



# THE EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN ENGLAND

The Evangelical Christian Church, as a mainstream Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, traces its historic roots to the formal organization of the Christian Church in 1804 under the leadership of Barton Warren Stone (1772-1844), a former Presbyterian minister. The Barton-Stone Movement later merged with the efforts of Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) and his son Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) to become the Restoration Movement that gave birth to the Churches of Christ (Non-Instrumental), the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and The Christian Connection.

The emphasis on religious freedom became strong enough that Barton Stone avoided any man-made ecclesiastical traditions that resulted in a movement that was “largely without dogma, form or structure”, committing only to a primitive Christianity. This movement sought to restore the whole Christian church and the unification of all Christians in a single body patterned after the church of the New Testament. In a nutshell, it was believed that the church had departed from the New Testament preaching and teaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. On June 28, 1804, they adopted the “Christian Movement” to identify their group with Barton Stone, based on its use in Acts 11:26 which became the remnants of the Springfield Presbytery. Of the majority of independent churches that aligned with the “Disciples Movement” which identified with the Campbell's group, decided to use the name the “Christian Disciples”, until it was renamed The Evangelical Christian Church in 1860.

The Evangelical Christian Church, as a restructured group within the Restoration Movement tradition made significant contributions to evangelical Christianity by becoming a Fundamentalist movement of the 21st century that has a position that is conservative theologically, and focused throughout England, United States and world-wide on radical biblical congregationalism, and traditional Christian Church thinking with a unique contemporary approach. This movement sought to end the divisiveness that had arisen within denominational differences, while appealing to all Christians to disassociate from the lunacy of denominationalism and religion, and return to Kingdom principles. Barton Stone's concept of unity grew from a belief that Christians could extract the Bible's truths by reason of the scriptures, they approached it without presuppositions. These truths, in turn would displace human forms of order, leading to the unstoppable result that Christians would start “flowing together” and others would come to faith because of the biblical model of unity. Both groups were opposed to the use of creeds as tests of faith for membership, and believed that a simple confession and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour was sufficient to unite all Christians around the world as Kingdom citizens.

The Evangelical Christian Church, also known as the Christian Church or (Christians), became the Stone-Campbell Movement of early nineteenth-century, that based its Biblical mission on the Great Commission found in the gospel of Matthew chapter 28, verses 18 and 19, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." This group looked to the whole Bible to discover practices and Kingdom principles that united the early church in substance.

The term "the Restoration Movement", has been used to describe their interest in restoring the New Testament church in the biblical pattern that was found in the book of Acts. In their examination of the Scriptures, this group found that the early church gathered on the first day of the week to partake of "Holy Communion". They began to celebrate the Lord's Supper once a week for their healing and wholeness. They also determined that baptism by immersion, as portrayed in the New Testament, was for adult or mature Christians only. They adopted this biblical practice in their churches and abandoned the ritual of infant baptism while adopting child dedication.

Separation between Church and State was believed and practiced unlike the modern church today, which believes in incorporation, charitable status, building permits, etc. to claim its historic roots. This practice ended in the early 1900's. However, while the principles of the Restoration Movement exist today, many Evangelical Christian Church clergy continue to enjoy many freedoms in their ministries and churches without human dictatorship.

In 1832, many Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Lutherans and others that became followers of the Alexander Campbell's group made an effort to unite in purpose with Barton Stone's group. They discussed their concern about divisions among Christians, and proposed that unity could be restored by taking the Bible as the only standard for faith and practice. These leaders sought to reform the church along non-sectarian, non-creedal lines. The Stone-Campbell movement began as two separate threads, each without knowledge of the other, during the Second Great Awakening in the early 19th century. When the question arose as to the name to be adopted, the Alexander Campbell's group took the name "Disciples" while Barton Stone's group favoured the name "Christians". This name was taken because the first disciples were called "Christians" in Antioch. Walter Scott and Thomas Campbell sided with Stone. As a result "Christian Disciples" was taken and used, becoming the most powerful movement in church history – and a uniquely world-wide religious body, known as The Evangelical Christian Church .

Through the early twentieth century, many Restoration churches, not otherwise a part of the three larger Restoration bodies, existed under such names as the Evangelical Christian Churches, the Christian Churches of North America, the Christian Missionary Churches, the Bible Evangelical Churches, the Community Churches, Evangelical Congregational Churches, Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical Protestant Churches, which traces its roots to various Lutheran and Reformed churches from Germany in 1720. The Congregational Christian Church itself was the product of a merger in 1931, between the Congregational Church and a number of Christian Churches. The Congregational

Church developed in England while migrating to the United States and England. Some of these came together in 1966 as the Evangelical Christian Churches.

Beginning with the Old Prussian Union of 1817 and existing mainly at the national level, united churches have been formed from a combination of Protestant (esp. Reformed, Congregational, Methodist, Evangelical Christian Church, Baptist and Anglican) churches. Reform and Congregational churches entered into what was the largest number of unions recorded. The broadest diversity so far brought into union of the Church of North India (formed in 1970), incorporating Anglican, Baptist, Brethren, Congregational, Disciples, Methodist and Presbyterian elements. United churches formed a very diverse group linked not so much by a uniform ecclesiology of church life, but by a commitment to a visible structure of unity of Evangelical Christian Churches within church history.

