

Woodmancote Evangelical Free Church

Church Handbook

A Little of our history

Who was the Countess of Huntingdon?

This church owes its existence to the Countess of Huntingdon - the inscription is still visible today and it can be seen high on the front wall below the bell turret.

Selina Shirely was born on the 24th August 1707, later receiving the title when she married the ninth Earl of Huntingdon in 1728. During her long life she used her huge fortune to found and support establish many churches. She died on the 17th June 1791.

The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion

The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion was formed as a result of forced dissension from the established church of the day. Its adherents were influenced by the preaching of George Whitfield of Gloucester, a friend and co-worker of John Wesley. Demands for meeting places came from all parts of the country and the Countess took a deep interest in each request. It had never been her intention to secede from the established church. Initially these congregations were described as "societies in the secession patronised by Lady Huntingdon", later the congregations formed "The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion".

The Countess also provided funds for a college to train of men for ministry in dissenting (non-conformist) churches.

The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in Woodmancote

Non-conformism in Woodmancote begins in 1811, when a group of Calvinist Methodists began to worship in the village. At first they met in cottages. In 1825 the group built a place of worship at the bottom of Chapel Lane between the lane and the stream. It was about this time they affiliated themselves to the Countess of Huntingdon Connexion. Until 1920, the congregation came under the oversight of Countess Church in North Place, Cheltenham (now the Rock Gym).

In 1854 when the congregation numbered around 50 they moved to new premises in Stockwell Lane. The chapel became a domestic dwelling and at one time a school. The new Church was officially opened on Tuesday June 6th 1854. The interior measures 30 by 20 feet. Its exterior contained some special features a bell turret, surmounted by a weather vane (replaced by a cross in 1954) and carved stonework with the Countess of Huntingdon crest and two attractive heads. The total cost of construction came to £300, of which £245 had already been raised when the church opened.

In 1906 it was discovered that in 1854 the deeds of the new Church had been entrusted to eight individual trustees who had not been replaced. In 1911, after detailed enquiries, the Countess of Huntingdon Trustees once again became responsible for the Woodmancote Church. In 1920 a local committee took over the running and oversight of the Church from the North Place Church.

In 1926 the Rev. Arthur Kew who had served as a missionary in Sierra Leone was appointed the Church's Honorary Minister, a position he held until 1950

The attempts in 1959 to appoint the Rev. R. Wesley Hemming as the next minister was not supported by the Connexional Trustees and the congregation was split in two with some members following Mr. Hemming when he left the church after a two year dispute.

It was not until 1973 that another a retired missionary the Rev. Ted Long was inducted as Minister. He served until 1982

The next Minister was Douglas Bell who served from 1988 until 1998, like the existing Minister Keith Linzner who was appointed in 1999, they both entered the ministry after taking early retirement.

Note:

A more comprehensive history can be found on the church's Internet site <http://www.freechurch.freeseve.co.uk>

Who we are today

We belong to a group of churches formed during in the eighteenth century as a result of the generosity of a Christian lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. This wealthy Christian lady financed the building of many churches and also in the beginning, provided for the training of Ministers and Pastors.

We are a friendly and caring family of Christian people drawn from many different backgrounds, but we share the desire to take Bible truths seriously and apply them in our own lives and in the life of our community.

We are united in a knowledge of Jesus Christ and are discovering that He brings meaning, purpose and joy to our lives as we seek to learn more about Him, love Him and serve Him. The Church family today consists of about 35 adults and 10 children and we recently welcomed a number of newcomers.

If you would like more information about us or our activities you can:

- check out the web pages: <http://www.freechurch.freeseve.co.uk>
- contact me personally by e-mail, letter or telephone.

We should love to welcome you at our main Sunday Service at 10.30 a.m. During part of that Service we provide separate teaching for the children, and once a month we hold an all-age Family Service.

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Note:

The above is an extract from our current "welcome" literature (November 2000).

What we believe

God:

We believe in one God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe He is almighty eternal and unchanging, and the Creator and Ruler of all things.

We believe that in His righteousness and love, God has revealed Himself and His truth to people through creation and through the Bible, but chiefly through his Son, Jesus Christ.

We believe that through Jesus, God has provided for the salvation of the world.

The Bible:

We believe that the Bible is divinely inspired, entirely trustworthy and our supreme authority in matters of faith and behaviour.

