

# Freedom

**An introduction to the  
Free Methodist Church in UK  
and Ireland**



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## **Mission Statement**

“To love God, love people, and make disciples.”

## **Vision Statement**

“To bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches.”



# INTRODUCTION

**FREE METHODISTS** are passionate about life in the **SPIRIT**. We uphold **BIBLICAL TEACHING** in a world of shifting values and social change. We love to engage in God's mission **TO SEE LIVES TRANSFORMED** through God's grace, knowing His truth, and being anchored **BY HOPE IN CHRIST**. In 2019, God gave the Free Methodist Church leaders a mandate to grow to 100 churches and more by 2034.

This booklet is for anyone interested in the calling, values and beliefs of the Free Methodist Church. Whether you are an individual interested in knowing more about your local Free Methodist Church, or you are a church group considering affiliating with us, this introduction has been designed to help you.

All Free Methodist churches have three basic elements which define them:

1. A shared belief found in statements of faith or Articles of Religion.

2. Values that shape behaviours which may be written down or sometimes are unspoken.

3. Some means by which corporate decisions are made and health in the church in its life, mission and organisation is maintained and strengthened.

These have been recorded in writing so everyone can know where we stand. Ultimately, prayerful decisions and commitments to belong (or not) can be based on a full understanding of the facts.



*Set*  
*Live* **FREE**

 *Bringing*

**FREEDOM**



# 1. WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

*"We want this church to promote the Kingdom of God."  
B.T. Roberts, 1890*



*Howard Snyder (1940–present, Professor of Wesley Studies at Tyndale Seminary, Toronto)*

*"The church gets into trouble whenever it thinks it is in the church business rather than the Kingdom business. In the church business, people are concerned with church activities, religious behaviour and spiritual things. In the Kingdom business, people are concerned with Kingdom activities, all human behaviour and everything God has made. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world."*

## **We are Free Methodists**

The central value of Free Methodism is freedom. This is explained in three inclusive statements known as "The Freedoms." These are Set Free, Live Free and Bringing Freedom. The Freedoms underpin the absolute conviction that Jesus Christ died and rose again to offer life for all people everywhere. Men and women are encouraged to respond to God's call to minister the Freedoms.

In freedom, people choose to live holy lives, to lead others to God, to engage in Holy Spirit-led worship in diverse languages, cultures and styles, to work for social justice, and to engage in the transforming mission of God to the world.

## The Freedoms



Not one of us walks through this broken world untouched by its consequences. From our own wrong decisions, to attitudes that trap our minds, to the way we've been treated by other people, we are all affected in ways we didn't want to be.

Some religious groups think that by living a life around a group of rules we can rise above this, but we believe that there is no way we make ourselves free, no matter what we do.

Instead we believe in a God who loves us so much that He himself bought our freedom. He gave His own life so that we could know His healing power in our lives and no longer be trapped by sin, fear or regret.

Because this salvation only comes through Jesus, this is

Good News! It is not dependent on who we are, what we have done or where we come from. It means that no one is excluded from receiving this freedom. Those who find faith in Christ are **SET FREE** to live for Him.

The Gospel is the Good News about the love of God to bring freedom to all people regardless of background, race, gender and socio-economics.



Being set free from the past is only the start of what we believe God has for us.

We believe the Word of God has power to change the trajectory of a person's life and to transform their mindset. It calls us to live life beyond the ordinary trappings of this world and into the freedom God originally intended for us.

By prioritising His will above our own, we are given access to

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His insight, His power and His purposes for our lives.

Through His great help we aim high for how we live. This means we throw off everything that holds us back from His perfect peace and joy. We believe all this is experienced more fully when we live them out together, so we build churches that connect and build one another up. The FM Churches become family, where we celebrate together, support one another and find our place in the mission God has given us to change the world.

The Holy Spirit transforms us so that however troubled our past may have been, we can **LIVE FREE**. By Christ's Spirit, all who trust in Him can start to live with a new passion and purpose.