The Evangelical Christian Church attempts to continue the Restoration tradition as embodied in its several slogans: "Call Bible things by Bible names"; "The Church of Jesus Christ on earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one"; "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak. Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent"; "In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, love"; "We are not the only Christians. We are Christians only"; and "No creed but Christ. No book but the Bible"; "No head-quarters but heaven, no creed by Christ, no book but the Bible, no plea but the gospel, and no name but the divine".

The Evangelical Christian Church believes that ecclesiastical traditions divide, but Christians should be able to find common ground by following the practice (as best as it can be determined) of the early church. Throughout history, it was found that names of human origin divided the church, but Christians should be able to find common ground by using biblical names for the church (i.e. "Christian Church", or "Church of God or Christ", as opposed to "Methodist" or "Lutheran", etc.). It seeks to perpetuate the message first preached by Barton Stone and his colleagues. This includes an emphasis on the Bible as the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice in every area of the Christian life. The Evangelical Christian Church did not officially accept decisions by the early Church Councils, particularly in the third and fourth centuries. Those matters were left to individual interpretation. It only accepted the Trinitarian approach to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, while considering itself a conservative, non-creedal Christian movement that shares the distinctive view that the authentic primitive church order is being restored to the whole church in the power of the Holy Spirit, using only the early church as a model.

The Evangelical Christian Church acknowledges as its Sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour. The Evangelical Christian Church is a community of believers who through baptism by faith in Jesus Christ are bound by covenant to God and to one another. The Evangelical Christian Church draws inspiration from the truth of scripture and the leading of the Holy Spirit, celebrating around the Lord's Table the life, death and resurrection and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. It also looks to the presence, power and energy of the Holy Spirit to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world without the control of human dictatorship. The basis of this Christian fellowship is found in relationship with one another in accordance with the teaching of our Lord and practice among evangelical Christians. It recognizes two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Another practice (not a sacrament)

included in the Evangelical Christian Church is the washing of feet as illustrated by the Lord.

The Evangelical Christian Church is not only non-denominational in structure, but it is an ecclesiastical religious body that reflects a rich variety of theological, cultural, and sociological perspectives and backgrounds. The early participants in this movement consisted of those who came away from a variety of fundamental, evangelical denominations and religious groups. They insisted on using Bible names. They did this, not in an attempt to reform any particular denomination, but rather in an effort to "restore" the "original" church along non-sectarian, and non-creedal lines, embracing Barton Stone's motto, "Let the unity of Christians be our polar star".

The Campbell movement was characterized by a "systematic and rational reconstruction" of the early church, in contrast to the Stone movement which was characterized by "radical freedom and lack of dogma". The Campbells also had designated themselves as "Reformers", and other early leaders also saw themselves as reformers, seeking Christian unity and restoring apostolic Christianity. Despite the differences, the two movements agreed on several critical issues. Both men saw restoring apostolic Christianity according to a biblical pattern found in the New Testament as a route to Christian Liberty, while stressing Christian unity and fellowship under God. One of the basic goals of the English Puritans during the Restoration Movement was to restore a pure "primitive" church that would be a true apostolic community. Barton Stone believed that unity among Christians could be achieved by using apostolic Christianity as a true model in the interest of peace, love, mercy, and kindness.

All Evangelical Christian Churches are self governing in the tradition of congregational polity. This movement is not "just another denomination" but an "assembly of believers" who have agreed together to love God, love each other, and serve the world. As Christians, we are given the keys of the Kingdom of God. That is why Evangelical Christian Church leadership is never static and fixed but is fluid and dynamic. It is never program-oriented but is people-oriented. It is never building-oriented but a builder of community, never in control but is able to shift from being leader, to a peer or follower. Leadership is never "qualified" but demonstrates godly qualities, never one person but multiple persons. It is never an office holder or an officer, but leadership is a servant among servants of God.

The Evangelical Christian Church encourages diversity when we gather, and desires discussion with those who agree to disagree. We're distinctly Christian and our love for Jesus is communicated clearly, but aside of having no creed, we have a specific statement of beliefs that is truly biblical, and we enjoy freedoms that are not under authoritarian control. We see our role in the Body as providing a safe place for those ministers who can't seem to find their voice in a more traditional setting. This is the right to private judgment, interpretation of scripture, and liberty of conscience. We will be the first to tell our brothers and sisters that we don't have all the answers, but we are heading toward deep uncharted waters, travelling where the wind of the Holy Spirit blows, and waiting on the Holy One who is leading us to adventures yet unknown.

As a result, all Evangelical Christian Church ministers come from evangelical, charismatic, mainline, and post-Christian intercultural backgrounds. The religious and philosophical views represented are equally varied. This provides occasional tension and awkward moments, but also incredibly rich and beautiful dialog, which stretches us and causes us to grow in humility and maturity. We embrace one another fully as beautifully flawed, unique individuals in the family of God who are called to rule and reign with Christ as world changers and history makers within the Kingdom of God on this earth.