

# ***The Episcopal Free Communion***

## ***“The Episcopal Free Church”***

### ***The Free Protestant Episcopal Church***

*Founded on November 2nd, 1897*



## **Constitution and Bylaws**



Adopted as

### **Constitution and Bylaws**

for

**The Episcopal Free Communion**

Approved by the Bishops Consistory

***Adopted on May 31th, 2015***

***Solemnity of the Holy Trinity***

Southampton, Hampshire

England, UK

## **PREAMBLE**

**We declare and establish this Constitution and these Bylaws to preserve and perpetuate the principles of our common Christian faith and to govern this body in an orderly and Christian manner. These Bylaws will seek to preserve the autonomy and liberties of each individual province and the freedom of action of this communion to accomplish its God-given purpose.**

## **ARTICLE ONE. NAME AND PRACTICE**

**The legal name of this organization shall be The Episcopal Free Communion – The Episcopal Free Church (hereafter referred to as The Episcopal Free Communion). The original name of the communion was The Free Protestant Episcopal Church when it was founded in 1897 and tacitly recognized in England as a legitimate Christian denomination in the year 1917. At present it also has authority to operate as a religious denomination in the United States of America. In this country there is complete separation of state and church. But moreover, The Episcopal Free Communion has developed into an international communion with approved churches and ministries in 35 countries of the world including the United States, Europe, Africa, India, Pakistan, South America, Central America, Russia and Scandinavia.**

**Our structure, theology and form of worship, is commonly understood as a distinct Christian tradition representing a middle ground between what are perceived to be the extremes of the claims of 16th century Roman Catholicism and the Lutheran and Reformed varieties of Protestantism of that era. As such, it is often referred to as being a via media (or "middle way") between these traditions.**

**However, because Anglicans in general and our communion specifically, allow for significant freedom and diversity within the areas of Scripture, reason, and tradition, a great many variations in doctrine and practice exist within our churches in the different provinces.**

## **ARTICLE TWO. PURPOSE**

- 1. To stand for a Christ-centered, morally sound, Christianity which comprises the Christian faith: the faith and practice of the Apostles and the early Disciples of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.**
- 2. To obey the Great Commission of Christ by carrying the good news to the entire world (Matthew 28: 19-20).**

## **ARTICLE THREE. STATEMENT OF UNITY AND FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS**

- 1. Recognizing the *unity of the Church of Christ* in all the world, and knowing that we are but one branch of Christ's people, while adhering to our particular faith and order, we extend to all believers the hand of Christian fellowship, upon the basis of those great fundamental truths in which all should agree. With them we confess our belief in one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of grace. We believe that Jesus came in the flesh, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.**
- 2. Affirming now our belief that those who thus hold to these fundamental truths together constitute the one universal Church, the several households of which, though called by different names, are the one body of Christ, and that these members of his body are sacredly bound to keep "*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,*" we declare that we will cooperate with all who hold these truths.**
- 3. We believe that, beyond these fundamental truths, there can be unity in diversity and diversity in unity in other particulars of faith within the body of Christ.**
- 4. This communion is an ecumenical denomination because we believe it to be the will of the Lord Jesus, and is open to walk and collaborate with other Christian denominations from the Protestant or Catholic tradition. This is a communion that lives the fullness of the Anglican**

**"ethos" but allows the coexistence of theological, pastoral or liturgical currents of different orientations in what it believes to be the spirit of Anglicanism. It does not understand a unilateral Anglicanism that only emphasizes this or that theological - pastoral – or liturgical stream, but respects any denomination and as far as possible, joins forces with them to strengthen the final goal of Anglicanism even if they are in different denominations with no official link to ours, which could happen through a frank and respectful dialogue.**

**5. Therefore the communion accepts currents traditionally associated with a legitimate Anglicanism, that is, the Anglo Catholic, Evangelical, Charismatic and Liberal currents. These currents will be respected and their place guaranteed in this denomination, believing this to be the Anglican spirit in its fullness. The communion wants that all joining the board of ministers are fully aware of this stance and believes that those who cannot envision Anglicanism in this way must seek a jurisdiction that speaks to their heart.**