*Bishop Matthew Thomas, Bishop, Free Methodist Church (1955 to present)*



*"Everything excellent. That's the way it was once, in the beginning. Nothing broken. Right now, God is working to make everything whole again. We are a part of his people, working under the leadership of the Holy Spirit to restore the world — making people and all creation whole. As a result, we see outbreaks of God's glory.*



## Multiplying Healthy Lives, Leaders and Churches

Free Methodists are keen to emulate the call of the first Methodist preachers who engaged in the breathtaking work of God that swept the nation at that time. Like them, **we are eager to rediscover a LIVING HOLINESS THAT IMPACTS LIVES AND COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE UK**

**AND IRELAND**, and wherever we are called to serve in this world. Disciples are made, healthy leadership encouraged, and small groups and various churches planted in order to fulfil this commission.



John Wesley's vision for the church in his day was to embody New Testament Christianity so vibrantly that it would affect everyone who came into contact with it, and we want the same for the 21st Century. **WE WANT FREE METHODISTS TO TEACH WHAT THE APOSTLES TAUGHT, TO LIVE AS PASSIONATELY AS THEY LIVED IN THEIR GENERATION, AND TO SERVE THE GREAT MISSION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** To do this we uncompromisingly centre everything around the Bible, the Holy Spirit and life-transforming mission.

Our aims are:

## To Teach What the Apostles Taught

We believe the Bible is God's inspired Word. The Bible directs what we believe and the way we live. We are committed to keeping the Gospel message clear. Therefore, we believe that

- All people are sinners by nature and practice
- All people can be saved because Jesus Christ died for all people, not just for some. His death is sufficient for all who respond in faith to Him
- Christians can know they are saved through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit offers them assurance that God is their Father
- All Christians can be set free from guilt, and from the power of sin, in order to live peaceful lives that radiate the love of Christ.

Therefore, we are committed to living in harmony with the Free Methodist Articles of Religion - See Paragraphs 100-131, pages 9-27 of 2019 Book of Discipline.

## To live as vitally as the early church lived in their generation

- We need to be filled with the Spirit, who leads us in His love and power. The Spirit lives within us, transforming us step by step to become more like Jesus in our daily lives
- Living life in the Spirit means we are empowered to serve in the church as well as in the community. We are eager to "throw off all that hinders" us from living holy lives. We embrace actions and values that cultivate the Christian life. The Spirit overflows through us, bringing God's goodness to others.

Therefore, we are committed to live in harmony with our Membership Covenant which expresses God-given principles that shape our everyday lives. NOTE: These principles are stated plurally because we value this expression of community holiness. We recognise the need to belong to a church family who support one another and hold each other to account. See Paragraphs 154-160, pages 19-21 of 2019 Book of Discipline.

## To Undertake the Great Mission of the Kingdom of God

o Jesus commissioned his disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Their mission remains our mission. We continue to raise healthy communities locally, nationally and globally as life-long followers of Jesus. These people are equipped to help others know and follow Christ

Our mission is to make disciples who are able to make disciples. Everything, from the appointing of pastors to the organisational structures and methods, should serve this purpose. Free Methodists value making disciples, following New Testament Christian lifestyles, and living in the Spirit, over structure, style or method.

The Free Methodist Church ordains pastors for ministry and appoints them to their spheres of service, in consultation with the pastors and representatives of local churches. (We understand that in New Testament times those who oversaw the local church were appointed by Apostolic leaders. They were not appointed by the local congregation). Free Methodist pastors are accountable to the Free Methodist Church. Their character and conduct are reviewed annually.

In order to worship God, strengthen the church and undertake this mission, Free Methodist pastors endeavour to live in harmony with their ordination vows.



