



# FLAGS FOR CHURCHES

*"Lift up a standard for the people"*

Isaiah LXVII v.10

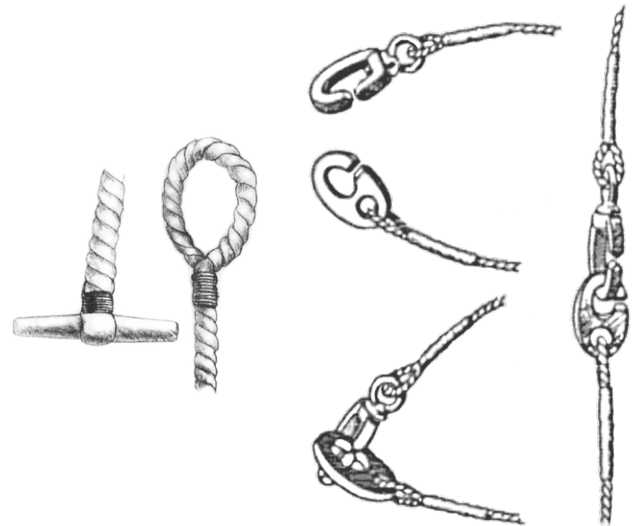
**Guidance for the Church of England**

### What is the appropriate flag to fly from a church?

There are no legal restrictions on the flags that may be flown from a church, but there are some customs that should be followed. In general, any appropriate flag may be flown, subject to diocesan guidance, and the wishes of the incumbent and PCC. Present practice is based on two factors:

First, an Earl Marshal's warrant dated 9 February 1938, issued at the request of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, stated that the Flag proper\* to fly from a Church of England church was the Cross of St George (a red cross on a white background), with a shield of the arms of the diocese in which the church is situated, placed in the top corner nearest the flagpole (known as the canton). It is further specified that a mitre should not appear over these arms. However, the diocesan flag is relatively expensive to make, and the coat of arms can be difficult to distinguish at a distance.

And the second factor is the ancient, historic tradition of churches flying a plain St George's Cross.



*The Union Flag, a personal banner, also toggle and eye, and Inglefield clips, the usual method of attaching a flag to the halyard. Make sure your flags are flown the right way up, particularly the Union Flag which people often get wrong. It should be as in the photograph, ie. the broader white uppermost nearest the flagpole.*



*St George's Cross and a Diocesan Flag*

\* Flag proper is a technical term meaning the flag to be flown from a church when it is wished to represent the organisation of the church itself.

### Are we allowed to fly other flags?

There is no Flag Act in the UK (unlike most other countries) and therefore, contrary to popular myth, there is no legal restriction on the flags that may be flown from a church. The previous factors merely encourage the flying of specific flags, and do not prohibit or prevent the flying of other flags in addition. Indeed, there is precedence for flying foreign, national, regional, civic, organisational, historical, or personal flags from a church, with the agreement of the Incumbent and PCC. For example, you are positively encouraged to fly the Union Flag on state occasions, the flag of the town or city during a civic service, or a Mission to Seafarers flag on Sea Sunday.

However it should be noted that there are certain legal and ceremonial restrictions placed upon some flags. Royal Standards (British or Foreign) may be flown only while the Royal personage is actually within the building or grounds, being hoisted (or broken) on their arrival and lowered following their departure. It is never hoisted when the Royal person is passing in procession. Likewise, the White Ensign (the flag of the Royal Navy) should be flown only by the nine churches that ancient custom or practice allows to do so.

Furthermore the design of a flag flown by an individual or organisation is its legal property of that individual or organisation. It would therefore be polite to ask their permission to use it first.

### How and when can we fly flags?

The flag should be attached to the halyard (the term for the rope) by clips, or toggle and eye, and then hoisted to the top of the pole, ie. 'close up'. If the halyard is given a couple of turns around the flagpole it will stop it

flapping noisily in the wind, and it is then tied as tightly as possible around the cleat at the base of the pole. A slack halyard looks very sloppy, and will increase wear on both the flag and the halyard.