#### **ARTICLE FOUR. STATEMENT OF FAITH AND PRACTICE**

**The following Principles, while not to be used as a test or as a strict requirement of Christian cooperation and unity in the overall body of Christ, are adopted as a testimony of faith and of the spirit in which Free Anglicans interpret the Holy Scriptures and their duties as Christians and Anglicans.**

**Our beliefs include the following:**

- We believe in one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him.**
- We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.**
- We believe in the Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Guide;**

- **We believe in liberty of Conscience in all matters of interpretation, practice and worship.**
- **Our faith is founded in the Scriptures and the Gospels, the traditions of the Apostolic Church, the historical episcopate, the first seven ecumenical councils and the early Church Fathers.**
- **We understand the Old and New Testaments as "containing all things necessary for salvation" and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.**
- **We also understand the Apostles' Creed as the baptismal symbol and the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.**
- **We celebrate the traditional sacraments, with special emphasis being given to the Holy Eucharist, also called Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper or the Mass. The breaking and reception of the bread and wine as representing the body and blood of Christ as instituted at the Last Supper. It also represents the sharing of the table with Christ.**
- **We use the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) which is one of the ties that bind the Anglican Communion together.**
- **We believe that all the members of the human race have been created equal, in the image of God, and therefore promote inclusiveness in all our churches and ministries. Based on this principle the Communion:**
  - **Allows the ordination of women to holy orders with the same rights and duties of men. We also understand that the Communion makes no distinction as to race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, social status, profession, marital status, political belief and culture of its members.**

- Is open to ordain and allows ordination of men and women of homosexual or bisexual orientation with the same rights and duties of heterosexuals.
- Believes that debauchery and sexual promiscuity are contrary to the spirit of the Bible, but also believes that all unions that are authentic and loving, between two mature human beings, should be respected and blessed in our church, so it is open to celebrate the blessing of homo affective unions.

#### **ARTICLE FIVE. MEMBERSHIP**

- **Qualifications for membership.**
  - Membership shall consist of persons who meet the education, experience, behaviour and moral characteristics required by their accepting Bishops and who are in agreement with the Statement of Faith and who will abide by the Constitution and Bylaws of The Episcopal Free Communion.
- The Episcopal Free Communion shall have three Orders of the Clergy, namely:
  - Bishops who shall have a special responsibility and authority for the preservation of the truth of the doctrine of the Church for the purity of its life, and the worthiness of its worship;
  - The Priests who in co-operation with and under the guidance of the Bishops have a special responsibility for preaching the word of God and administering the Holy Sacraments and generally for the cure of souls; and
  - The Deacons, who have a special responsibility for the care of the poor and distressed, for the instruction of the young and those

without the proper knowledge and for giving assistance to the Priests in Divine Service.

#### **ARTICLE SIX. ELECTION OF BISHOPS**

- The Provincial Archbishops of the Communion shall be elected by the Archbishop Primus in consensus with the Consistory of Bishops.
- Every Diocesan and Suffragan Bishop of this Communion shall be elected by the Provincial Archbishop in a form consistent with the procedures laid in the Regulations made under this Constitution. Such election should be notified to the Primus and the Consistory of Bishops.
- A Bishop for any Diocese may be elected from among the Bishops or Clergy of any Province or Diocese of The Episcopal Free Communion or of any other Diocese in communion with The Episcopal Free Communion.
- The tenure of office of a Bishop or a Provincial Archbishop shall be determined by the legislative and administrative organs of the Communion.

#### **ARTICLE SEVEN. GOVERNMENT AND OFFICERS**

The Episcopal Free Communion is composed of provinces, dioceses, parishes or churches, orders and ministries. Provinces are directed by Archbishops, dioceses by Bishops, churches and ministries by priests.