*Rev Allan Ellershaw  
Former Free Methodist Superintendent  
and National Leader UK*

*“The Free Methodist Church is a body of dedicated Christians committed to the will of God as revealed in the Bible, Wesleyan in doctrine and practice, who consider themselves to be members of the body of Christ in this world. The Free Methodist Church is committed to developing and maintaining congregations characterised by understanding, forgiveness, mutual discipline and assistance. They view local churches as mission outposts. Pastors are appointed not just to local congregations and buildings, but to the evangelisation of whole communities, towns or cities. They believe the destitute and disenfranchised of the world deserve particular care and any individual can become a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ.*”

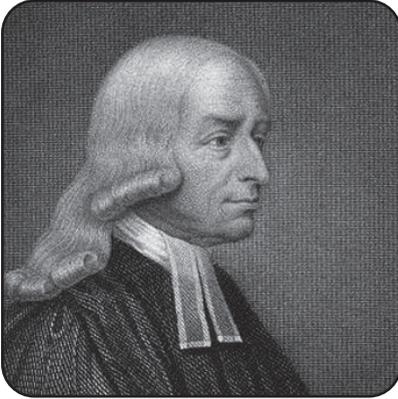
*The Free Methodist Church recognises no geographic, social, racial or cultural limitations on Christ’s command to preach the gospel of redemption and to share his message of wholeness. They are called to introduce all people to Jesus Christ. This includes the inner city, the countryside, villages and the market places of the world.”*



**CONNECT**  
**BELONG**  
**ENGAGE**



## 2. HOW DO WE FIND OUR PLACE IN THE FREE METHODIST STORY?



### Connecting with a Great Story

We believe God is the author of the Free Methodist Church.

Methodism first arrived in England in the 18th century. John Wesley said that he believed this work of God occurred with the great purpose to

**“reform the nation, and in particular the church; to spread Scriptural holiness over the land.”**

May 24th 1738, following Wesley’s Aldersgate experience, he began to preach **justification by faith** to all who would listen. From 1739 until his death 52 years later it is estimated that Wesley travelled some 225,000 miles and preached over 40,000 times, sometimes to crowds of over 20,000. At the time of his death there were 72,000 Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland, as well as a Methodist church in America of around 75,000 members.

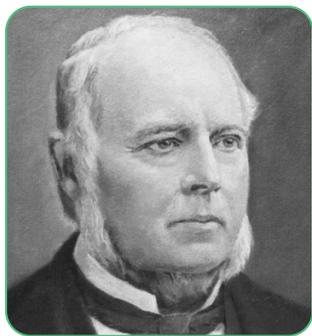
Wesley’s epitaph was written in 1791. It can be found on his grave in London. It reads,

**“THIS PLACE MADE SACRED BY THE MORTAL REMAINS OF THE VENERABLE APOSTOLIC WESLEY. THIS GREAT LIGHT AROSE BY THE SINGULAR PROVIDENCE OF GOD TO ENLIGHTEN THESE NATIONS AND TO REVIVE, ENFORCE AND DEFEND THE PURE APOSTOLIC DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH.”**

It is important to note that John Wesley's great quest was not to establish a new church, but to see New Testament Christianity restored to the land of his birth. He did this by reviving, enforcing and defending the apostolic message and promoting the principles of the life of the early church. This desire to seek to be a New Testament church is at the heart of the present day Free Methodist life and story.

## **In 1860, the Free Methodist Church in the USA was formed.**

Church historians note that as Christianity moves with the centuries it tends to drift from the founding principles of the New Testament church. God then calls a prophet to lead a restoration or reformation, to call us back to focus on the main thing. These reforms lead, not to the reformation of the original group, but to the organisation of a new movement in order to reignite the Biblical witness that had been renounced or neglected.



