



the Fellowship of Independent
Evangelical Churches

Annual Review

2019-2020

Independent Churches
Working Together

photo: Avenue Community Church, Leicester

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Executive Summary 2019-2020

- 19 churches affiliated to FIEC
- 1 new church plant recognised
- 2 churches closed, 3 resigned membership
- £850,000 distributed to churches via the FIEC Mission Fund
- Church donations received for FIEC's General Fund of £765,000 – we are thankful to God for this wonderful provision.
- New website launched at *fiec.org.uk* making all the FIEC leadership resources easier to discover and navigate.
- The launch of our weekly Leadership in Lockdown webinars for churches
- The launch of the FIEC podcast
- More than £80,000 donated to our Training Fund
- 24 churches and 16 individuals supported by the Training Fund
- More than 25 churches supported by Ray Evans – our Church Leadership Consultant
- 576 men as members of the Pastors' Network including:
 - 408 Serving Pastors*
 - 41 Itinerant Pastors*
 - 26 Prospective Pastors*
 - 80 Retired Pastors*
 - 21 Pastors-in-Training*
- 31 Pastors added to the Network this year
- 2 *Get to Know...* films published
- 2 issues of our theological resource *Primer* published



Welcome from the National Director

John Stevens

Welcome to the FIEC Annual Review, covering our financial year from 1 September 2019 – 31 August 2020. We all know that this has been a very difficult year because of the unexpected Coronavirus crisis.

However, despite all the challenges we have faced, God has been incredibly good and gracious to FIEC, and I have been so encouraged by the way our churches have responded.

The gospel has continued to be preached and many churches have seen more people joining online and physically than before the crisis. We have been thrilled to hear more reports of conversions from our churches than in any year I can remember as National Director.

We have seen the real benefits of being 'independent churches working together to reach Britain for Christ'. Churches and pastors have made huge efforts to support one another, for example connecting regularly on Zoom to pray. These relationships have been fostered by our local conferences and new weekly webinars. A greater sense of unity and identity amongst FIEC churches in Scotland and Wales have also emerged through national webinars to help serve their unique needs.

We have seen 19 new churches join the fellowship and recognised one church plant. We have launched a new website and hosted weekly webinars throughout the crisis to keep leaders informed of the latest law and guidance and help them to navigate the challenges they face.

As FIEC represents some 630 churches, I have been invited to attend regular briefings and consultations with government ministers and officials to express the frustrations that many of our churches have felt at the lockdown and clarification of what the law and guidance meant for churches. It is due to this engagement that the government eventually allowed small weddings to resume and baptisms to be conducted by immersion, and they have been more cautious about introducing a

blanket requirement for churches to close. We have lobbied hard for congregational singing to resume as soon as possible and for the lifting of restrictions on mingling between members of the congregation as soon as it is safe to do so.

I am immensely thankful for the FIEC staff team, who have worked extraordinarily hard to serve and support our churches in this difficult time. In September we were sorry to say goodbye to Elisabeth Smyth, who retired after 22 years dedicated service to FIEC, but were also delighted to appoint Rachel Sloan and Gabby Samuel to join our women's ministry team. We wish Andrew Nicholson well on his forthcoming retirement from Fellowship Property Trust after many years serving FIEC.

Once again God has graciously provided financially for FIEC this year. We have been able to distribute £850,000 from our Mission Fund to support gospel projects around the country. This money came from a generous donation, and from a number of closed churches.

We anticipate that this fund, and our Training Fund, will be replenished in this coming year so that we can help support even more gospel initiatives. God's good provision for us means we will be able to appoint a Director for Smaller Churches in 2021. This role will focus on supporting churches with a membership of 35 or less, and we trust this will benefit many of our churches and lead to the gospel advancing in many communities.

As we look forward to the coming year, we cannot be certain what it will hold. There are hopeful signs that the development of a vaccine will allow more normal life to resume. However, we do know that God is unchanging and that he is faithful to his promises and his people. We also know that our mission remains the same. The vast majority of our nation, some 97% of the people, do not know Christ and have not believed the gospel that can alone deliver them from death. Whilst it is good to look back, we must also look forward with courage and confidence and redouble our efforts to proclaim the glorious good news that has been entrusted to us.

Finally, I am so thankful for your support and prayers for us, and we look forward to continuing to help you in the coming year. Please do be assured of our regular prayers for you. I do hope that the rest of this review will be a real encouragement to you.