In the UK, there are no legal timings for the raising and lowering of flags. Tradition has been to raise the flag first thing in the morning and lower it at sunset, if for no other reasons than visibility and the reduction of wear. However, as always, it is a question of practicality and common sense; if the flag needs to stay up for a significant period of time, it may be more appropriate to let it remain flying even at night. If this is a regular practice the flag should, if possible, be illuminated at night.

With regard to when flags should be flown, in the United Kingdom there are no legislated dates when flags either must, or must not, be flown. However each year the Lord Chamberlain, through the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, issues a list of days on which UK Government buildings should fly the national flag. Combining this with other appropriate civil and religious days, the Flag Institute has compiled a list of suitable dates for churches to fly flags (see table), but these suggestions in no way prohibit flying flags on any other day, such as local festivals

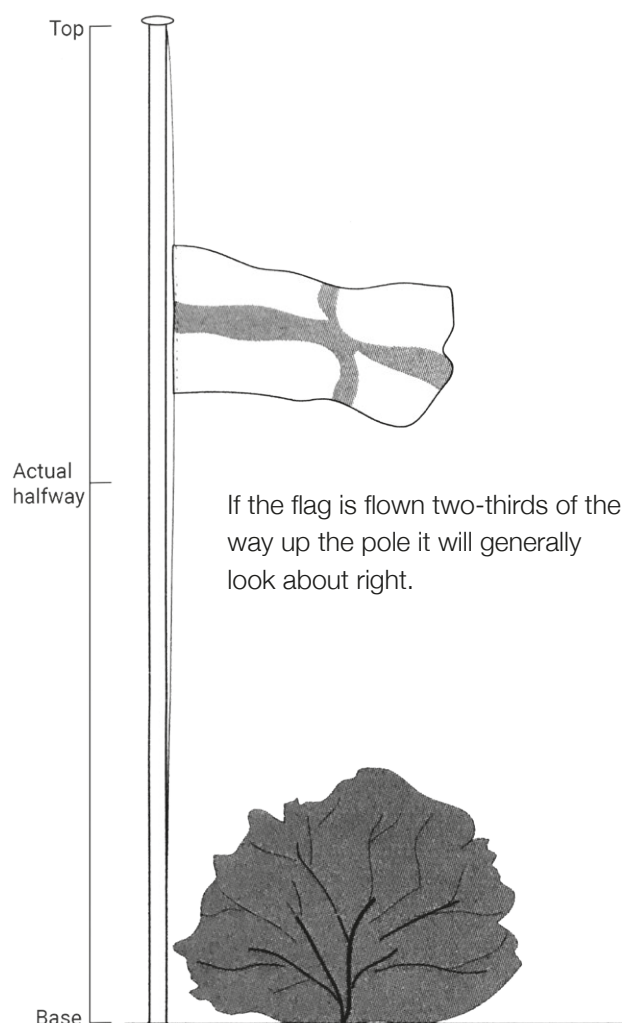
### How and when do we fly flags at half mast?

Strictly speaking, flying a flag at half mast means just that. However, this tends to look too low, particularly if the lower part of the pole is surrounded by battlements, trees or shrubs, and, as a rule of thumb, if the flag is flown two-thirds of the way up the pole, it will look about right. When raising the flag, it should first be raised to the top of the pole ('close up'), held there for a moment, and then lowered to the half-mast position. This procedure is reversed when the flag is lowered.

Protocol suggests that the Union Flag is half-masted only by royal command, normally as a sign of national mourning. On such occasions the command itself will normally declare the length of time the flag should remain at half mast. It should be noted that during such time all flags, with the exception of the Royal Standard, should be flown at half mast. The order is normally given by the Lord Chamberlain's department.