Consider the story of **Mr Benjamin Titus Roberts**, born July 1823. In 1848, Roberts became a minister in the Methodist Church in America. Churches flourished under his ministry and revival broke out. Roberts, however, became increasingly concerned by the worldliness invading the church. He wrote an article entitled "New School Methodism." Roberts expressed concern that many ministers of the day had no

time for the holiness message and old-style holiness preaching. He wrote:

**“OLD SCHOOL METHODISTS RELY UPON THE AGENCY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH. NEW SCHOOL METHODISTS APPEARED TO DEPEND ON THE PATRONAGE OF THE WORLDLY, THE FAVOURS OF THE PROUD, AND THE ARTIFICES OF WORLDLY POLICY.”**

This article provoked a reaction which led to the establishment of the **Free Methodist Church at Pekin, New York, 23rd August 1860**. The new movement saw themselves as Methodists because they embraced the Biblical message and the lifestyle of the early Methodists (that is, the desire for New Testament Christianity). The title 'Free' was chosen to emphasise the desire to see:

	Freedom of the Holy Spirit in worship		Freedom for all slaves
Freedom from secret societies		Free seats for all, especially the poor	
Freedom for all, that is, clergy and laity, men and women to lead and serve as they follow Jesus' call			

BTRoberts was a writer, publisher, Christian educator and holiness preacher who responded to God's call with a courageous faith. He was, in a sense, the John Wesley of his generation.

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## How Free Methodism Came to the UK

Pastor Lyle Wesley Northrup, a Free Methodist evangelist from the USA, arrived in Belfast in the 1960s. This visit led to a vision for the future of the Free Methodist Church in the UK.



*Rev Victor Trinder,  
Free Methodist Superintendent UK*

*“The prospect and opportunities Northrup so enthusiastically communicated to the Commission on Evangelism, generated for the work in Belfast an impetus which opened the door for unprecedented growth in Northern Ireland and eventually to the new church constituency in England.”*

As the church in Northern Ireland grew, so did the connection between Rev Victor Trinder (from Ireland) and Rev Ron Taylor (from England). They met at the Southport International Revival Convention, where they discussed the Free Methodist church at a critical time for Methodists in the Northwest of England, between September 1970 and September 1971.

In the late 1960's many Methodists became concerned about the growth of radical theology among senior leaders. The supreme authority of Scripture was being undermined. Challenges were made against many New Testament doctrines. Spiritual experiences were being dismissed as outdated and irrelevant.

Until 1970, evangelicals within the Methodist Church felt that, as their church began with an evangelical revival and, as John Wesley's sermons and notes on the New Testament had been part of the official doctrinal foundations, they held the "title deeds" of the denomination. God spoke to the people from Esther 4:14:

“FOR IF YOU REMAIN SILENT AT THIS TIME, RELIEF AND DELIVERANCE FOR THE JEWS WILL ARISE FROM ANOTHER PLACE, BUT YOU AND YOUR FATHER’S FAMILY WILL PERISH. AND WHO KNOWS BUT THAT YOU HAVE COME TO ROYAL POSITION FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS.”

Evangelicals within the Methodist Church had a difficult decision to make. Either they would remain within Methodism and work for reform, or they would leave. Rev F B Mitchell, Rev R Taylor and Rev J B Walton, after much prayer, chose to leave. Then, rather than establish independent congregations, they decided to link up with the Free Methodist Church of North America.



*Rev Frank B. Mitchell*

*“Small groups often purchase doctrinal purity at the price of becoming ‘orphan’ churches, and they withdraw into cultural backwaters out of touch with society around . . . John Wesley’s original vision of a faith that embraced the affections as well as the intellect, emphasised scriptural holiness and social righteousness, along with its insistence that ‘the world was his parish’, drew this group of Methodists to link up with the world-wide Free Methodist Church.”*

J B Walton, reflecting on those early days, believed Free Methodists were called to be:

- Saturated with God
- True to the Scriptures
- Powerful in prayer
- Led by the Holy Spirit
- Winning the lost