Pastoral Ministry

Johnny Prime, Associate National Director

What do Onesiphorus and Philemon have in common? According to Paul they sought to refresh other believers. Onesiphorus often refreshed Paul and was not ashamed of his chains (2 Tim 1:16); Philemon brought Paul great joy and encouragement as he refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people (Philemon 1:7).

COVID19 may have changed the way I have worked, but it has not changed the aim of seeking to refresh pastors and other church leaders so that they may be equipped to refresh God's people.

Some headlines from the last 12 months:

Local Conferences

A series of 32 local conferences were planned for 2020 under the title *Leadership & Legacy*. Eight of these were able to take place pre-COVID, followed by seven Zoom events. As we considered the legacy we have each received from faithful servants of God, we were challenged to consider the danger of leaving a harmful legacy which is inconsistent with the servant-hearted model of leadership set by our Lord Jesus. The talks from the day are available on the FIEC website.

The Pastors' Network (PN)

The PN has continued to grow with 31 new members. Of particular encouragement has been the way PN members have been proactive in encouraging each other during lockdown. Leading the way have been the Yorkshire pastors who have had a fortnightly hour-long Zoom catch up for prayer and mutual encouragement. It exemplifies what it means to be "inter-dependant" as well as "independent" churches. Mutual refreshment as we serve our Lord Jesus and his people has never been more important.

We are currently considering how to update the Pastor's Handbook and how to help pastors and churches as pastors anticipate retirement.

Help to churches

Hardly a week goes by without requests for help as churches encounter difficulties of various kinds. With members of the Pastoral Support Team I have sought to help churches to resolve issues in a godly way. Lockdown has been especially challenging for churches seeking new pastors. Some appointments have been made during lockdown, but for other churches the search process has had to be put on hold. During lockdown we have revised the booklets, *Calling your Pastor* and *Caring for your Pastor*, both of which are available on the FIEC website.



Training

Adrian Reynolds, Associate National Director

One of the most encouraging things to me as I visit churches and speak with leaders is how the culture of training in the local church has become much more embedded. It's become more natural for a church

leader to ask 'what training does this person need?' rather than question whether training is necessary for those serving in all kinds of roles.



Our ongoing need is therefore to ensure we have all kinds of training for all kinds of roles. We're reasonably well set for training for full time pastors – both residential

and non-residential options. What's been encouraging in the last twelve to eighteen months is seeing the growth of training options for those who cannot study full-time or need training for specific ministry, for example youth work or women's ministry.

Where training providers have started such provision, they've often found them enthusiastically supported. There are still some gaps which we are working on with colleges and seminaries, but the overall picture seems increasingly healthy.

We've begun to see this filter through. The average age at FIEC conferences, for example, is much lower, though it could be lower still. There are some promising younger leaders emerging.



Nevertheless, we must be honest and acknowledge that the UK church is small and, as a result, providers will always struggle to make ends meet. That's why it's been great that the Training Fund has continued to provide funding for those studying in the UK. We are not only serving churches in this way but – indirectly – supporting those colleges and providers.

Significant donations to the Training Fund have dropped off recently, but we've been encouraged by both individuals and churches who have continued to see supporting the Fund as a key part of their mission giving. Perhaps your church might like to consider this too?

Looking ahead, we want to develop further the idea of competencies for leaders allowing churches to both evaluate, appraise and also plan for future training of all

kinds of leaders. This is a pretty big project, but one we believe will serve the church well in the coming years.



Mission

Andy Paterson, Mission Director

It was a great joy to be able to give away £850,000 to FIEC churches up and down the country in the Spring via our Mission Fund. It's enabled churches to appoint evangelistic workers as well as seeing some embark on plans and projects to help more people in their communities hear the good news of the gospel.

We were delighted to give money to Cornerstone Church in Liverpool to help them to fund more Church Planting Residencies. Meanwhile, Harper Church in Glasgow received funding to appoint a cross-cultural worker to help them reach out to the thousands of asylum seekers on their doorstep.

It is a mark of the evangelistic zeal of our churches that we received applications for the Fund totalling more than £3.5m. We know a lot of churches didn't get the funding they were hoping for, but we are delighted to have more funds to give away in 2021 so I'd encourage churches to apply again when this is available.

The coronavirus pandemic has led to a strange period for us – in fact, I was on furlough leave at the beginning of lockdown. It's also meant that church planting activities have not been able to move forward at the pace they could before March 2020. That said, we have been delighted to formally recognise one new church plant during the 2019/20 financial year. We have seen three more join us since the beginning of September, while one of the churches accepted for full affiliation was a new plant in Manchester.