The legislative and administrative organs of The Episcopal Free Communion shall be:

- The Archbishop Primus of the Communion.
- The Consistory of Bishops which shall be the highest international organ of The Episcopal Free Communion;

- **The Provincial Council which shall be the administrative organ of a Province. The Council leader is the Provincial Archbishop who is autonomous and works in coordination but not under the authority of the Consistory of Bishops; and**
- **The Diocesan Council which shall have authority over the internal affairs of the Diocese and will be under the supervision and direction of the Provincial Bishop.**

**The Archbishop Primus and the Consistory of Bishops as hereby constituted, shall be the Legislative body of The Episcopal Free Communion and will also serve as a consultative and advisory body to every Province, Diocese, Officer, and member thereof.**

**The Consistory of Bishops will work hand in hand with the Archbishop Primus in the day to day administration of the Communion.**

**The Consistory of Bishops shall be constituted by:**

- **The Chancellor;**
- **The Vice-Chancellor**
- **The Secretary General**
- **The Secretary for Development and Foundations**
- **Five Provincial Archbishops chosen by the Archbishop Primus and the Consistory of Bishops.**
- **The members of the Consistory will have a tenure lasting two years but may be elected to new terms as determined by the Legislative and Administrative bodies of the Communion.**

**The government of The Episcopal Free Communion is Episcopal. The main governing and regulatory body of the Communion and the principal advisory body to the Archbishop Primus is the Consistory of Bishops.**



One of the roles of the Consistory of Bishops is to insure that the statement of faith, the covenant of conduct and the general principles of the Christian faith are adhered to. Their responsibilities include overseeing and regulating issues related to the administrative, legislative, ministerial, evangelistic, educational, missionary, benevolent and other interests of The Episcopal Free Communion.

### **The General Synod**

Although the Provinces are autonomous in their functioning, this constitution creates the General Synod of the Communion which is a consultative body charged with the duty of making some of the decisions that may affect the Communion as a whole. The General Synod will exert its function when requested by the Primus or the Consistory of Bishops. Most of the decisions of the Communion will be in the hands of the Primus and the Consistory of Bishops. However, in some occasions the Consistory may need the consensus of the Provincial Archbishops and will consult them.

The General Synod shall be composed of:

- The Archbishop Primus
- The Consistory of Bishops
- The Legal Counsel
- The House of Provincial Bishops

The General Synod will hold meetings every three years that will be presided by the Archbishop Primus or his designate. Other Bishops and members of the Communion may also attend these meetings if needed or desired.

Charged with the day to day operation of the Community, the Consistory of Bishops will consult the General Synod when some decision affecting the entire communion must be made. The Consistory of Bishops shall be

**the highest international organ of The Episcopal Free Communion and the highest consulting body to the Archbishop Primus.**

**A Diocesan Council may also be established, if required, within each Diocese and shall have authority over the internal affairs of the Diocese and will be under the supervision of the Diocesan Bishop and the Provincial Archbishop.**

**The Headquarters of The Episcopal Free Communion are located at present in London, United Kingdom but the location may change at the time a new Primus is elected.**

#### **Provincial Archbishops:**

**The Provincial Archbishops are Superintendents of their assigned State or Province.**

**The duties and responsibilities of the Provincial Archbishops are to assist, encourage, elder, support and mentor the Dioceses, Churches, Ministries, Ministers, Priests and deacons under their care. It is the duty of the Archbishop to insure each local diocese, priest, deacon, ministry, minister, congregation and other affiliations of The Episcopal Free Communion adhere to the Statement of Faith, the code of conduct and the principles of the Christian Faith.**

**The Provincial Archbishop may establish a Provincial Council which shall be the administrative organ of a Province. The members of these Provincial Councils will be chosen by the Provincial Archbishop. The Council leader is the Provincial Archbishop who is autonomous and works in coordination with but not under the authority of the Consistory of Bishops.**

**Bishops, priests, ministries, congregations and other affiliates report any problems or concerns directly to the Provincial Archbishop.**

Provincial Archbishops are encouraged to resolve any problems or concerns at the state and local level before contacting the Consistory of Bishops. Each province of The Episcopal Free Communion is autonomous and possesses all the freedom to run, operate and administer their province as they prayerfully consider appropriate. Each province shall use the name for their churches and the ecclesiastic rites for their service or mass which they consider adequate for their community. A considerable degree of liturgical freedom is permitted; our churches can be either High or Low Church and worship styles range from the very simple to the elaborate.