Rev J B Walton  
Free Methodist Superintendent

*“We all believe that this was and is God’s will for us. We long that our successors should be absolutely true to the Word of God, and to walk at all times in the Spirit. We would rather that these churches cease to exist than they become empty shells of traditionalism, or dent, either by ignorance or by choice, the Word of God or the doctrines of the Free Methodist Church as they stand, as we accept them.”*

It is clear that all who are known as “Free Methodist” are called by God to live the “Great Story.” We hold true to Scripture and undertake a life-transforming mission in the power of the Spirit. Those who are considering belonging to the Free Methodist movement will recognise the

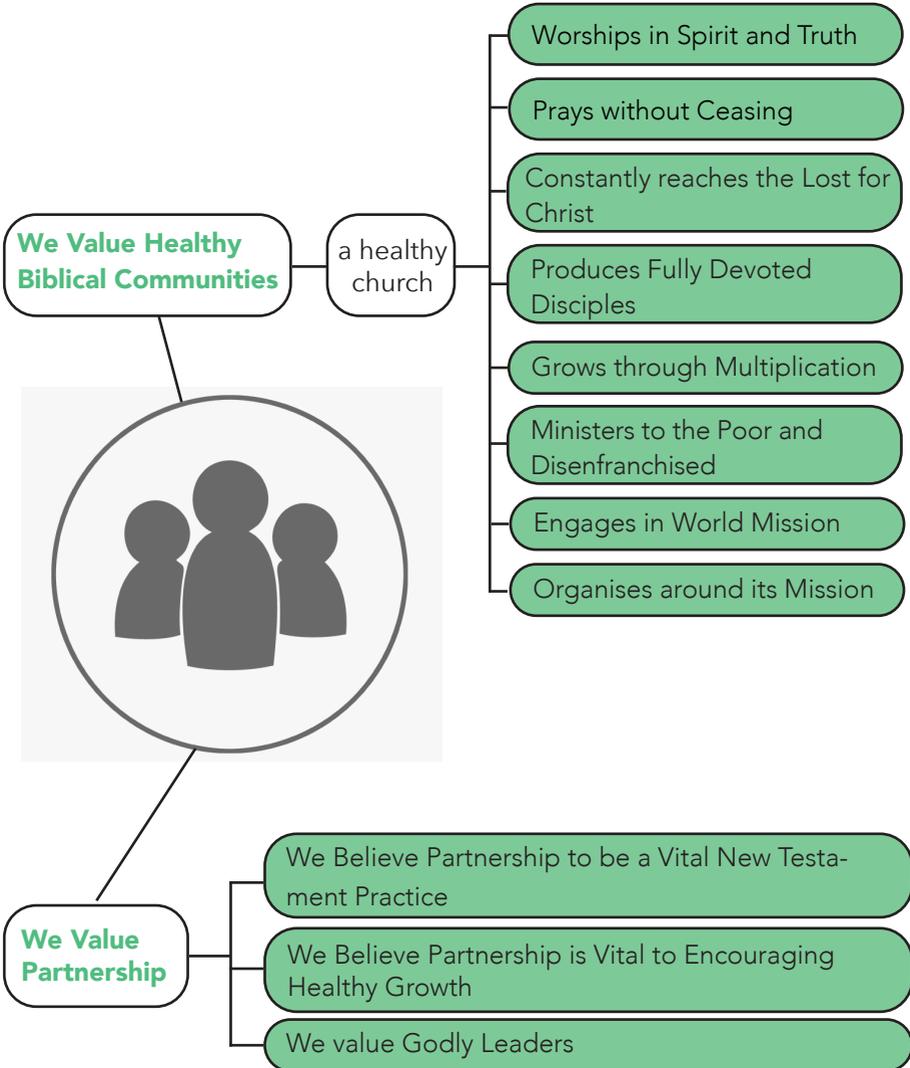
spiritual heritage  
from which  
others can draw

family network  
to which others  
can belong

calling which  
others can help  
to fulfil

# Belonging to a Great Community

The Free Methodist Church is a growing, global family with over 15,200 churches throughout 90 countries. Partnerships between churches in different countries are constantly strengthening, enabling individuals and groups to enlarge their worldview of what God is doing in the world.