One of the great encouragements of this challenging period has been hearing of the number of churches who have been seeing conversions during lockdown. Every week we pray for a small number of FIEC churches and it's wonderful to see several of them report that people are becoming Christians. In addition, many are

seeing good numbers at online seeker courses like Christianity Explored. Please pray on for conversion growth across our family of churches. In the months to come we hope to start producing short testimony videos and pray this will be an encouragement to your work and ministry.



Leadership

Ray Evans, Church Leadership Consultant

I work two days per week for FIEC as a leadership consultant.

The period up to lockdown was busy and productive.

From September until March I visited many churches and leadership teams, including churches in Carlisle, Kilmarnock, Stoke, Cardiff, Caterham, Letchworth, Milton Keynes, Bedford (x2), Lincoln, London (x2), Warboys, Cambridge (x2), Long Crendon, Ipswich, Edinburgh, Horsham, Birmingham (x2), Bristol, and Clifton.

I used the travel time on long distance trips to write and have composed 20 articles or so during the period. They appear on the FIEC web site whenever it is thought best. I have continued writing for the website during lockdown.

I also talked with large numbers of church leaders individually, both before and after lockdown and have held two European Leadership Forum webinars.

After lockdown I lectured at Oak Hill College during Graham Beynon's sabbatical. I spoke for four extended sessions by Zoom. I am presently in the middle of taking eight full morning sessions at London Seminary on leadership.

I have taken several FIEC *Leadership in Lockdown* webinars and attended many others.

I have been able to take some Zoom leadership training sessions during lockdown with churches in Nottingham, and Edinburgh, Southampton, Loughborough, Leamington Spa and Dunstable.

I have read widely especially during lockdown on a whole range of uses to do with leading churches. I regularly write book reviews for the Christian press. I am planning to put a book proposal on leadership to a Christian publisher in the near future.

I would value prayers as I plan the next season of helping leaders, as most visits cannot now take place. It may give me opportunity to mentor a few pastors in more depth and this may be a good use of my time.

I am very grateful for being supported by FIEC in this ministry and trust that it is a helpful addition to what we can provide as we serve churches and their leaders.



Women's Ministry

Elinor Magowan, Women's Ministry Coordinator

September 2019 began with two significant events – the first Scotland Pastor's Wives' Conference hosted by FIEC in Edinburgh, and our first training event specifically for women in ministry to work at both Bible handling and crafting a Bible talk.



Women's ministry seminar at the 2019 Leaders' Conference

At the Leaders' Conference last November, five seminars on women's ministry were hosted including Raising Titus 2 Leaders, Developing Women's Ministry in the Local Church, Being a Ministry Wife, Marriage, Ministry and Family Life, and Women's Workers in the Local Church.

Over the course of the year, various events and individual contacts served as a springboard for local ministry wives support groups to be established. Our networks of women's workers and ministry wives have grown significantly, and we have had good contact with training providers for women in ministry.

Elisabeth Smyth and I became further aware of the pressures on women in ministry during lockdown, and in July 2020 we both contributed to the *Leadership in Lockdown* webinar series, speaking on 'Lockdown leadership that cares for women in church ministry'.

We have had countless conversations with women's workers and ministry wives and church leaders discussing opportunities for women's ministry; the challenges of serving; the need for rest and refreshment; how to deal with conflict in a ministry team; the joys of sharing the gospel and different ways to reach out to women and to disciple them; pastoral concerns and how to grow in godliness as a woman in ministry.



Elisabeth Smyth at the 2019 Ministry Wives Retreat

Elisabeth and I have appreciated opportunities to share God's word at women's retreats, day conferences and evangelistic events. We were both particularly disappointed that Thrive and Ministry Wives Retreat couldn't take place in May due to the lockdown and know this was a loss for those who would have attended. In

addition, these would have been the last retreats for Elisabeth as she retired from her role at the end of September 2020.

As we were preparing to say farewell to Elisabeth, and to mark the truly significant contribution Elisabeth has made to Women's Ministry in FIEC, Rachel Sloan was appointed as Elisabeth's successor and Gabby Samuel to the new role of Women's Ministry Development Worker. They both commenced work with FIEC in September 2020.

We thank God for his faithfulness and the sacrificial service that ministry wives and women in ministry undertake to further gospel work in reaching Britain for Christ.