Human Nature:

We believe that in the same way that Adam sinned against God so all people have sinned against God and are therefore in need of God's forgiveness and a change of heart and life before entering the Kingdom of God.

Jesus:

We believe that Jesus was God in human form, born of a virgin.

We believe that Jesus had a real and sinless manhood and that His teaching was perfect. Through faith we believe that his death and resurrection provide a way in which people can be free from sin and its eternal consequences.

We believe that after his resurrection Jesus return to heaven and continues to be the means by which people can be made right with God.

Salvation:

We believe that a person is made right with God following repentance towards God and faith in Jesus.

We believe that Salvation is a free gift from God.

The Holy Spirit:

We believe that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us to understand what the death and resurrection of Jesus can mean for us.

We believe that the Holy Spirit helps us to see that we have sinned against God and need His forgiveness and a complete change of heart in order to live the Christian life.

We believe that the Holy Spirit helps us to worship God, to understand what God wants of us and to minister effectively to others.

The Church:

We believe that all Christians who are part of Christ's world-wide Church, have equal responsibility to obey His command to share with everybody the Good News of Salvation. We believe that Christians belonging to a local church should see themselves a part of the world-wide Church, and should seek to live in unity, as Jesus prayed that his followers would do.

Baptism and Holy Communion:

We believe that Jesus instituted Baptism and Holy Communion.

We believe that Baptism is an outward sign of belonging to Christ, and that Holy Communion is a way for those who belong to Christ to continue to remember His death for us until he comes again.

The Second Coming of Jesus:

We believe that Jesus himself will be seen returning in power and glory, to judge people for all time.

We believe that those who died will be raised and those who have been made right with God will enter God's perfect Kingdom and those who have not will be separated from God for ever.

How we operate**The Church Meeting.**

We acknowledge that

- Christ is the head of the church
- He calls, enables and equips individuals of a local congregation for roles of leadership and service.

Those appointed as leaders must be given the opportunity to discharge the responsibilities described below. However they also have a commitment to listen to the whole congregation and to involve them the ongoing life and ministry of the congregation.

To achieve these objectives: -

- **A Church Meeting** shall be held at least 4 times a year. Details of the meeting must be announced on at least two consecutive Sundays before the date planned for the meeting.
- All **regular worshippers*** are entitled to attend and to vote.
- A quorum for a Church Meeting shall be one-third of the regular worshippers.
- Any matter(s) that a regular worshipper(s) wishes to be included on the agenda of the Church Meeting must be submitted to the Church Secretary for prior consideration by the Leadership Team.
- Any motion before the Church Meeting will be carried if two-thirds of those present vote in favour.
- **A Special Church Meeting** may be convened if one-third of the regular worshippers make a written application to the Church Secretary. Details of the meeting must be announced on at least two consecutive Sundays before the date planned for the meeting. No other business will be transacted at a Special Church Meeting other than that specified in the notice convening the Meeting.

Regular worshippers are those whose names appear on the Congregation List. The Leadership Team will ensure that the list is updated prior to the Annual General Meeting and as necessary at any other time during the year. Only those who are over 18 years of age will be expected to vote at meetings and for the appointment of Leadership Team members.

- **An Annual General Meeting** shall be held as soon as possible after the close of the Church's Financial Year, when: -
 - the audited Annual Financial Statement will be presented.
 - Reports for the work of the Church for the previous year approved.
 - Leadership team members will be appointed or re-appointed.

The Minister (Pastor)

The "calling" of a Minister (Pastor) requires the involvement of the Trustees of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion - who in principle are required by *The Scheme* (The Connexion's Trust Document) to approve the appointment a Minister to a local congregation. The minister (pastor) with the help and support of the other Leadership members, will be responsible for:

- ensuring that the Word of God is preached and taught.
- ensuring that the church meets regularly to pray.
- the exercise of pastoral oversight.
- the observance of the ordinances of Holy Communion and Baptism.
- leading the church - as guided by the Holy Spirit - into new areas of ministry and service.

The Appointment Process

- The appointment of a Minister (Pastor) shall take place at a specially convened Church meeting which normally will be chaired by a member of the Trustees. At least three quarters of the regular worshippers must vote in favour of the nominee being called to the Pastorate.