## **A Healthy Church Grows through Multiplication**

Churches ought to see disciples, leaders, groups and congregations reproduced. Disciples produce disciples, leaders produce leaders, groups produce groups and congregations produce congregations. To assume that only evangelists and teachers produce disciples or that districts plant churches is to miss the power of the reproductive nature of the local body of Christ.

## **A Healthy Church Ministers to the Poor and Disenfranchised**

The poor see the gospel demonstrated to them by word and deed. This was one of the marks of the ministry of Jesus and the early church. It follows that the destitute and disenfranchised deserve our particular care. People who feel disconnected with society because of their condition, ethnicity or status need to hear and see the Good News of God's grace.





## 2. We Value Partnership



### **We Believe Partnership to be a Vital New Testament Practice**

The New Testament church clearly had a leadership structure (Acts 15:6; 20:17; 1 Tim 3), and a form of 'membership' from which, in certain circumstances people could be excluded (Matt 18:15-19; 1 Cor 5:9-11). Leaders were appointed in churches (Titus 1:5) and this could only be either by each leadership group selecting successors or by being chosen by the church members. Even in the New Testament Church where the apostles had been chosen directly by the Lord Himself, there was the example of some leaders (including Stephen) who were chosen by 'the whole congregation' (Acts 6:5). Having an official and clear membership clarifies who is eligible to be a part of this process.

## **We Believe Partnership is Vital to Encouraging Healthy Growth**

John Wesley believed that those who were serious about their salvation would demonstrate their commitment to Christ by the lifestyle they adopted. He developed three standards by which members in early Methodist communities (known as “societies”) sought to show their desire for salvation. By committing to these three standards, faith was deepened and sustained:

### **THREE STANDARDS**

“By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind.”

“By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as possible, to all people . . .”

“By attending all the ordinances of God, such as public worship, ministry of the Word, the Lord’s Supper, family and private prayer, searching the Scriptures, fasting and abstinence.”

The New Testament pattern of repentance, faith and baptism form the essential requirements of those who are ready to become partners in the Free Methodist Church. Our expectation is that partners will, with the encouragement of the church and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, grow in grace and Christian maturity, and serve according to the gifts and graces God gives each one.

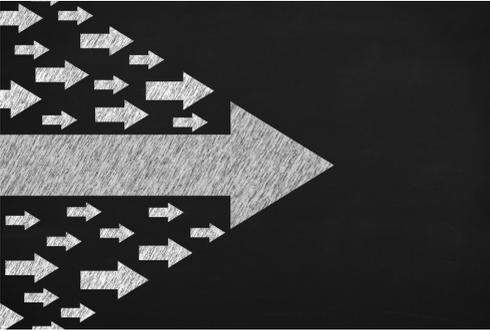
Belonging to a local church is an invaluable aid to discipleship, whether that is called 'membership' or 'partnership'. All Christians belong to God's church, whether they choose to take a formal step of commitment to their local church or not. However, Free Methodists encourage one another to consider making a commitment of dedicated partnership.

This means that an individual has decided to be accountable to the church, affirming that they intend to follow Christ all their lives, and that they agree with the Christian ethos of the local church. In effect, they declare their love for the people in their church, showing their intent to serve God together with them. This involves answering five partnership questions:

1. Do you have the assurance that God has forgiven your sins through faith in Jesus Christ?
2. Do you believe the Bible is God's written word, uniquely inspired by the Holy Spirit, and do you accept its authority for what you believe and how you live?
3. Do you resolve, by God's grace, to be Christ-like in heart and life, opening yourself fully to the cleansing and empowering ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance of the Scriptures, and the nurture and fellowship of the church?
4. Do you accept the Free Methodist Articles of Religion, Membership Covenant and principles for the lives of its members and the governance of the church?
5. As a follower of Jesus Christ, will you embrace the mission of the Free Methodist Church, within and beyond this congregation and will you join us in giving sacrificially of your time, talents and resources to help us carry out that mission?