One custom worth noting is that, after the death of the reigning monarch, flags should be flown at half mast from the announcement of the death until the funeral, except on Proclamation Day, when flags are flown close up after the proclamation. On the death of other members of the Royal Family, flags are usually flown at

half mast on the day of the announcement and on the day of the funeral, but the arrangements will normally be specified by the Lord Chamberlain's Department. The Flag Institute can advise if requested.



It is therefore arguable that it is inappropriate to half-mast a Union Flag for a non-national event, but once again there is no hard and fast rule about this. On such an occasion, for example, when a funeral is being held within a particular church, it may be better to fly at half mast the St George's Cross, or the deceased's personal banner of arms, or flag of office (for example Mayor or Lord Lieutenant), or even the local civic or county flag – whatever seems appropriate and dignified.

### What is a pennant?

An empty flagpole is a forlorn sight that suggests the building is empty, business is finished, and the people have gone away. For this reason, there is a growing tradition in the UK for some cathedrals and churches to follow the Scandinavian tradition of flying a pennant (known there as a vimpel) when no other flag is flown. It is somewhat analogous to the pennant flown continuously by a warship while in commission. In this instance



the pennant (sometimes called a pennon) is not a flag as such (and is never flown at half-mast). The pennant has the advantage that it need not be hauled down at sunset, thus saving much time and effort. It may also be cheaper than a flag.



*A Pennant (Scandinavian Vimpel)*

An appropriate design for a church is a white pennant with a red cross, although other designs are not ruled out. For example, Portsmouth Cathedral flies one with the St George's Cross on white at the hoist, and the colours of the diocesan arms at the fly. The Flag Institute can advise on design.

Scandinavian pennants are usually long and thin, but if the St George's Cross, or other device, is to be recognisable, the breadth at the hoist will need to be about 15 inches. This should be suitable for a pennant of any length, but six to nine feet is likely to be right for most flagpoles.

#### **How do we obtain the flag of a visiting dignitary?**

When the visit of a Royal, National or Civil dignitary is made known, you should contact their office, advise them that you have a flagpole, and request that a flag be sent in advance so that it may be flown during the visit. When it arrives, check that it is the right one, and that the fittings (clips or toggle & eye) are compatible, in case some makeshift arrangement for attaching it to the halyard is necessary. Finally, make sure it is flown the right way up.

#### **Do we need a faculty for a new flag or flagpole?**

You will be glad to know that flags do not require a faculty! However erecting a flagpole on the church tower would require a faculty, or at least the approval of the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC). For a church with a spire or where there is no appropriate place on the building, it is usual to erect a flagpole on the ground near the church. Churches are included under the Ecclesiastical Exemption Order (1994), which means that the erection of a flagpole on church territory may not require local planning permission. However local-authority rules vary and it would be wise to seek advice from them as well as from the DAC.

It should be noted that there are flagpoles now available which are made from low-maintenance and light materials such as glass fibre, and which can also be fitted with vandal-resistant mechanisms to prevent theft of the flag.

#### **How do we look after old flags?**

It is common practice in the UK to place decommissioned military and other flags or standards in cathedrals, churches and chapels. The technical term for this is laying up. Historically, the idea is that a long-honoured flag would find a last resting-place to decay quietly and gracefully. However in the modern age of conservation such thoughts are an anathema to many, and indeed your church may well find itself holding some important artefact of the nation's heritage in its care. How to handle such items varies greatly, dependent upon type, material, make-up, condition, and age. The Flag Institute has contacts with many specialists, including those who care for the flag collections of the Imperial War Museum, and the Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC. Should the question of cleaning, repairing or restoring any flag be under consideration, you are strongly urged to contact the Institute for advice.

#### **Do other denominations have different rules?**

These guidance notes have been written from the perspective of the Church of England. It should be noted that the Baptist Union, the Church of Scotland, Church in Wales, the Methodist Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the United Reform Church have their own flags and symbols. These churches are all included under the Ecclesiastical Exemption Order referred to earlier.

