

Market Overton
Free Church

Church Issues

**An outline of how we seek to
conduct our church life**

March 2010

**MARKET OVERTON
FREE CHURCH
(MOFC)**

is part of the

Rutland and District Evangelical Trust
Registered Charity 1063820

The purpose of the Rutland and District Evangelical Trust is:
öTo establish an Independent church or churches and/or for the advancement of the Christian Faith, for the advancement of education, for the relief of poverty, and for other charitable purposes beneficial to the community.ö

**MOFC is affiliated to the
Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)**

MOFC is a church committed to glorifying God
by speaking and living the good news of Jesus Christ among
people in the Rutland area and
supporting others doing the same
across the region, the nation,
and the world

This booklet has been prepared with the purpose of letting you know what we believe and how we seek to conduct the work and business of
Market Overton Free Church.

As a church we believe that some things are really essential and these are contained in the Statement of Faith on pages 2 and 3.

Other matters are of importance to us and these are set out in the rest of the booklet.

We recognise that other Christians may not agree with all these things, but we aim to explain why they matter and what difference they make in the life of Market Overton Free Church.

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INTRODUCTION.

History of Market Overton Free Church (MOFC)

In September 1995 a number of Christians living in the area began to meet each Sunday morning in the Market Overton Village Hall for worship. This new church was supported by a number of other churches in the East Midlands, with Holywell Free Church, Loughborough, and Bethel Free Church, Wigston, providing particular help. In 2001 the church affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC), which is a group of around 500 similar churches across the UK. In October 2001 the first minister, Rev. Peter Rush, was appointed.

What is a Free Church?

Historically the term is used to describe any non-Anglican Protestant church. We use the title with that meaning and to emphasise that we are free of state control, free of control by popes, bishops or synods, and so free to be self-governing, which we believe is the New Testament pattern for church life. Hence we belong to a fellowship of Independent churches.

As a Protestant church we stand in the tradition established at the Reformation, which we believe was a rediscovery of true Christianity. Hence we belong to a group of Evangelical churches who proclaim the good news (ævangelø) of salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. This message is revealed in the Bible, which is the only source for our beliefs and practices. While we are glad to stand in this historic Reformed tradition we do not stand still, but seek to apply these great truths in a contemporary way in the modern world.

Mission statement

MOFC is a church committed to glorifying God by speaking and living the good news of Jesus Christ among people in the Rutland area and supporting others doing the same across the region, the nation, and the world.

For our relationship with other churches please refer to the FIEC statement on ecumenism in Appendix 1

STATEMENT OF FAITH

(FIEC Basis of Faith)

1. God

There is one God, who exists eternally in three distinct but equal persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is unchangeable in his holiness, justice, wisdom and love. He is the almighty Creator, Saviour and Judge who sustains and governs all things according to his sovereign will for his own glory.

2. The Bible

God has revealed himself in the Bible, which consists of the Old and New Testaments alone. Every word was inspired by God through human authors, so that the Bible as originally given is in its entirety the word of God, without error and fully reliable in fact and doctrine. The Bible alone speaks with final authority and is always sufficient for all matters of belief and practice.

3. The Human Race

All men and women, being created in the image of God, have inherent and equal dignity and worth. Their greatest purpose is to obey, worship and love God. As a result of the fall of our first parents, every aspect of human nature has been corrupted and all men and women are without spiritual life, guilty sinners and hostile to God. Every person is therefore under the just condemnation of God and needs to be born again, forgiven and reconciled to God in order to know and please him.

4. The Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin, and lived a sinless life in obedience to the Father. He taught with authority and all his words are true. On the cross he died in the place of sinners, bearing God's punishment for their sin, redeeming them by his blood. He rose from the dead and in his resurrection body ascended to heaven where he is exalted as Lord of all. He intercedes for his people in the presence of the Father.

5. Salvation

Salvation is entirely a work of God's grace and cannot be earned or deserved. It has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ and is offered to all in the gospel. God in his love forgives sinners whom he calls, granting them repentance and faith. All who believe in Christ are justified by faith alone, adopted into the family of God and receive eternal life.

