

# Free Churches Group

## 2013 ANNUAL REPORT



***"I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly"***

***John 10:10b***

The Free Churches Group is a network of 24 denominations in the Non-Conformist, Evangelical and Pentecostal traditions providing health care and prison chaplaincy services and education support from a Christian value base in England and Wales. It serves as the operational arm of The Free Church Federal Council Incorporated, a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee (Company No. 00364987, Charity Registered No. 236878) established in 1940.

# 1 YEAR UNDER REVIEW – SOME REFLECTIONS

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The past year has been one of on-going transition and challenge for the Free Churches Group (FCG) as the separation of our office and financial administration from that of Churches Together in England (CTE) was concluded and the FCG has endeavoured to reposition itself as an independent charity to enable the distinct voice of the Free Churches to be raised within the contested space of the public square. This has required considerable reflection and discussion on our identity, core purpose, vision and values and public benefit objects by all key stakeholders – staff, directors and member churches – and remains very much a matter of work-in-progress.

This has required a strategic review of the FCG which has involved embarking on a revision of the Memorandum and Articles of Association (M&A) of the Free Church Federal Council, our membership structure and criteria, our key relationships and who we seek to influence, our communication strategy and our branding as an organisation now independent from CTE. All of this work is on-going and will be prioritised in the year ahead to enable a fully revised M&A to be presented to member churches for adoption at the 2015 Annual General Meeting.

This review process has enabled us to clarify *who* we are (our identity and guiding values), *what* we do (our strategic priorities), and *how* we plan to deliver these (our strategy) which are summarized in the Strategic Plan which is to be presented to the Group meeting in September for ratification. This repositioning has been taking place within a context of continuing change in the ecclesial, religious and cultural landscape of England and Wales which has posed both challenges and opportunities for the FCG.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges and opportunities of navigating this ‘three-dimensional’ landscape in a post-Christendom context were outlined in a discussion paper of Free Church Ecclesiology presented to the Group residential meeting in Birmingham in May (which has been posted on our website with other documents from this residential). This paper makes the bold claim that a Free Church ecclesiology is best suited to navigate this complex landscape based on our historic commitment to the principles of religious freedom, equality and social justice and our focus on the transforming power of the Gospel and the primacy of the local church rooted within communities across the length and breadth of England and Wales.

However, it also asserts that in order to grasp this opportunity, the historic Free Churches and newer members need to recover a confidence in the Gospel in order to respond to the daunting challenges within the communities we serve on the basis of our conviction of the wisdom, grace and truth that is found in Jesus Christ. This conviction, in turn, provides the basis for our engagement in the public square in a way that is faithful, hopeful and loving and forms the framework for the new strapline we have adopted for the FCG – ***Promoting Faithful Witness in the Public Square.***

We believe that the ministry of Free Church Chaplains in the Health Care and Prison Services and the engagement by members of our churches serving on Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education (SACRE) provides a compelling example of such *faithful witness* and a brief update will be provided later in this report on the achievements and challenges of our three core programmes.

## 2 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OVER THE PAST YEAR

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Key achievements over the past year include:

### 2.1 OVERSIGHT AND REFURBISHMENT OF TAVISTOCK SQUARE PROPERTY

Based on a review of the key purpose and support functions of the FCG Office for staff and member churches, the directors reversed their decision to relocate the office to Northampton at their meeting in November last year. This decision has meant that the FCG have resumed oversight of the historic FCFC property at 27 Tavistock Square, London from CTE who remain a tenant with substantially reduced office space for the moment. As the primary tenant now responsible for the management and maintenance of this property we have successfully renegotiated contracts for all the utilities and services, refurbished all the office and meeting room space and have commenced actively marketing the vacant office space and our meeting rooms to other charities and churches to maximise the income from this important asset that has been bequeathed to us by the FCFC. This has been a time-consuming but necessary task and we are now well poised to maximise the use and benefit of this property to give expression to both our stewardship and mission responsibilities as a charitable company going forward.

