scripture to assure us that if we sincerely confess our sins then God will forgive us. The Minister then warns us not to try and hide our sins, but to confess them so that we might receive forgiveness. He also reminds us why we have come together - to give thanks, to praise, to hear God's most holy Word, and to pray for others as well as ourselves. We then confess our sins together, including the things we have failed to do as well as those wrong things we have done. The presbyter then assures us that God pardons and absolves all those who truly turn to him.

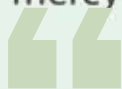
The focus of the service now shifts to praise in the form of psalms (a collection of 'worship songs' in the Bible). We then come to the core of the service – two readings from the Bible, one from the Old Testament and one from the New. Between them and after them we say or sing other praise songs (called 'canticles').

After the Scripture readings and canticles we join in stating what we believe in a brief summary of the Christian faith called the Apostles' Creed. We then turn to prayer, responding to the Minister and listening to prayers that he says on behalf of all of us. Other prayers may follow – for those in authority, for church leaders, for the sick, for particular needs.

Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer will usually be followed by a sermon where God's Word (the Bible) is explained to us. There will probably also be hymns or songs at various points.

Be **thankful** unto him, **bless** his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is **everlasting**.

—Psalm 100:4-5



Language

In worship (and especially in Churches that use the Prayer Book) there are some new words to be learned. This is true of most areas of life. In recent years we have all had to learn new vocabulary associated with our computers – 'wi-fi', 'cloud', 'google', etc. It's the same in church life, but the words are generally less technical!

So don't let them put you off – take time to get used to them and understand their meaning.

Holy Communion

Do This In Remembrance of Me

This service (also called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist) is composed of two elements. The first derives from the ancient synagogue service and consists of praise, Bible readings, a Creed, prayer for others, confession and absolution. The second element goes right back to Jesus' final meal with his disciples the night before his death.

On that occasion Jesus took bread and said, 'This is my body which is given for you,' then took a cup of wine and said, 'This is my blood of the New Covenant which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.' Jesus then commanded them to do this as a perpetual memorial of him until he returns. This is why the presbyter repeats the words of Jesus and invites people to come and eat and drink and so feed on him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving.



In 2008 the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem, inaugurated a movement to defend and promote biblical Anglicanism worldwide.

Both the UK Dioceses of the FCE have accepted the Jerusalem Declaration that emerged from the 2008 gathering and have affiliated to GAFCON. Our bishops are members of the GAFCON UK Bishops' Forum (along with the Reformed Episcopal bishops in Germany and Croatia).

The FCE has two representatives on the GAFCON UK Panel of Reference.

Strengthen Our International Links

The Free Church of England has always had international links and, at times, actual congregations and dioceses outside the UK. Maintaining effective relationships is not always easy, but is worth pursuing as much as possible.

In recent years we have worked increasingly closely with other members of our Reformed Episcopal family around the world.

We also have a number of international partners working with us in areas such as evangelism and church planting.



We Remain Focused

It is easy in church life to get distracted by minor issues and to lose focus and energy. It is important, therefore, that we constantly work for unity and effective collaboration among ourselves so that we may be faithful fellow-workers with God.

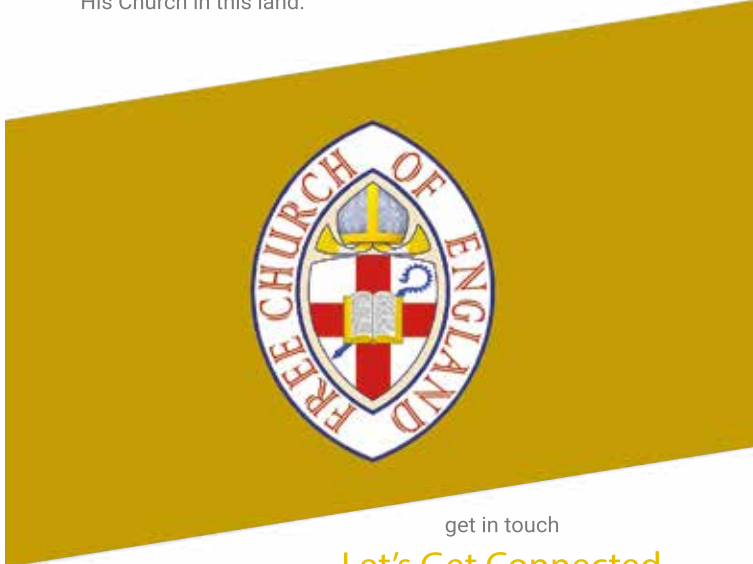
In all our activities our priority must be to obey Jesus' commission to us to make disciples and to teach them to observe all that he has commanded us (Matthew 28:19). Our mission therefore must be founded upon and directed by God's wonderful revelation to us in the Bible.