6. The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven to glorify Christ and to apply his work of salvation. He convicts sinners, imparts spiritual life and gives a true understanding of

the Scriptures. He indwells all believers, brings assurance of salvation and produces increasing likeness to Christ. He builds up the church in fellowship with God and empowers its members for worship, service and mission.

7. The Church

The universal church is the body of which Christ is the head and to which all who are saved belong. It is made visible in local churches, which are congregations of believers who are committed to each other for the worship of God, the preaching of the word, the administering of baptism and the Lord's Supper, for pastoral care and discipline, and for evangelism. The unity of the body of Christ is expressed within and between churches by mutual love, care and encouragement. True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel.

8. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Baptism and the Lord's Supper have been given to the churches by Christ as the visible signs of the gospel. Baptism is a symbol of union with Christ and entry into his church but does not impart spiritual life. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice offered once for all and involves no change in the bread and wine. All its blessings are received by faith.

9. The Future

The Lord Jesus Christ will return in glory. He will raise the dead and judge the world in righteousness. The wicked will be sent to eternal punishment and the righteous will be welcomed into a life of eternal joy. God will make all things new and will be glorified for ever.

For a fuller explanation of these beliefs and supporting Bible references please refer to the FIEC publication, *Light for Life*.

Members will each indicate continued adherence to these truths at our Annual General Meeting.

THE BIBLE

We believe the Bible is the completely sufficient guide and the supreme authority on all matters of Christian faith and practice. For that reason we are glad to be identified with those who are Bible-believing churches and Bible-believing Christians. Why is this so?

The Scriptures are inspired

öAll Scripture is God-breathedí ö (2 Tim.3:16). The same Holy Spirit, who inspired all the 39 Old Testament scriptures (-writingsø), also inspired the writing of the 27 New Testament books. All means all! "God-breathed" means out of God, the real author. he caused the Bible to be written by about 40 different men - carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21) over a period of about 1500 years. So the Bible is God's Word to us - wholly reliable, without error, and the authoritative revelation of God to us through words.

The Scriptures are instructive

The Bible is to be received as God's words to us and revered and obeyed as such. Paul told Timothy that it is öuseful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and trainingö (2 Tim. 3:16). Very simply, to show us what is right, what is not right, how to get right and how to stay right! It is the best training manual we could have as Christian believers. God caused it to be written, and through it speaks to us today, as he spoke to people when those words were first written.

The Scriptures are instrumental

Paul reminded Timothy that the Lord uses the scriptures to do two things - make us wise for salvation, and then make us thoroughly equipped for every good work when we have become believers (2 Tim.3:15&17). God uses his Word to make us Christians, and then to make us better Christians! It is an instrument he uses, and therefore we will make sure we hear it being preached at our public services, we study it together at other meetings, and we set time aside for regular personal reading.

The Scriptures are to be interpreted

We acknowledge our duty to interpret the Bible carefully. Among other things this means taking into account the intention of the original writer, the style of writing, and the light other Scriptures bring to a subject. This will help us to distinguish between temporary cultural practices and permanent abiding principles.

Bible-believing Christians come to differing interpretations on some of the matters dealt with in the following pages of this booklet, but these are secondary matters, and not essential to the Gospel. We can and should enjoy fellowship with such Christians

who are united with us in the essentials set out in the Statement of Faith, even if we disagree in our understanding of other matters. However, we believe it right to welcome into membership of MOFC only those who recognise and respect our understanding of these disputed matters, and we expect visiting preachers and teachers to respect our position with regard to these points.

One area of disagreement concerns principles of interpretation. We believe the New Testament indicates that Old Testament prophecies regarding Israel find fulfilment in the New Testament Church (e.g. Amos 9:11,12 quoted in Acts 15:12-18). We do not, therefore, agree with those who interpret these prophecies as strictly applicable only to the nation and people of Israel, teaching that God has a distinct purpose for Israel apart from and separate to the Church (which is the teaching of some Dispensationalists). Such interpretation results in a specific view of the 'end times' that sees Christ Jesus establishing an earthly kingdom centred geographically in Israel with a rebuilt temple and sacrificial system. We believe this to be a mistaken interpretation, but recognise that those adopting it are brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Teaching of the Bible regarding sexual practices

In light of the Sexual Orientation Regulations, Regulation 14(5), we clarify our doctrine as follows. We follow the teaching of the Bible that all extra-marital sexual practices are sinful and wrong (Hebrews 13:4). This includes homosexual practices (1 Corinthians 6:9,10. Romans 1:26,27) . The Bible also teaches that we must not be actively or passively complicit in sin (1 Timothy 5:22. 1 Samuel 2:22-36) and that faith without works is dead (James 2:17). It is therefore part of our doctrine that in relation to any activities of this church we must in no way condone, promote, assist or encourage homosexual practices.