By wholeheartedly committing to our local church, we are saying that we can't go it alone. The Christian life is far more than a simple "me and Jesus" view of life. We need the family of God in order to commit, grow, and develop ministry within and without the church building.

## We Value Godly Leaders



We believe that great leadership is essential in order to see the Kingdom of God come here on earth. In His Word, God raised up people to be leaders in order for His people to take new ground and to equip believers to do His work.

Experienced leaders with a servant heart are vital to any great community.

The leadership of the **LOCAL CHURCH** is usually composed of a pastor (or more than one pastor), as well as paid or lay leaders, who may work with youth, or as evangelists or other roles as required.

It is crucial that the leaders are people of spiritual depth. They must hold Scripture in high regard. They must be open to the person and work of the Holy Spirit. They must long to see communities impacted by the transforming love of Christ.

The Scriptures offer guidance to those in leadership. Leadership positions should be filled by members who:

- Live consistently according to the Bible's expectations for leaders (Ex 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Tim 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9)
- Express Christlike attitudes in life and in relationships (Matt 20:26-28, Jn 15:12-17, Acts 6:1-7 and Eph 4:1-17)
- Live in harmony with the membership covenant
- Model values of belonging, such as generosity in time, gifts and resources
- Live courageously, exercising obedient faith
- To live in private what they profess or teach in public

## The National Leadership Team (NLT) and the Annual Conference

The Free Methodist Church is a connexional church with shared beliefs and values, in which local churches are encouraged to link up, to work together and support one another.

Each church selects leaders from among those members/partners who are recognised to have the gifts and graces required. These leaders work alongside their appointed pastor to develop the life and ministry of the church in its community.

Each church selects a delegate to work alongside the ordained ministers at the "Annual Conference." The Annual Conference is an organisational term for the way the Free Methodist work



is overseen in a region. Currently, the UK holds one Annual Conference to oversee the whole of the UK. However, as we grow numerically, it is likely that a second Annual Conference will be added. Church representatives would only attend the one for their area.

The Annual Conference assists churches by offering practical advice, encouraging the development of vision, and developing leadership pathways including ordination. It continually invests in, and cares for, pastors. It provides a national website, leadership hub and social media presence.

The Annual Conference appoints ministers to churches for an indefinite period. This is done with much prayer and consultation between the pastors, church delegates and lay people. As far

as possible, this ensures appointments are in line with God's will. The Annual Conference supports church leadership teams during periods of vacancy until a new pastor is appointed.

The work of the Free Methodist Church in the UK is overseen by the National Leadership Team (NLT). This team is elected by the Annual Conference to serve the denomination for a four-year period.

## **The General Conference**

The NLT are supported by a Bishop from the "General Conference." The Free Methodist Church UK is currently connected to the Free Methodist Church in the USA so, every four years, pastors and delegates attend the General Conference in the USA. This conference deals with doctrinal and moral concerns raised by the churches. It elects a number of bishops to oversee the work in different regions of the world. If the Free Methodist church in the UK were to grow significantly, it would be possible to become a General Conference in its own right.

The combination of local leaders and regional and national leaders has New Testament precedence. In New Testament times, most leaders were selected from within the congregation, but some - such as Timothy and Titus - were appointed to oversee new congregations. They were appointed by the Apostles who exercised an itinerant ministry.

We value working together. In times of need, believers in one congregation may be asked to help meet the needs of another congregation. Also, individual churches are not expected to iron out major doctrinal issues in isolation, because this important work is undertaken by the General and World Conferences to which individual churches send representatives. (see Acts 15)



## Engaging In the Life of the Church

As the Free Methodist Church in the UK and Ireland pursues the vision of 100 churches and more by 2034, this will lead to new ministries in new locations throughout the land. All churches and communities have different needs and opportunities.



