



# Free Church of England Newsletter April 2013

## **Free Church of England Orders recognised**

One of the disadvantages that the Free Church of England has suffered from since the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been the refusal of the Church of England in particular to take us seriously as a 'proper' Church. As Bishop Vaughan commented in 1944, a century of faithful, orthodox Christian witness gradually won us grudging respect from other Churches. This was reflected in our being admitted to membership of the Free Churches Federal Council where our representatives sat as equals with members of the Methodist, Baptist, United Reformed and other denominations. More recently, we have built on that. Our membership of Churches Together in England allows us to mix with an even wider range of Churches,

including the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. It has opened up new opportunities for us to witness to our unique.

There was still, however, the problem that our clergy were not accepted as 'real' bishops, presbyters and deacons. So, for example, if one of our clergy transferred to the Church of England, he had to be conditionally ordained.

Happily, all that has recently changed. At a meeting with Bishop Paul Hunt and Bishop John Fenwick at Lambeth Palace some years ago, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, agreed that the recognition of Orders was a discrete area that could be looked at without the need for full conversations such as we had in the 1990s. If successful, it could change the relationship between the Churches for the better.

With Primus' approval Bishops Hunt and Fenwick had a number of face to face meetings with representatives of the Church of England's Council for Christian Unity. There was also a meeting with a delegation of REC bishops who were visiting the UK. In the past the Church of England had tended to make judgements about us without actually checking the facts. This time they actually asked us to clarify a number of points and Primus was able to write on several occasions to the Bishop of Guildford, the Chairman of the Council for Christian Unity, correcting a number of misconceptions that were held about us. A report was drawn up, which was also discussed by the Church of England's Faith and Order Commission (composed of theologians). Both these bodies approved the report, which recommended that our Orders be 'recognised and accepted' under the Overseas and Other Clergy (Ministry and Ordination) Measure 1967 – which is the piece of legislation that the Church of England uses when determining matters of this nature. The

recommendations were endorsed by the Standing Committee of the Church of England's House of Bishops. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York accepted the recommendations and formally 'recognised and accepted' our Orders under the Measure.

This does not, of course, mean that we are joining the Church of England. It does, however, mean that the Church of England now recognises us a Church with clergy who are as truly bishops, presbyters and deacons as her own. There are now *two* lawfully recognised Anglican Churches in England.

We thank God for this recognition and pray that it will assist us in our outreach and mission.

### **Holy Trinity, Oswaldtwistle**

... are holding two booksales. If you would like to take part, please contact the Revd John Taylor.

### **Emmanuel, Saltley**

Bishop Ken and Edna are retiring from active ministry at Emmanuel after many years' service. The congregation thanks God for their ministry and wishes them a long and healthy retirement together.

### **A New FCE congregation is born!**

The Revd Gerald Kirsch describes the founding of our new work at Shoreham:

Having come home, as it were, to the Free Church of England, I anticipated the Lord would call me to some new work. After a couple of leads to existing churches in the Southern Diocese and much soul searching and prayer, it was clear that these were not to come to fruition. During the Bishop's charge at my Ordination he had

sown the seed that I might start a new work. I did not think so at that time; however, one or two of my friends and who were members of my former church said "If you do decide to do something in Shoreham we would follow you." Well, two years on I was approached by a couple who had become so disaffected with my previous church and my successor that they had left and were looking for a new spiritual home. They felt that I was the one who could lead them. Bishop Paul's words came back to me so I began to pray earnestly that I would know God's will for this. My friends also told me of others too who had left and some who might if they knew I might be starting something. I simply decided to put the fleece out. I did so by writing to these folk and asking them to pray about it too and at the same time invited them to come and meet with me to learn more about the Free Church of England and my thinking about doing something.

The response was very surprising, with some 30 folk, some of whom I had not written to who were in similar circumstances and said they would like to attend my meeting. The meeting took place and ended with Compline.

I was now in a quandary. I had the makings of a congregation and nowhere to hold services. I spent the next week trying to hire various halls including talking to the Vicar of a local Anglican Church whose second church was struggling, on the basis of sharing the buildings, but he was more concerned about the confusion our respective denominational names would cause. Then out of the blue the local Anglican Church school offered to let us use their school hall. We agreed a date on which I would be shown round and advised of Fire and security measures etc., and I duly arrived only to be informed that it had been cancelled

This was on a Thursday before we were due to hold our first Service. During this period also I as a matter of courtesy wrote to the minister of Shoreham Free Church advising him of this new venture and included a copy of a similar worded letter that I would send out to all of the other Churches in Shoreham.

On the Friday afternoon before we were to hold our first service, the school secretary sent me a texted message saying that the school Governors had met and had rejected our application to hire the hall on the grounds we were another church grouping outside the Church of England. You can imagine my distress!!!

But The Lord had another venue on mind one which I had written off as not suitable

They gave us every Sunday with the option to renew the hire every two months if we wished to remain

We held our first service on the 24th October a service of Morning Prayer and have met each Sunday since.

We want to expand our church programme but we are restricted to use of the hall it being used by many other groups. We are praying that the Lord might lead us to our own premises. Meanwhile we are looking at ways to advertise our presence and how we might be able to serve the local community. We thank God for His blessing to us as we seek to grow and secure the place of the Free Church of England in the county of West Sussex

Gerald

## **St Andrew's, Bentley**

The Church ran another in its long series of Children's Holiday Clubs. The theme of this one was 'Xpedition Force'.

Below is a snapshot of one of the activities. There are no prizes for guessing the identity of the man in the background with the mug of tea!



## **St John's, Tottington**

The Friends of St John's Tottington have just been awarded a grant of £130,000 from Viridor Credits, a landfill charity trust!

The news is a cause for great thanksgiving to God, and will enable the Church to proceed with its plans to install kitchens, toilets and a heating system, and to adapt the building for community use as well as worship.

### **Christ Church, Exmouth**

We have been running a 'Freedom in Christ' course, which most of the congregation have been attending. Barry, one of our loved and valued members in his 70s, said 'it has been the best thing I have ever done'. FIC is a discipleship course using DVD teachings that is designed to help believers break free of attitudes and strongholds that are a hindrance in following Jesus.

We are also seeking to expand our outreach to young people. In the Church generally the statistics are worrying – a 90% decline in children and young people attending Church in the past 20 years. Considering that statistically 75% of Christians were converted before the age of 17, the UK Church is in trouble – time for prayer and action!

### **New Friends**

In these days of turmoil in many parts of the Christian world, the Free Church of England has received a number of expressions of interest from people both here in the UK and overseas.

People are impressed by our orthodox biblical stance and by the way we have maintained our witness for well over a century and a half.

Some of these will be reported on at Convocation in May when we will be given the opportunity to extend the right hand of fellowship to a range of new brothers and sisters in Christ.

## St George's, Blackburn

The photo shows Cairon Berry, a member of our congregation, carrying the Olympic Torch in Blackburn. Cairon was selected for her work in Scouting over the last 20 years and for her fundraising for Diabetes UK.