MEMBERSHIP

We believe that membership of a local church is important. The local church is a group of Christian believers - born-again by the Spirit of God - collectively meeting together in a local community for worship, fellowship, service and evangelism. All true believers are members of the universal family of Christ - his body, but members of a local church are those who wish to identify with and be associated with that church in all aspects of its local life and activities.

Membership of a local church involves the following commitments:

Commitment to the doctrines of the faith

Our Statement of Faith makes clear what we believe, and membership involves an acceptance of this, a pledge of adherence to it, and a willingness to contend for it, so declaring our oneness in these essentials of the gospel.

Commitment to the Great Commission

The Lord's commission for evangelisation (Matt.28:19, 20) is our task locally and world-wide, and membership accepts this involvement in various forms, working together in the task of making known the gospel to all.

Commitment to care

The local church is a family of the Lord's people, so in membership we enjoy the care of each other, supporting each other with prayer, encouragement and practical help as needed.

God has placed gifted leaders in local churches, to care for his people and direct the work. Members not only enjoy the care of such spiritual leaders, but recognise and submit to their leadership, authority and discipline.

Commitment to activities

The local church is a family engaged in many activities and meetings. Membership accepts the importance of these for a healthy church life, and as far as practically possible, makes them a priority.

Commitment to giving

We believe that in the Lord's work the Lord provides for the needs of his church. He does this normally through the giving of those in the local church. It is the duty of the member to give as the Lord has provided for the continuance of the local church. (See "Finance")

Commitment to members' meetings

The business of MOFC is conducted through four general meetings in a year. The Elders provide an agenda at least one week prior to the meeting. Members are

encouraged to bring to the Elders any other matters they would like brought up at these meetings. In addition members are encouraged to raise matters at the meeting for Elders' consideration.

Privilege of service

The Bible teaches that all believers are gifted by the Holy Spirit for service in the church. Members will be encouraged to exercise their gifts within the fellowship for the benefit of all under the guidance of the Elders. There are leadership roles (Elders and Deacons), practical roles (e.g. treasurer, musicians), and numerous other ministries to be engaged in. (See Romans 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:1-11, Eph 4:11, 12, 1 Peter 4:10, 11)

Of the numerous gifts of the Spirit, it is our belief that ones consisting of revelation from God were restricted to the apostolic age: Apostles and prophets received new truths direct from God (Ephesians 3:4,5) and communicated these to the church. They were thus foundational to the church (Ephesians 2:19,20). Their ministry was accompanied by miraculous signs which confirmed their status as recipients of divine truth (2 Corinthians 12:12, Hebrews 2:3,4). Once these truths were recorded in Scripture there was no longer any need for further revelation, because Scripture is completely sufficient in terms of God's communication to us.

Application for membership

The elders of MOFC are glad to receive applications for church membership from true Christian believers. They are considered carefully and prayerfully. Where applicable, contact is made with any previous church where membership has been held. Applicants for membership will be asked to indicate their agreement to the church's Statement of Faith and acceptance of the matters dealt with in this booklet. Applications, with the elders' recommendation, are then placed before a church members' meeting for approval.

EVANGELISM

We believe evangelism is the duty of all disciples of Jesus. The risen Saviour commanded his disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15)

Evangelism is commanded

If individually and corporately we are not telling sinners the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ we are disobeying our Lord.