#### **ARTICLE 8. THE ARCHBISHOP & PRIMATE**

The head of the Communion shall be the Primate, Archbishop and Metropolitan of The Episcopal Free Communion who shall be elected to his office by the previous Primus or, if not possible, by the Consistory of Bishops, and shall hold office under, and have privileges, powers, authority and duties as are defined by the Constitution, Canons and Regulations made by or under the authority of the Consistory of Bishops and shall exercise all the rights and perform all the duties of the office of a Metropolitan.

The Primate shall summon and preside over meetings of the General Synod, and is the Principal Minister of The Episcopal Free Communion.

The Primate shall be an ex-officio member of all Committees, Boards, Commissions and Councils that may be appointed under any provision of this Constitution or of any Canon enacted by the Consistory of Bishops.

During a vacancy in the Office of Primate or during the illness or other incapacity of the Primate, the Chancellor of the Episcopal Free

**Communion shall have authority to perform all the duties of the Primacy and shall be styled Acting Primate.**

**In the absence of the Primate from any meeting of the General Synod or any Committee, Council, Board or Commission, constituted under the Constitution or any Canon of the synod, unless otherwise provided, the Chancellor of the Communion shall preside.**

**The office of the Primate may become vacant after -**

- **He or she dies;**
- **He or she has held office for twenty years from the date of his presentation or when attaining the age of eighty years, whichever first occurs;**
- **Having given notice of his intention to resign or retire, and the Chancellor has, in consultation with the Consistory of Bishops, accepted the resignation; or**
- **upon representation made to the Chancellor by at least two Diocesan Bishops his appointment is terminated or he is required to retire by a resolution supported by a majority of two-thirds of the General Synod: Provided that he shall be given the fullest opportunity to defend himself against any charges that may have been brought against him.**

**In addition to his functions as Metropolitan Bishop, the Primate shall have the following functions:**

- **To have general supervision over the whole of The Episcopal Free Communion in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution and the Canons of the Church.**

- To confirm the appointment of any person duly elected a Bishop in the Communion and to arrange for his consecration if he be not already consecrated;
- To preside when he is so required by Regulations pertaining thereto at the hearing of appeals in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution concerning the trial of Bishops, the Clergy, and the Laity and also on other occasions when the Consistory of Bishops sits as a court.
- To represent The Episcopal Free Communion in its relationship with the rest of the Anglican World and other Churches in communion with it and on its behalf to correspond with other Metropolitans;
- To perform such other functions prescribed by this Constitution or as may from time to time be entrusted to him by the General Synod or the Consistory of Bishops.

#### **ARTICLE NINE. MEMBERS COVENANT OF CONDUCT**

The fundamental principles of The Episcopal Free Communion are based upon the Word of God. Therefore every member is expected to live according to its teachings and avoid and refrain from that which is destructive to the Christian life and dishonorable to God. Every member is earnestly admonished to:

- Maintain high ethical and moral values in all their dealings, personally and professionally.
- Respect one another's difference in religious beliefs, including the differences in doctrine, style and personality of other Christians as they follow the leadings of the Holy Spirit.

- Only speak in edifying ways in regards to others, including Christian ministers, ministries, and the Body of Christ at large.
- Treat all with whom they come into contact as they would like to be treated.
- Members of the communion must pledge to work alongside their brothers and sisters in the ministry of the Church, performing their duties to the best of their abilities within the Church and for the glory of the Almighty God and our Lord Jesus Christ. They must respect the determinations of the Provincial Archbishop, the Archbishop Primus and the Consistory of Bishops.
- The Episcopal Free Communion does not provide any economic remuneration for work as a clergyman, and members are not employees of this Church. This does not exclude the possibility that, at some time, one of the churches of the Communion or one of its members may make a contribution for a specific need of a ministry.
- All members accepted or ordained as a clergyman or clergywoman of The Episcopal Free Communion will receive the authority to exercise their priestly ministry but must know they are accountable for their actions to the ecclesiastic and civil authorities.
- All persons ordained into The Episcopal Free Communion are independent ministers in the daily functions of their respective ministries, that is, neither the minister nor the Communion is or can be an agent for or of the other and each minister is fully and individually responsible for their actions, legal, financial or contractual obligations.
- The Communion does not assume any LEGAL responsibility for its ministers or associated ministers. All clergy are independent ministers