Notes:

- i. This meeting will only be arranged after the issue of the pastorate has been fully discussed at previous Church meeting(s).
- ii. An election procedure similar to that described below for appointment of a Leadership Team will be adopted for the appointing and re-appointing of a Minister.

The Leadership Team

The size of the team will be commensurate with the number of suitably gifted regular worshippers. However, in practice it is unlikely that leadership team members will be greater than 10-15% of regular worshippers. The leadership team will be responsible for appointing from within their number a Church Secretary and Treasurer. Details of these appointments will be announced as necessary during a Sunday service.

Appointment Process

- Prior to the Annual General Meeting (when necessary) the church secretary will ask for nominees for new leadership team members.
- All nominees must be sponsored by at least four other regular worshippers.
- All regular worshippers will be advised in writing, at least three weeks before the Annual General Meeting, of the name(s) of all nominees. A voting paper will be attached to the communication with instructions that it must be returned by the Sunday prior to the date arranged for the Annual General Meeting. It is essential that all voting paper are returned therefore, one who does not return their voting paper will be contacted by one of the two persons appointed to count the voting papers and arrangements made for their vote(s) to be included in the final count.
- At least two-thirds of regular worshippers must to vote in favour of any nominee if they are to be recognised as a leadership team member.

Notes:

- a. A method of recording returned voting papers will be adopted that preserves the concept of a secret ballot.
- b. If the number of nominees cannot reasonably accommodated within the membership team then the vote conducted will ask regular worshippers to express a preference for individual nominees.
- c. Members of the Leadership Team will normally serve for a period of three years. The above process will also be used to re-appoint any existing Leadership Team member.
- d. Any leadership team member who has served for two consecutive three periods will be asked to prayerfully consider whether they should serve for a further term.

Leadership Team - Areas of Responsibility

General issues:

- To give a positive lead in discerning God's will for the Church.
- To seek God's guidance concerning the particular steps and actions for every aspect of Church life.
- To lead the congregation by example, encouragement and exhortation.

Promotion of spiritual growth of the congregation through:

- Worship and prayer and fellowship.
- Applying God's Word to all areas of church life both individual and corporate.
- Sharing of Christian experience.
- Recognising, developing and using the gifts Christ has given his people.
- Involvement in the wider mission of the church, locally, nationally and internationally.

Caring for the congregation by:

- Being alert to situations and problems that from time to time confront individuals and families within congregation.
- Regularly visiting every member of the congregation.
- Seeing that practical help is given to members of the congregation and local community.
- Encouraging and counselling the backslider.
- Praying over the sick.

Administration and Finance:

- The keeping financial records, authorising expenditure and allocating Donations.
- The maintenance of records as required by statute and the Trustees.
- The production of publicity and promotional material.

Management of Premises and Equipment:

- The maintenance of the church buildings and grounds
- The maintenance of the heating and lighting systems.
- The purchase and upkeep of equipment.

Notes:

- a. In order that the Leadership Team can carry out their responsibilities effectively, they should meet at least bimonthly.
- b. To help them the Leadership Team wish to set up small working groups who would have responsibility for a specific area or aspect of church life. Any members of the congregation who has a special gift or interest in the topic should be invited to join these groups

Leadership of Church Groups

All Church groups shall submit their rules, if appropriate, and names of leaders to the Leadership Team for confirmation before being made public.

Notes

- a. All leaders who are working with children and young people would be subject to scrutiny and subject to all relevant legislation and guidelines.

Use of Premises

Requests to use the Church premises for all special and occasional meetings must be made to the Church Secretary.

No group or individual can use the premises for a private function or activity without written permission from the Church Secretary.

Alteration of Rules

Any proposed alteration of, or addition to, the church rules, shall be circulated to all Regular Worshippers for consideration prior to a Church Meeting.

What we expect

Being a member of the Church of Christ entails both privileges and responsibilities. It is expected that those who are considered regular worshippers should be:-

- Regular in their attendance on Sundays.
- Faithful in prayer and Bible reading.
- Generous in their giving.
- Diligent in their Christian living.
- Committed in their love and service for their Lord and his church by being eager:
 - a. to get to know and show concern for the welfare of other church members.
 - b. to see the gospel communicated within the community.
 - c. concerned for the ongoing life of the church that they attend its church business meetings.