Evangelism is comprehensive

It is to be in all the world, to all creation. We will engage in work

- amongst children. Bible Exhibitions, school assemblies, after-school clubs and holiday Bible clubs are all activities we can use to reach children with the good news of Jesus. (Please refer to our Child Protection Policy in appendix 2)
- in local prisons as opportunity arises.
- in our local villages and communities by regular evangelistic events (e.g. coffee hour), the use of evangelistic literature, and by getting involved in community life in order to establish links with people around us.

We will also use various means to fulfil our duty:

- by a rolling two-year mission programme beginning with low-key bridge-building events (e.g. quiz nights, musical events, outings) culminating in a period of intensive mission.
- by running courses for those inquiring about Christ (e.g. Christianity Explored, The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus)
- by support of mission work at home and abroad (see section on missionary work)

Evangelism is communication

In all these endeavours we must verbally proclaim the content of the gospel of repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17). It is this that is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." (Romans 1:16)

Knowing that no-one will be saved apart from God's sovereign power and grace, we will make prayer a vital component of all our evangelism.

BAPTISM

We believe that true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ of any age are the right and proper subjects for baptism. Sinners hear God's Word, they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then are baptised, uniting with other believers in the church to serve and worship God. Consequently baptism was an essential part of the teaching and practice of the New Testament church. Why is this so?

Baptism is an act of obedience to Christ

Before Jesus left this world he gave this command to his church: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt.28:19, 20). First, make disciples - by preaching the gospel. Second, baptise those who believe. Third, teach those disciples to obey. Baptising of disciples was commanded by the Lord Jesus.

Baptism is a profession of our faith

Baptism was intended to be a sign and mark of distinction, so that those who had become true followers of Christ might be known, both by the church and the world around them. They were baptised on profession of their faith. Faith preceded baptism. No faith - no baptism. Baptism never saved anyone!

Baptism is a public witness of a spiritual experience

In the New Testament, baptism took place in public. It was the first act of witness that new believers made - an outward expression of an inward experience that had already taken place in the individual. Baptism is a vivid picture of what Christ has done for us personally: Forgiveness is pictured, in which immersion in water illustrates the washing away of our sin; It is a picture of new life that we are enjoying in Christ, the past having been buried. Hence, the method of baptism is essential to this picture. We, therefore, believe that the normal way should be by total immersion in water, thus fully portraying its true biblical significance and meaning.

Practical matters

Believers who want to be baptised will be interviewed by at least one of the Elders and given instruction regarding baptism. The service of baptism will be held in a local church which has a baptismal pool or locally by means of a portable baptismal pool.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

We believe that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated in accordance with Christ's command to his disciples in the upper room prior to his death. The scriptures do not give us specific instructions about how regularly this should be done, but the example of the early church would encourage us to meet at the Lord's Table often.

It is exclusively for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ - no one else - and is celebrated as:

A memorial service

Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19) So in a real sense we meet so as not to forget him and his substitutionary death for us on the cross. The communion table is a memorial of the past when our salvation was secured in Christ's atoning death.

A thanksgiving service

At the Lord's Table we "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:26) to each other and the world, declaring its significance and uniqueness, and together expressing our deepest gratitude to Christ. The title "Eucharist" means just that - "thanksgiving".

A service of hope

Not only are we looking back together, but we are also looking forward to Christ's triumphant return. The church will continue to meet in this way "until he comes." (1 Cor. 11:26). This is a prospect - a confident hope - we all share. (Titus 2:13).

The Lord's Supper service takes the form of eating broken bread and drinking wine together, as Jesus commanded. These are symbols of his broken body and his blood shed for us sinners. Partaking of them signifies and assures us that by faith we have a share in the benefits of Christ's death. By faith we enjoy his risen presence at such times and look forward to that glorious day - the Day of the Lord - when we shall see him face to face and be with him forever (1 Thess. 4:17).

We believe that those who join in the Lord's Supper should have examined themselves according to 1 Cor. 11:27-29 and only partake if they are right with the Lord and their fellow believers, otherwise they should not partake of the bread and wine but allow them to pass by. They should get right at the earliest opportunity. This will be reinforced on each occasion we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

THE LORD'S DAY

We believe that Sunday - the Lord's Day - should be a special day in the life of the church and all its members. So what is so special about the Lord's Day?

What was it?