Scotland & North of England

Andy Hunter, Scotland Director

Despite Lockdown disruption, the FIEC network in Scotland and the North of England has seen some growth over the past year including affiliations in Glasgow, Dundee, West Lothian – and a newly recognised Church Plant in South Queensferry. The

Aviemore Church Plant took another significant step forward this year with the purchase of a house in the centre of the town. It was also a great encouragement that over £100k of the Mission Fund came to Scotland to support a range of gospel projects from Orkney to the Central Belt.

This growth and the expanding work of FIEC in Scotland was reflected in a record number of Scottish delegates attending the 2019 Leaders' Conference (over 70).

The FIEC organised 'Independent Church Ministry' course at Edinburgh Theological Seminary also had its highest number of students with 11 certificates being awarded in May. The course runs on a biennial basis and will run again in Autumn 2021 (DV). It has also been encouraging to see the continued development of women's ministry with an online gathering of Pastor's Wives in September.

Other ministry developments including lockdown support over the year have included:

- i. **Online Pastors' Fraternals:** since March two of these have run in Scotland and another in North East England providing support for pastors.
- ii. **Scotland Webinars:** to complement the national webinars (and reflect the differences in government guidance) three Scotland webinars have been hosted (attended by between 40-55 church leaders).
- iii. **Coronavirus – Scotland Guidance Summaries:** As Scottish Government Coronavirus Guidance has been issued and updated we have circulated summary notes to Scottish FIEC Churches and Pastors. These have also been picked-up and used by a wider constituency of churches and appreciated.
- iv. **Pastoral Contacts:** individual phone calls, emails, meet-ups (where permissible) have been made across the network to keep in touch with local church situations and offer support to church leaders.
- v. **Safeguarding Training:** two events for Trustees and key Safeguarding personnel were organised in conjunction with Christian Safeguarding Services.
- vi. **Cumbria Vision Team:** a small group of pastors has been convened to try and strengthen gospel work and relationships between FIEC churches in the region.
- vii. **North East England Partnership:** FIEC churches have been at the heart of organising a series of North East Gospel Partnership gatherings of church leaders over the year.



London

Trevor Archer, London Director

In spite of the many challenges this strange year has brought, there is still much to praise God for, albeit progress in several areas has been limited. Appropriately our last London Gathering in February

just before the lockdown, was devoted entirely to praying together for the Lord's blessing upon London and the tens of thousands of people who do not know Him. There was something special about 80 leaders packed into Globe Space in Willcox House, crying out to the Lord for His blessing before turning attention to the needs of the churches represented.



Our close partnership with London City Mission has continued, particularly in seeking to support them during a year of massive change and transition for their leaders and workers, as the Mission seeks to focus more closely on working in and through local churches. Change is never easy, and mistakes inevitably happen along the way, but the heart of LCM to serve the poor remains undiminished and closer involvement with the local church will produce long term benefits for mission and evangelism and church planting. Working with LCM has given opportunity to develop relationship and understanding with leaders in many diverse churches. In that regard work "behind the scenes" has been going on with the London Gospel Partnership to begin to develop stronger ties with Black and Asian church leaders.

Much of the time during and beyond lockdown has been seeking to support, encourage and advise leaders of our London churches which, whilst demanding, has in many instances served to deepen relationships and connections with leaders and between churches. Exchanging advice and sometimes pooling resources has seen some churches and their leaders develop connections which previously did not exist - and that can only be for the good of the gospel. Some new churches have joined the Fellowship in this past year which is always a great encouragement.

In July 2020 the first steps were taken towards the appointment of Gabby Samuel who began with FIEC part time in September. In addition to her three days a week with FIEC focused on supporting churches in the training of younger women, Gabby will act as the Women's Worker two days a week with Stockwell Baptist which merged in September 2019 with Brixton Local Church. Her background and experience will also benefit the Fellowship nationally as part of our Women's Ministry Team.



Operations & Church Affiliations

Phil Topham, Executive Director

It's been a huge encouragement to our work and ministry that despite the coronavirus pandemic, churches around the country still want to join FIEC because they share our mission and vision. If anything, the pandemic has enabled some to recognise the value of being part of a wider family of churches.

In the 2019/20 financial year we saw 19 new churches join the Fellowship from across England, Scotland and Wales. We have a steady stream of churches in the pipeline to join us in the months ahead, God willing.

We've also been able to strengthen our office team during the year. Justin Gill has joined us as our IT Manager, with Joel Murray appointed as our new Communication and Media Officer. We are praising God for what they have brought to the team, building on the excellent work of David Cornish and Rachel Dalby who moved on during the period.