and responsible for their own actions, including but not limited to any and all financial and fiscal responsibilities, contracts or liabilities and the commission or omission of any action. However, each clergy member is answerable to the Communion and does come under the Episcopal oversight of the Provincial Archbishop, the Archbishop Primus and the Consistory of Bishops. If an investigation finds that serious violation of Christian ethics, morals and values have indeed been committed; certain sanctions can and may be applied, up to and including removal, revocation and nullification of the clergy member's faculties, ordination and or consecration and a return to the state of laity. Membership and ministerial standing in The Episcopal Free Communion will be revoked upon proven behaviours unbecoming Christians and Ministers

#### **ARTICLE TEN. AFFILIATIONS**

This denomination is not a member of the Anglican Communion based in England, but of The Episcopal Free Communion - The Episcopal Free Church - a worldwide fellowship of free and autonomous Anglican Provinces that are in full communion with the Archbishop Primus Richard Palmer who acts as "primus inter pares".

This communion of Anglican Free churches was founded in November 2, 1897, in England by the Bishops Leon Checkemian, James Martin and Andrew A. Mac Laglen.

However, although The Episcopal Free Communion has no official ties with the Church of England and therefore has no official links with the Archbishop of Canterbury, it shows great respect for his office and considers it as a symbol of unity for all Anglicans whether in full communion with Canterbury or not.

**The Episcopal Free Communion welcomes the affiliation of other churches, denominations or communions as either full members, or as partners or affiliates in full communion or intercommunion.**

#### **ARTICLE ELEVEN. DISCIPLINE**

**The Archbishop Primus and the Consistory of Bishops shall have exclusive power to approve provisions with regard to Discipline and in particular:**

- **to prescribe and define offences for which a Bishop, Priest or Deacon or any member of the Laity of this Church may be tried: and**
- **to determine the constitution and rules of procedure of Diocesan, Provincial and final appellate Tribunals for the exercise of Ecclesiastical discipline and establish a final court of Appeal for the purpose.**

**Any Bishop, Priest or Deacon of a Diocese of this Church against whom a charge is brought shall be tried in accordance with the accepted provisions of Ecclesiastical Discipline. All investigations and deliberations on these matters shall be in charge of the Consistory of Bishops.**

#### **ARTICLE TWELVE. THE MINISTRY**

**The Episcopal Free Communion recognizes that God calls all members of the church to be ministers and witnesses to the Gospel in their lives and in society.**



It also recognizes that God calls some to be missionaries, evangelists, shepherds, overseers, pastors, and teachers, as servants to prepare His people for service to others and for the building up of the Body of Christ. Ordination by The Episcopal Free Communion is the rite whereby one so called is recognized and authorized to perform those ministerial duties under the auspice of The Episcopal Free Communion. Members of other denominations wanting to join The Episcopal Free Communion as full members may be incardinated given the proper education, experience and the approval of the local Provincial Archbishop or the Consistory of Bishops.

#### ARTICLE THIRTEEN. AMMENDMENTS

Members of The Episcopal Free Communion - The Free Episcopal Church may propose amendments to this Constitution and Bylaws. Such proposed amendments shall be submitted in writing to the Consistory of Bishops. The Archbishop Primus of the Communion will make the final decision of whether or not to adopt the changes with the assistance of the Consistory of Bishops. You have the right to receive and explanation in case of denegation of your proposal.

*With all love and blessings,*



*+++The Most Rev'd Dr. Richard Arthur*

*Palmer*

*Archbishop Primus*