At creation God laid down certain principles for mankind, to do with work, marriage and one special day in the week, the Sabbath - which means "rest" (Genesis 2:2). For the good of all humanity, a Sabbath was instituted, a day of rest. It was God's gift (Mark 2:27). This was reinforced when God gave the 10 commandments to his redeemed people in the Old Testament, the Israelites (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15).

What did it demand?

A day of rest from regular work in order to be a day consecrated to the Lord (Exodus 16:23).

How did Jesus use it?

The Bible makes it clear that he observed the Sabbath. He used it for worship and teaching, healing, legitimate leisure, and evangelism. He was not inactive on the seventh day; Jesus respected it, and used it.

What did it become?

Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), transferred it to the first day of the week. This was the day he rose from the dead, appeared to his disciples (John 20:19, 26), and poured out his Spirit (Acts 2:1). The unanimous practice of the early church in observing this day demonstrates this change had Apostolic authority (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2).

How is it to be used today?

The early church set a good example - using it for worship, meeting together, teaching, and preaching. The Bible leaves us in no doubt that it should be a day that is different, a day that honours God, a day for ceasing from normal work activity, a day for joining with God's people in worship, remembering God our Creator (Exodus 20:11) and Redeemer (Deuteronomy 5:12-15), a day for evangelism, a day for engaging in works of mercy, doing good for those in need, and a day for works of necessity. - a day of activity - not hibernation - governed by the principles of God's Word, our ultimate authority for all matters of faith and practice.

"This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it".
Psalm 118:24

MISSIONARY WORK

We believe that as a local church we should have a missionary strategy. "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mat 28:19) was the commission given to the disciples by our Lord. The supreme task of evangelism has consequently been made the responsibility of the whole church - and that includes local churches. "According to the Bible the missionary task is a calling that may not be avoided by a single member of the church" (J H Bavinck, missiologist).

Why mission?

The roots of mission go right back to the Old Testament. It all began with God's promise to Abraham. (Gen.12:2, 18:18,19) Through him, all nations would find blessing. That was God's plan - his manifesto - for the world of humanity. Mission is not the church's idea - it is God's plan. It is not our goal - it is his. Light and hope for lost sinners and his gift of forgiveness, peace and eternal life are to be made known to all peoples.

Why Jesus?

There is no other way to know God. Without the cross of Christ there is no message of forgiveness, no good news, no answer to give to needy sinners faced with eternal punishment. "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ" (2 Cor 5:19) - that is the exclusive focus of our mission-message. This message will be given in the context of demonstrating the mercy of Christ by practical work where appropriate (e.g. medical, educational, and developmental ministry).

Why us?

Why should mission involve us at all? Simply because the task has been passed on to us all. "You will be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8), is the Lord's answer. He calls us to share in his mission to all, whether locally, nationally or internationally. It is a global task.

Therefore as a local church we endeavour to:

- make mission a priority in prayer together
- seek to support financially those engaged in evangelism and mercy ministries in the UK and overseas
- commit support to any member of MOFC who, with our approval, engages in training and service in full-time mission work

We seek to "pray as if everything depended on God, and work as if everything depended on us."

LEADERSHIP

We believe that properly appointed and recognised leaders are essential for the spiritual well-being of the local church and its development.

Necessity

Leadership in the local church is vital if God's people are to be cared for. It is necessary for the maintenance of the truth of the Gospel, for discipline, and dealing with difficulties in the corporate life of the church. Decision and action is required, cohesion and co-ordination. Development of the gifts within the fellowship is essential.

Responsibilities

The New Testament specifies two offices in the local church, Elders and Deacons (Phil. 1:1). Elders are men with primarily spiritual oversight and care. 'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock' (1 Peter 5:2,3). Deacons have a supportive role mainly responsible for temporal matters (Acts 6:2-4). Leaders are to care, encourage, convey a vision, and be forward-looking - seeking God's way in all these things.

Qualifications

Prescribed tests for local church leaders are found in the Bible (Acts 6:1-8, 1 Tim.3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4). A distinctive requirement is that a leader is to be a recognised believer filled with the Holy Spirit. If lacking this qualification, whilst having many others, they should not be appointed. They are made by God - not men - but are appointed by the church, having had their qualities and gifts discerned (Acts 6:3, 20:28). Recognising the Biblical pattern the existing Elders are to be the ones who normally identify new Elders, with the membership being invited to give their agreement (Titus 1:5).