By building and growing churches which focus on discipleship (ie Becoming more like Jesus), the Free Methodist Church equips people to continue to walk in freedom. By the power of the Holy Spirit inside each believer, people can be released into a truly joyful life and discover how their gifts can change the world around them. Local churches are missional outposts that reach into their communities, towns and society itself in order to be agents of grace and change.

In response to the Great Commission of Jesus to 'Go and make disciples of all nations,' the Free Methodist church desires to connect, equip and inspire each person to know God and to make Him known. It recognises that no one can fulfil this commission alone and is therefore dedicated to building effective churches and meaningful partnerships with others who share this passion, so we may support one another and ensure that the Word of God is communicated rightly and effectively.

### **We best discover our gifts with our local church family**

Belonging to our local church enables us to use our gifts to benefit those around us. We do this not to enhance our own reputation or status, but solely for the benefit of others. Spiritual gifts are given to each of us through the Holy Spirit and are given for building one another up. Every person has a valuable contribution to bring to the Body of Christ and should seek and nurture these gifts with love and wisdom. Through these acts of service God is glorified and people understand more fully the freedom they have been called into.

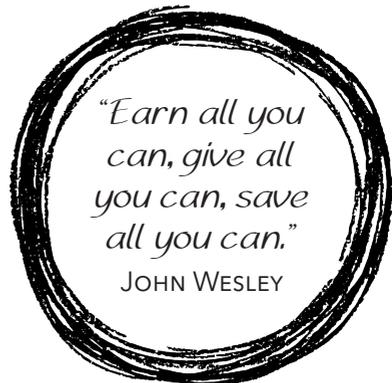
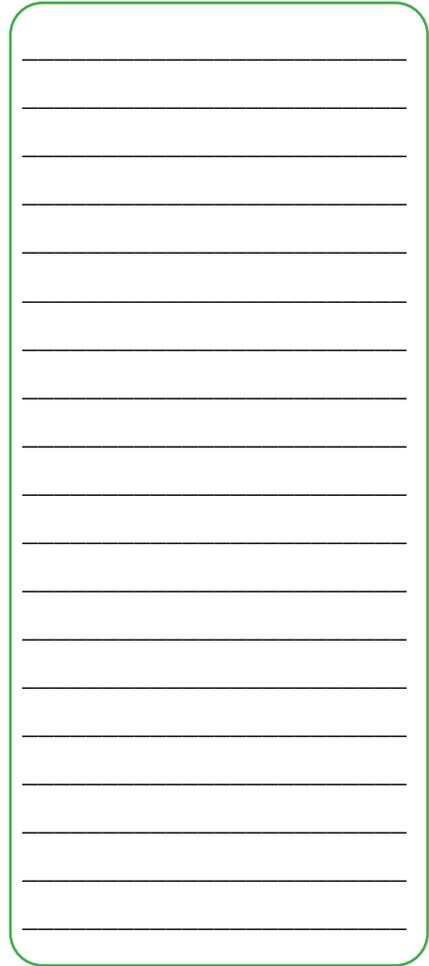
## Including

The Good News of Jesus is for all people everywhere. Together we create a place of welcome for our community. In the various ministries, from weekdays to weekends, formal or informal, at home or away, we make it our aim to encourage all to belong, and to know God's love for themselves.

Every man, woman and child with a living faith, who lives in harmony with the vision, values and call of God in the Free Methodist Church is free to pioneer new church plants, to engage in ministries that help people find freedom in Christ, to lead and to serve, and to impact their community for the good of many.

## Investing

We can give our time, gifts and resources generously. The modern age encourages us to pursue our own interests and the small stories of our own lives. However, Free Methodists are called to live simpler lives, being content with less in order to live a life that is "rich towards God." John Wesley said "Earn all you can, give all you can, save all you can." Those that









Set free - Living free - Bringing freedom