When the pandemic hit in March 2020 we took advantage of the Government furlough scheme – especially for some members of our administrative team. This was in recognition of the fact that the events and activities they administer were no longer able to take place. The big loss, of course, was the Leaders' Conference and we were very sad to have to cancel the 2020 event.

We hope to return to Torquay in 2021 and have booked 8 – 10 November at the Riviera International Conference Centre. At the time of writing it is unclear what things will look like next autumn, but we are planning for the Conference to go ahead. In the meantime, please pray for the staff at the RICC, many of whom have been made redundant during the pandemic.

We are grateful to God for his provision during the 2019/20 financial year. We have continued to see generous donations from churches for our work and ministry. This year we have taken the decision to freeze donations (they are not subject to the usual inflationary increase) and we hope this helps you in the current uncertainty. We've only been able to serve you in the way we have during this pandemic because of your generous investment in our ministry over many years.



We were able to publish two more issues of our theological resource *Primer*. Issue 09 was the second part of the Doctrine of God and focused on the Trinity while issue 10 considered Spiritual Warfare. *Primer* is now being produced in partnership with Oak Hill College and continues to be edited by David Shaw. Upcoming issues are planned on Humanity and the Incarnation, and all 10 issues are available from both The Good Book Company and 10ofThose, the latter of which have taken on publication of the resource.



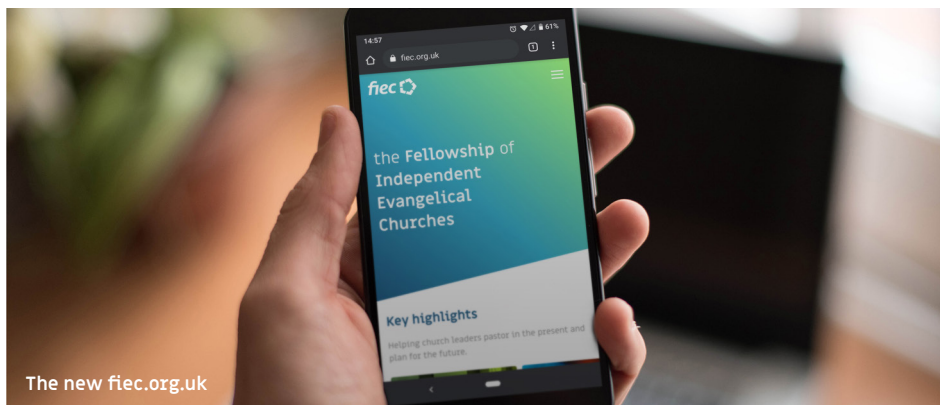
Media & Communication

Joel Murray, Communication and Media Officer

The coronavirus crisis has shifted so much of life online that *fiec.org.uk* and FIEC's other online channels have become more important than ever as we seek to serve and equip church leaders through an unprecedented time.

In God's grace, the commission of the new *fiec.org.uk* website was completed in September 2019, and I was appointed as Media and Communication Officer before the pandemic took hold in March 2020.

In the period from September 2019 to August 2020 there have been 161,427 individual visitors to *fiec.org.uk* – an increase on the previous year of 21.5%. This could be down to the new website, but an increase in visits to the website per week is clear to be seen from March onwards.



The new *fiec.org.uk*

Although we have tried to keep on publishing non-coronavirus news and resources on the website, the topic has dominated – for obvious reasons. We have created a 'Series' page where all coronavirus related content can be found in one place.

A key addition to the website in this period has been the 'Pray for our Churches' function. This allows churches to support one another in prayer: churches can submit their own requests, and read through those of other FIEC churches to pray for.

Social media is used to share resources from the FIEC website where there are close to 10k followers across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The FIEC mailing list also has 1,496 weekly subscribers and 3,167 monthly subscribers.

A new development since lockdown is the launch of The FIEC Podcast, which is available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Overcast, and other podcast platforms. It has been used to provide an audio version of the *Leadership in Lockdown* webinars, but also to host various interviews that have been conducted too.

In the next six months we hope to develop the podcast to have more specific podcast resources other than using the channel to reproduce what has been done elsewhere. Podcasts are a growing medium and used by many church leaders.

We are also exploring how use of video could be developed in the ministry in addition to the popular *Get to Know...* series.

A challenge going forward will be to discern the best ways to communicate what FIEC is doing and how church leaders can be helped. For example, our printed magazine *Together* has been put on hold during the lockdown period and needs to be thought through in the future.



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