Ministry

We believe that if the church is to be governed biblically, there should be a plurality of Elders - leadership should be shared. It is not the task of one man (Acts 14:23). But a -minister may be appointed as an Elder to give the whole or most of his time to the work of preaching and teaching.

We believe that the New Testament forbids women 'to teach or have authority over a man' (1 Timothy 2:12). They cannot therefore be Elders and should not teach or preach in meetings where men are present.

FINANCE

We believe that the Bible provides clear principles both for individual believers and the church regarding financial matters. We are accountable to God in this area because everything we have has been entrusted to us by him (1 Chronicles 29:14, 16, 1 Timothy 6:17).

Individual finances

Christians have a responsibility to seek employment in order not to be a burden to others (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12), to provide for their own families (1 Timothy 5:8), and to pay taxes to the government (Romans 13:6, 7).

Christian giving is to reflect the example of Jesus Christ. In the central passage dealing with the subject in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 8 and 9) this truth is established with the words, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich." (8:9)

The Bible teaches that Christian believers have the joyous privilege of giving regularly and proportionally (1 Corinthians 16:2), secretly (Matthew 6:2-4), generously (1 Timothy 6:18), sacrificially (Luke 21:1-4), voluntarily and cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).

Giving is with a view to supporting gospel work (1 Corinthians 9:13, Galatians 6:6) and relief for the needy (Matthew 6:2-4, Ephesians 4:28).

Church finances

We believe all financial commitments should be met by means of direct giving from within the church and by gifts from other churches, Christian individuals, and organisations. Administration of finances in the church is to be done in orderly fashion and in keeping with best practice. (2 Corinthians 8:20, 21). The treasurer shall keep adequate records of all financial transactions, reports shall be prepared for church officers' and members' meetings as required, and the accounts shall be audited appropriately.

We believe it right to support gospel work and relief of the needy beyond our local church. A minimum of 10% of donated income will be used for this purpose annually. Members are encouraged to nominate suitable recipients

APPENDIX 1

FIEC STATEMENT ON ECUMENISM

All gospel-loving Christians face many kinds of tension, but there is one particular way in which we are increasingly pressurised at the present time. Since the formation of the Churches Together movement in 1991, with its avowed aim to pursue ecumenism at the local level, we are constantly being urged to join other churches in united services, prayer meetings, marches and evangelistic activities.

If all the other local churches and their leaders involved in a united activity are wholly committed to the one true gospel there is no problem. Indeed the FIEC desires to encourage that kind of true and biblical ecumenism. Often, however, some of the churches and leaders with whom we are urged to unite neither believe nor preach those essential gospel truths which are embodied in our FIEC Doctrinal Basis or a similar Statement of Faith. Some do not accept the inerrancy of Scripture, the eternal punishment of the unsaved, or that Christ died bearing the punishment due to sinners. Some deny the deity of Christ, his virgin birth, miracles and literal resurrection. Others teach that religious ceremonies such as baptism, the mass and the adoration of Mary have some saving efficacy.

The FIEC has always felt it to be confusing and unbiblical to unite in public acts of worship and outreach with those who question and deny the faith. Our Doctrinal Basis, *What We Believe*, clearly states, "True fellowship between churches exists only where they are faithful to the gospel."

If an evangelical church or leader unites with those of a liberal persuasion who deny essential gospel truths, or with those of a Roman Catholic persuasion who add to the gospel, then great confusion is created. The impression is given either that the evangelical, liberal and Roman Catholic are all agreed when in fact they are worlds apart doctrinally, or that their different messages are equally valid when in fact there is only one gospel. Not only is this confusing but it is also a contradiction of the gospel on which our FIEC churches unite.

The gospel of salvation by grace is so precious to us that we desire to stand together with all who believe and preach it. For the same reason, we are compelled to remain separate from those who deny it. By taking this position we are seeking to follow the commands of Scripture. (Galatians 1:8, Romans 16:17).