### 2.2 STAFF DEVELOPMENTS

- 2.2.1 **FCG Education Officer** – the outcome of the Review of the Post of Education Officer conducted by a review group of CTE and FCG members was the transfer of the Education Officer, Ms. Sarah Lane-Cawte, from a CTE to a FCG employment contract with effect from the end of the financial year. This was based on a decision by the directors at their meeting in November last year where they received the final recommendations from the review group and affirmed the importance of maintaining and strengthening a Free Church Voice on Education in the midst of the rapid changes in education policy by the current Government. Although Sarah is now employed as the FCG Education Officer, the directors agreed that she could continue to provide the resources for Education Sunday for CTE which will be badged as both CTE and FCG resources in future and to represent both FCG and the wider CTE constituency at meetings of the Religious Council and other education structures on which she is represented. Our love, prayer and sympathies go out to Sarah at this very painful period of her life following the death of her husband, Mark after a lengthy struggle with cancer on the 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.
- 2.2.2 **FCG Office Administration** – a part-time Administrator, Ms. Thandar Tun, was appointed on the 1<sup>st</sup> April on a four-day- a-week basis to provide administrative support to the Secretaries for Health Care and Prison Chaplaincy and financial administration for the FCG office. Thandar replaces Edith Steele who was performing some of these duties until this time and has provided a helpful and efficient resource to the FCG Secretariat. She is currently serving her probation period which will be reviewed at the end of September. Ms. Sabina Williams continues to work for two days a week and provides admin support for the Education Officer and acts as the PA to the General Secretary. Mr. Stephen Cutler continues to serve as the part-time Finance Manager for the FCG (a role he also performs for CTE and CTBI).

2.2.3 **Team Development** – it is pleasing to report that the FCG staff now operate as an effective team with each member contributing on the basis of their particular strengths and sustainable preferences within the team. This has witnessed effective management and oversight of the office been established, good practice utilised in the development of our new logo and website and collaborative working in developing a joint workplan based on strategic objectives, a communication strategy and working across programmes to develop values based approach to our work. This approach has provided a solid foundation for moving forward and a process for team achievement for the FCG Secretariat working in partnership with the FCG Directors and our member churches.

## 2.3 REBRANDING OF THE FCG

Another key achievement has been the successful rebranding of the FCG based on a new logo and strapline and we are currently in the process of developing a new website which will be launched later this year. This followed the production of a design brief developed by Revd Bob Wilson which asked companies to bid for the design of our new logo based on the information provided. Endis, a leading church web design company, were duly appointed and produced the logo in consultation with the staff, directors and Group members. This simple, flat design reflects our engagement in the public square from our Christian value base in a clear and unambiguous way and Endis have also been appointed to develop our new website which will be launched in November. We then plan to host an official re-launch of the FCG at a ceremony at our offices early on **Wednesday, 17<sup>th</sup> December** this year which will include a service of thanksgiving and dedication followed by a Christmas celebration.

# 3 OVERVIEW OF FCG PROGRAMMES

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## 3.1 EDUCATION

Key outputs for the past year have included the development of a FCG response to Higher Education and the organising and running of a one day Education Conference with specialist input from key note speakers and workshop leaders to inspire, motivate and encourage the Free Churches engagement in Education.

3.1.1 **Higher Education** – the given task is set-out in an updated paper of the Free Church Education Committee (FCEC) headed ‘Proposals for Higher and Further Education’ as follows:

- To undertake a scoping exercise to discern the most effective areas of engagement by the Free Churches with HE.
- To explore existing projects and initiatives in which the Free Churches are involved and identify good practice.
- To reflect theologically on the issues involved for the Free Churches regarding HE
- To build capacity amongst the Free Churches to support HE.
- To build up the HE presence on the Free Church Education Committee.

Letters written to the leaders and relevant officers of member denominations setting out the purpose of the group and asking for nominations of people to join the HE working group received a positive response and a highly competent group of people with knowledge and experience of different spheres of HE and different roles within it, detailed knowledge of HE policy, theological acumen and Free Church faith and experience is due to meet in November to take this project forward under the chairmanship of Dr Stephen Heap.

- 3.1.2 **Faithful and Free Conference** – after extensive planning and organising by the Free Church Education Committee a final programme, date and venue for the Education Conference due to take place at the Church at Carrs Lane in Birmingham on the 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2014 was confirmed and widely publicised via FCG networks, church media and other contacts. Sadly, despite wide publicity and numerous reminder to member churches to publicise this event, only 20 registrations had been received by the end of August leading to the difficult decision to cancel this conference by Julie Grove the Chair of the FCEC. This was bitterly disappointing to all concerned and for Sarah in particular who had put enormous time and energy into planning and organising this conference. A review of this conference will be conducted in due course to seek to identify the reasons for the low take-up and a report submitted to the directors.