Prayer

We are mindful that 'Unless the Lord build the house, those who build it labour in vain' (Psalm 127:1). We therefore submit all these initiatives to God and call on all our members to be in constant prayer that He will pour down His blessings and rebuild His Church in this land.



Our Mission



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Our Mission Today

Win souls for Jesus Christ

All our activities are pointless unless we are being ambassadors for Christ and enabling people to hear and respond to the Gospel and so enter eternal life.

Our priority must be to find ways of reaching people who have no idea what the Good News of the Christian faith is all about and how it would transform their lives for ever (literally). Only by helping them find a living faith in Jesus Christ are we meeting their deepest needs.

Plant and nurture healthy local churches

The focus for most people's Christian worship and fellowship is their local congregation.

It is there that new Christians will learn the faith, be baptised, experience fellowship with other Christians and be nurtured by Word and Sacrament. Healthy local churches are the key to Christian living, believing, witnessing and evangelising. A vibrant local church allows its people to grow in holiness and prepare for heaven.

A major priority, therefore, is to ensure the spiritual health of each and every one of our local congregations.

How We Are Accomplishing Our Mission



Revitalise Our Congregations

We are actively engaged in a programme of revitalisation to refocus our existing churches in the power of the Holy Spirit, while providing God-centred worship consistent with our Anglican heritage.



Equip All God's People

There is a desperate need for all God's people to be soaked in his Word, the Bible, and inspired by his Spirit, so that they can live, pray and witness in accordance with his will.

This is particularly important as most newcomers will have almost no understanding of the Bible or the basics of the Christian faith. Consistent teaching in various contexts has become a major priority.



Plant New Churches

The most effective way of reaching more people for Christ is to plant new Churches. Most of our existing congregations, in fact, began as what would now be called church plants. We are currently engaged in a process of training to become a church planting Diocese.



Uphold Biblical Morality

We live in a society that has departed from God's loving purposes for humankind in many areas – from financial honesty to the sanctity of life to sexuality issues. In all areas of life we seek to uphold traditional biblical morality and support and counsel those grappling with difficult decisions.



Nurture A Gospel Ministry

To grow the Kingdom and respond to the current situation we need well-trained laity, readers and clergy.

We rejoice that we have inherited the ancient threefold ministry of bishops, presbyters and deacons (our Orders are recognised by the Church of England and other Churches) and seek to recruit, equip and support godly men for the work of expounding the Scriptures, winning souls for Christ, ministering the sacraments and caring for the faithful.

Anglican Relations

Offer a home to faithful Anglicans

Significant numbers of faithful Anglicans are reaching a point when they can no longer in conscience remain in the existing Anglican Provinces in the British Isles. To such people the FCE offers a home that is authentically Anglican, rooted in the Scriptures and the classic Anglican formularies, yet free from party groupings and the recent unbiblical innovations seen elsewhere.

Continue to work for Anglican unity

From our own history and experience we know that Anglican unity is possible. To that end, we have hosted an Anglican Unity Forum bringing together a range of Anglican jurisdictions, organisations and churches to discuss issues impairing our relationship.

From this and other initiatives various patterns of ongoing collaboration have emerged.

LOVE one another as I have loved you. This is how everyone will know you are my **DISCIPLES**.

—Jesus

What Is Ministry?

'Ministry' means 'service'. Jesus spoke of himself as having come, not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45) and told his disciples that the one who would be greatest among them must be the servant of all (Mark 9:35). So in the Church, leadership and other activities are not about power and control but about working for the benefit of others.

All Christians are given gifts by the Holy Spirit to use to the glory of God and the benefit of the Body of Christ (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12). In the earliest days of the Church it is clear that the Apostles' unique leadership role was acknowledged by all the believers.

Three Historic Ministry Roles

As the Church began to grow the Apostles delegated areas of their activities to other, proven men – for example, serving tables (*diakonein* Acts 6:2) or as elders (*presbyteroi* Acts 14:23). The New Testament also speaks of overseers (*episkopoi* Acts 20:23; Philippians 1:1, 1; 1 Timothy 3:1).