APPENDIX 2

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

1. Introduction

Market Overton Free Church exists to encourage the worship of Almighty God, to foster fellowship and growth in grace of Christian believers and to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to people of all ages. These activities include children and young people under 18 who merit special provision to avoid any harm coming to them whilst in our care. This document sets out guidelines and procedures for ensuring that this is achieved. The guiding principles and practices are to be applied with common sense.

2. Policy Statement

At the centre of the church's work with children and young people is a concern for their safety and well being. Our aim is to prevent any abuse, physical, sexual or emotional, of individuals. All activities will be under the supervision of **Leaders** who have been issued with a copy of this document, have signed to indicate that they are fully in agreement with this policy and that they will abide by the guidelines and procedures contained within it. Child abuse is a criminal offence. If suspected or alleged, our policy is to refer the facts and allegations at our disposal to the appropriate statutory authorities.

The policy document will be reviewed and updated as necessary. Where guidance on the application of the document is needed, the church Elders should be consulted. Copies of this policy document will be given to all church members and helpers. It will also be included in The Church Issues Book.

3. Appointment of Workers

The church **Elders**, who have all had Criminal Record Bureau checks (CRB's), are responsible for all matters of child protection in the church. All leadership appointments shall be made by the Elders, who may interview the candidates prior to appointment. Details of any circumstances or illnesses, past or present, which could have a bearing on an individual's suitability to work with children or young people, must be declared. All such information will be held in strict confidence by the Elders. All leaders and regular helpers will undertake a CRB check. **Leaders** appointed must be members of the church and demonstrate an aptitude to teach and work with the relevant age group.

4. Guidelines

4.1 General

1. Remember and practice Christ's love for children and young people by providing a caring, supportive and Christian environment in which they can develop spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically.
2. Endeavour to pray regularly for those in your group.
3. Treat all with equal care and respect. Do not use violence or intimidation of any kind, including physical punishment.
4. Respect confidentiality, but be realistic about their limits (see 5.4)
5. Keep a record of names, addresses and contact telephone numbers of those who come along.
6. Provide parents/carers with contact name, address and telephone number.
7. Act to prevent trouble of any kind developing between the children or young people themselves. This is not classed as abuse within the context of this document and should be dealt with by the application of normal common sense.
8. Seek information on possible food allergies from parents of young children.
9. Be prepared to deal with injuries, accidents or illness.

4.2 Activities

1. Wherever possible mixed gender activities should have both male and female supervision and girls should not be supervised by men only.
2. Avoid activities with a high risk of physical injury or which could involve unwelcome or invasive behaviour.
3. Outdoor adventure activities (e.g. hiking, canoeing, rock climbing, pony trekking) must only be led by people with appropriate qualifications/experience.
4. Parents/carers must be advised of any activities which take children away from the usual meeting place.

4.3 Contact with Children and Young People

1. Avoid being alone with a child or young person if at all possible.
2. Be particularly careful about giving lifts by yourself in a vehicle seating children in the back if practical. This should not preclude its use in an emergency (e.g. to obtain medical help.)
3. If there is a need to talk on a one-to-one basis with a child or young person, this should normally be undertaken by a person of the same gender. Always ensure that another adult is aware when and where this is taking place. Do not do so behind closed doors or remote from other people.
4. Do not allow strangers to collect children from a church activity or

accompany children to the toilet. If young children require help going to the toilet, it is preferable for this to be undertaken by a female.

4.4 **Illegal Activities**

1. Any child or young person found committing an illegal act (e.g. shoplifting) whilst engaged in a church activity must be taken or sent home as soon as is reasonably practical.
2. Any child or young person found in possession of an offensive weapon or illegal drugs, must either surrender these to a responsible leader immediately or be excluded forthwith from further participation in the current event or activity.
3. If drugs are confiscated, ensure that another leader/helper witnesses this, The police must be notified immediately and the drugs handed over to them.
4. Parents/guardians should be informed of all cases of illegal activities, possession of offensive weapons or illegal drugs.
5. Incidents involving illegal acts against another party's property during a church activity (e.g. shoplifting) must be reported to the owner of that property. Any decision to involve the police should be left to that party.
6. All incidents involving illegal activities or illegal drugs must be reported promptly to an Elder who will record the incident(s) and consider whether further action is necessary.
7. Details of any circumstances or illnesses, past or present that may have a bearing on an individual's suitability for leadership must be declared. All such information will be held in strict confidence by the Elders. All those appointed as **Helpers** to work regularly with children or young people must be approved by the Elders but need not necessarily be members of the church. They must be issued with a copy of this policy and their signatures obtained to indicate their agreement to abide by the guidelines and procedures contained within it. Those who help on a very occasional basis must be given a copy of this policy by the Leader of the relevant group who must be satisfied as to their suitability to help.