## 3.2 HEALTH CARE CHAPLAINCY

The HCC programme has realised a number of positive outcomes over the past year which have served to reinforce the highly credible and positive profile that the FCG has gained in NHS England and Health Care Trusts. These include:

- Oversight and financial management of the NHS England Chaplaincy Project for financial year 2014-15, building on our work in year 2013-14.
- Revision of the Department of Health 2003 Chaplaincy Guidelines setting out principals for the pastoral, spiritual and religious care of patients and staff
- On-going support of chaplains through regional meetings now including the South-west.
- Working with the Healthcare Chaplaincy Faith and Belief Group developed a new course 'Starting out in chaplaincy'.
- Key presentation given at the College of Health Care Chaplains Annual Conference
- Publication of a 'Model of Health Care Chaplaincy' in Health and social care.
- Commissioned and in the process of writing a chapter for a book and developments and research in health care chaplaincy

## 3.3 PRISON CHAPLAINCY

The profile of the FCG has continued to be raised within NOMS of which the Secretary for Prison Chaplaincy (SfPC) serves as a faith advisor. This key relationship has been firmed up this year through ongoing participation in the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Council, ex-officio membership of the Chaplain General of the SfPC Steering Group, and regular meetings with NOMS Chaplaincy HQ Advisors. Key outputs over the past year include:

- Endorsement of 24 Chaplains from 10 different Free Churches' denominations / groupings.

- Ongoing visits and communications to pastorally support FC Chaplains through difficult transitional times within the Prison Service and support Managing Chaplains in their recruitment of new or replacement FC Chaplains.
- Engagement with Prisons Week Development team, this year including co-ordination of
  - Launch event at Westminster Central Hall
  - Prayer materials for Churches and Prisons
  - Two events focused on engaging Black Majority churches more specifically in prison ministry (an academic symposium, and service of challenge / thanksgiving)
- Working with Regents College, Malvern to develop MTh in Applied Theology modules (Practical Chaplaincy Development, and Christian Ministry in an Institutional Context)
- Development of SfPC Steering group including (as above) invitation to Chaplain General to attend as an ex-officio member
- Ongoing Social Network based communications to support and challenge FC Chaplains and those interested in this ministry
- National Broadcasting opportunities realized through interviews on BBCR2 and UCB. Press Release relating to concerns over increased suicide rates published in Baptist Times.
- Preparation for 1<sup>st</sup> FCG National two day Free Church Chaplains Training Conference to be held at the Prison Service Training Establishment, Newbold Revel
- Recruitment for role of PT Development Co-ordinator (1 year contract) to begin to give impetus to “Welcome Directory / Yellow Ribbon” project.

## 4 CONCLUDING COMMENTS

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In summary, the past year has been both a productive and challenging year for the FCG. Our public profile in the Health Care and Prison Services and Education sector continues to be enhanced and strengthened by the strategic and diplomatic engagement of our Executive Staff. Their conscientious and strategic engagement in these State institutions has served to enlarge our sphere of influence and provide a credible testimony of faithful Christian witness in the public square. This is carried out day in and out by the many hundreds of Free Church chaplains and SACRE members serving God faithfully in difficult places for which we join in giving thanks and praise to God!

After two years of transition and change, the FCG is now well positioned to begin to consolidate and build on its rich heritage and foundation to continue to promote faithful witness in the public square amidst the many challenges facing faith and society in England and Wales at the moment.

**Frank Kantor**  
**General Secretary**  
**September 2014**



## **MEMBER CHURCHES**

Assemblies of God - Baptist Union of Great Britain - Baptist Union of Wales – Christ Apostolic Church - Churches in Communities International – Church of God of Prophecy - Church of the Nazarene – Congregational Federation - Council of African & Caribbean Churches UK - Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion - Fellowship of Churches of Christ - Free Church of England - Free Methodist Church - Independent Methodist Churches - Methodist Church - Moravian Church - New Testament Assembly - New Testament Church of God - Old Baptist Union - Presbyterian Church of Wales - Salvation Army - Union of Welsh Independents - United Reformed Church - Wesleyan Reform Union

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

Free Churches Group  
27 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HH  
t. 0203 651 8334/8  
w. [freechurches.org.uk](http://freechurches.org.uk)

*Free Church Federal Council (Inc) trading as The Free Churches Group  
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