From these very quickly developed the distinct ministries of deacons, presbyters and bishops, which the FCE continues. These traditional responsibilities must reflect the ministry of Jesus himself, with the different roles reflecting different aspects of it.



Ministry and Gender

In the Free Church of England, we affirm that the ministry of men and women is equally valid, valuable and necessary in God's eyes. And yet the Church must take care to study and to obey Scripture with regard to preserving the complementarity of roles.

We see from the Scriptures a pattern that was witnessed to by the Tradition of the Church with regard to gender and ministry. While there are a number of roles open to women with a calling to serve in the Church, we believe that within the Church there is a divinely appointed order in which eldership/oversight roles are given to men only.

This is certainly not for the purpose of domination, but in order to protect and nourish the entire body of Christ. For that reason we ordain only men to the historic Orders of bishop, presbyter and deacon.



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Bishops

In addition to Servanthood, Jesus united in himself the great biblical offices of Prophet, King and Priest (e.g. Deuteronomy 18:15, Romans 1:13, Hebrews 4:14). These are reflected in the ministry of the bishop.

The principal duty of the Bishop is prophetic - to proclaim 'Thus says the Lord ...' - to preach the Gospel and call men and women to repentance and faith.

His kingly role is that of shepherd: after the pattern of the Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for his sheep, to lead, love and care for those committed to his charge.

After the pattern of Christ the High Priest, the Bishop is to intercede for his people and preside at the Church's offering of spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5).

Presbyters are the principal ministers of Word and Sacrament in the local congregations to which the bishop appoints them. They share the bishop's threefold ministry. They are to be messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord, calling their hearers to repentance and declaring in Christ's name the absolution and forgiveness of their sins. They are to baptise those who come to faith and feed them and all their people from the Word and the Lord's Table.



Deacons

Deacons make visible the servanthood that is at the heart of all Christian ministry. They work in support of their bishop and with presbyters to take the Gospel and pastoral care to those in need. They assist in preparing candidates for baptism and confirmation and they minister to the sick. It is appropriate that the diaconate is usually the first step in authorised Christian ministry, because servanthood is the foundation of everything else one does as a minister of the Gospel of Jesus.



What Is Apostolic Succession?

From the earliest days, one of the characteristics of the Christians was that they 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching' (Acts 2:42). As the first generation of eyewitnesses began to pass away it became particularly important that provision was made to ensure the faithful transmission of the apostolic witness to future generations. This became the particular responsibility of those charged with the oversight ('episkope' in Greek) of the Christian community in a particular city or locality. So St Paul tells Timothy to guard the deposit entrusted to him and 'what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also' (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14, 2:2).

That this is what happened is confirmed by the evidence of the earliest post-apostolic writers:

Through countryside and city the apostles preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons of future believers. ... The apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. (Clement of Rome, circa A.D. 90, Epistle to the Corinthians, 42:4-5, 44:1-3).

From this there very quickly grew up throughout the entire Church successions of overseers/bishops in each place, admitted to their office by neighbouring bishops once they were confident of the candidate's adherence to apostolic teaching. At a time when there were few written sources and false teachings were always springing up, this visible continuity of faithful guardians of the faith was particularly important.

Entrust this teaching to faithful men who will be able to teach

—Paul the Apostle



It is possible then for everyone in every church who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which had been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our time, men who neither knew nor taught anything like which the heretics rave about... (Irenaeus, circa A.D. 180-199, Against Heresies, 3:3:1).

This, then, is apostolic succession: a continuity of fidelity to the original Christian message entrusted to a continuity of bishops charged with its preservation and proclamation, and with pastoring the flock entrusted to them. It is a system that has served the Church well over the centuries.

Training for Ministry

Patterns of training for the ministry in the Free Church of England have varied over the years. Today most training is done by distance learning, enabling candidates for ministry to remain rooted in their local churches. Affiliation with different orthodox institutions is currently being explored.

The FCE values the breadth of experience of those wishing to serve as ministers of the Gospel. We are committed to offering ministerial and theological training which meets the particular needs of the individual, with an emphasis upon 'on the ground' practical experience. The FCE is flexible and does not hold to a 'one size fits all' package of training for ordinands – the goal is to equip men to be pastors, teachers and evangelists.

Men who have served as ministers in another denomination may, after suitable scrutiny, be received into the FCE, either directly if their Orders are recognised, or by ordination.