4.5 **Residential Activities/Holidays**

1. During a residential holiday or activity, Leaders act in 'loco parentis.' This imposes the responsibility to act as a wise and caring parent.
2. Children and young people under 18 must supply the written consent of parent/carer for their involvement. The form must also detail any health concerns and give permission for medical treatment in an

emergency.

3. Sleeping arrangements and the use of toilets/showers must avoid situations where embarrassment or abuse could occur or situations which could lead to an allegation of abuse. Genders must be segregated.
4. Leaders or helpers should only sleep in the same room/tent as children or young people if at least 2 leaders or helpers are present. Genders must be segregated.

5. Allegations of Abuse

1. During the course of work with children and young people, mutual trust may develop to the extent that allegations of abuse at home, in the group or elsewhere are shared. The following procedure must be observed if a disclosure is made:
 2. Remain calm and listen carefully. Do not show shock or disbelief.
 3. Other than to enquire whether anyone else has been told, do not ask further questions. It is important that this is left to those with appropriate skills.
 4. Keep an open mind.
 5. Tell the child early on that you will need to tell someone else. Never promise not to mention the matter to anyone else.
 6. Make notes of the conversation, using the actual words as far as possible. Use a code name for the child or young person if necessary. Sign, date and keep the notes in a safe place.
 7. Inform an Elder promptly. It is important that allegations of physical or sexual abuse are dealt with urgently. The Elders will inform **The Children and Young People's Service**. You will be given feedback.
 8. Tell no-one else what you have heard. On no account speak to anyone implicated in the abuse about the allegation.
 9. Pray privately for the child or young person, and the situation.

6. Suspicion of Abuse.

If privately you have good grounds for suspecting some form of abuse without being explicitly told about it, you should bring this confidentially to the attention of an Elder. Disguise the child's or young person's name if you wish. Do not approach the individual about the situation yourself or talk to others about it. The Elders will determine what further action should be taken and you will be given feedback.

If you are not satisfied with the action taken and feed back from any of the situations described above, you should bring your concerns to the attention of:

The Children and Young People' Service,

**Rutland County Council,
Catmose,
Oakham
LE15 6HP
Tel 01572 758407.**

APPENDIX 3

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

(To be read by members at the AGM)

Having been led by the Spirit of God to repent of our sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour; and having been baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

In accord with Acts 2:42 we promise to devote ourselves to:

The Apostles' teaching

We will keep the Word of God central in our lives through personal study and attendance at the preaching and teaching meetings of the church. We will ensure that the worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines of the church conform to Scripture. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly towards the maintenance of a faithful evangelical ministry in the church and towards other gospel work.

The fellowship

We will walk together in brotherly love; exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and encourage one another as occasion may require; bear with one another's weaknesses, and failings; be slow to give or take offence, but always ready for reconciliation, following the rules of the Saviour in Matthew 18:15-17 and Luke 17:1-4.

The breaking of bread. (The Lord's Supper) We will endeavour to be present at every gathering of the church for worship, especially the times we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It is on such occasions that we demonstrate our unity and so we will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, carefully avoiding all causes and causers of divisions, and ensuring there is no partiality shown within the church.

Prayer

We will engage in prayer in our personal devotions, in our homes and families, and in our meetings; praying for one another, for the work and witness of our church, and for the cause of Christ generally. We will endeavour to support the meetings arranged for prayer.

In accord with Titus 2:11-14, we promise, relying on God's help, to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope of the glorious appearance of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people who are his very own eager to do what is good.

If we leave the area we promise to unite, as soon as possible, with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