#### **Flag as a pall**

If a national or other flag is to be placed on a coffin, the top left corner of the flag should be placed over the deceased's left shoulder. It should be removed before interment.

#### **Further advice and guidance**

The Flag Institute will be glad to offer further advice or answer queries on any aspect of the design and use of flags. Details of our website and e-mail addresses are shown on the rear cover.

#### **Flag flying days**

The following comprise a suggested list of dates when it may be appropriate to fly flags from a church. It is neither mandatory nor exhaustive, the final decision must be taken by the parish itself. Two flags are suggested for each day. The prime flag would be the most appropriate flag to fly. However it is recognised that most churches probably do not have a 'flag locker' with

a large selection of flags, and so an alternative suggestion is made assuming that at least a Union Flag and a St George are to hand. Where St George is shown, in

Scotland and Wales it will often be more appropriate to fly the national flag.

Date	Occasion	Prime Flag	Alternative Flag
9 January	Birthday of HRH The Princess of Wales	Union Flag	St George
20 January	Birthday of HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh	Union Flag	St George
19 February	Birthday of HRH The Duke of York	Union Flag	St George
1 March	St David's Day	Wales/St David	Union Flag
2nd Mon in March	Commonwealth Day	Commonwealth Flag	Union Flag
10 March	Birthday of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh	Union Flag	St George
17 March	St Patrick's Day	St Patrick	Union Flag
March/April	Easter Sunday & following seven days	Diocesan Flag	St George
9 April	TM The King and Queen's Wedding Anniversary	Union Flag	St George
23 April	St George's Day	St George	Diocesan Flag
May	Ascension Day	Diocesan Flag	St George
5 May	Council of Europe Day	European Flag	Union Flag
6 May	Coronation Day	Union Flag	St George
May/June	Pentecost	Diocesan Flag	St George
May/June	Trinity Sunday	Diocesan Flag	St George
As appropriate	HM The King's Official Birthday	Union Flag	St George
21 June	Birthday of HRH The Prince of Wales	Union Flag	St George
17 July	Birthday of HM The Queen	Union Flag	St George
15 August	Birthday of HRH The Princess Royal	Union Flag	St George
3 September	Merchant Navy Day	Red Ensign	Union Flag
8 September	His Majesty's Accession	Union Flag	St George
3rd Sun in September	Battle of Britain Day	Union Flag	St George
21 October	Trafalgar Day	Union Flag	St George
24 October	United Nations Day	UN Flag	Union Flag
1 November	All Saints Day	Diocesan Flag	St George
2nd Sun in November	Remembrance Sunday	Union Flag	St George
11 November	Remembrance Day	Union Flag	St George
14 November	Birthday of HM The King	Union Flag	St George
30 November	St Andrew's Day	St Andrew	Union Flag
25 December	Christmas Day until Epiphany	Diocesan Flag	St George
As appropriate	Dedication Sunday	Diocesan Flag	St George
As appropriate	Patronal Festival	Diocesan Flag	St George
As appropriate	Local/Regional Days	Regional Flag	St George

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## The Flag Institute

The Flag Institute is the British centre of excellence for everything connected with flags, past, present and future. It advises government departments, public bodies, commercial companies and individuals alike on all issues concerning flags, including ceremonial, constitutional as well as design, use and practical matters of flying flags. It is responsible for maintaining the Register of County Flags.

There are flag organisations in many countries and the Flag Institute is an active member of the *Fédération Internationale des Associations Vexillologiques*, the international flag organisation.

The Institute publishes a twice-yearly illustrated journal, *Flagmaster*, which includes articles on wide and varied flag related subjects and in which details and pictures of new national and inter-national flags are presented.

Membership of the Flag Institute is open to everyone interested in flags, whether individuals, organisations or companies.

To find out more, please visit the Institute's website at:

[www.flaginstitute.org](http://www.flaginstitute.org)



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