CENTRAL

Church Profile

October 2026

Central Church, Edinburgh

Who are we?

Central is a missional, city centre church of all ages. Based at Central Hall in Tollcross, we are a church family drawn from across the city committed to Following Jesus, Being Family and Loving Edinburgh.
Our life together is expressed in our gathering together in Central Hall as well as in our scattered Communities, which are rooted in neighbourhoods and shared interests across Edinburgh.

- *We are following Jesus* – we call ourselves disciples because the most important thing in our lives is to learn how to do what Jesus said to do.
- *We are family together* – we are different kinds of people from different places who share our lives generously with each other.
- *We love Edinburgh* – Edinburgh is our home, and we want to love and serve the people who live in this city. We believe that God's love can transform lives and communities, and we want to see that happening in the places that we live, work or study.

Jesus at the Heart

At Central, Jesus is at the heart of everything we do. To live this out, our strategic priorities are to encounter God, become mature disciples, and seek the Christ-centred renewal of our city. We desire to see every disciple play their part in their everyday life, local context, and as a valued part of the whole body of Central.

Encounter God

We will be a community where people experience the transforming presence of God through His Word and Spirit, know God's transformative love, and grow in devotion and dependence upon Him. We want to strengthen our biblical and theological foundations, cultivate our dependence on the Holy Spirit, and contribute to a culture of faith, expectancy, spiritual depth and obedience.

Become Mature Disciples

We will encourage and challenge each other to become mature disciples of Jesus, who increasingly reflect His character, live out our calling, and intentionally help others do the same. We want clear pathways for spiritual growth, biblical formation and missional discipleship, and to develop and release leaders marked by Godly character, calling and spiritual maturity.

Seek the Christ-centred Renewal of our City

We will join with God in His mission to bring the hope and renewal of the Gospel to the people of Edinburgh and beyond as individuals, communities, ministries and as a church. We want to encourage bold witness to Jesus in word and deed, serve the city through sacrificial love, practical service, compassion and justice, and seek to influence culture through faithful presence, biblical truth and Gospel witness.

What do we believe?

Triune God

We believe there's only one true God, who made and rules over everything, who is loving, perfect, powerful, knows everything, has no beginning and will never end. God exists in a relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit – three persons, one God.

Father

God reveals Himself in the Bible as a gentle, forgiving Father, intimately involved with every detail of our lives. He's compassionate, holy, patient and just. He keeps His promises and answers our prayers. God made everyone in His image, and desires that everyone He made knows him.

Son

God has written Himself into the story of world history as a man – Jesus. We see what God is like by seeing what Jesus did, what He said, and the way he related to other people. Jesus is the Son of God. He came to earth fully man and fully God, born of a virgin. He lived a life without sin and chose to die on the cross to deal with our sin. Jesus encouraged people to follow Him and called them his disciples. Jesus welcomed in the Kingdom of God as heaven on earth. He rose from the dead on the third day and ascended to heaven where He sits at the right hand of God. He'll return in power, and on that day those who have believed Him will be with God forever, and those who don't will be separated from Him.

Spirit

The Spirit indwells all who trust in Jesus, and He draws alongside us with direct communication from God's heart to ours. Because we're God's children, we can hear His voice to us. As we participate with the Holy Spirit's mission to heal, restore and redeem the broken parts of our lives and this world, He brings the very power and presence of God into our lives. The Holy Spirit enables us to follow Jesus and represent Him, sharing His heart with others in word and action.

The Cross

God's world and people are broken. Sin is a reality that we grapple with every day. On the cross, Jesus died for sinners and carried away the sins of the world. In His dying and rising again, He freed us, defeating His enemy and ours, Satan, and making it possible for us to live in relationship with the Father again, forgiven for every sin.

Jesus' Resurrection

When Jesus rose from the dead, the power of Christ triumphed over evil and now lives in us today. Because He's alive, we can all live in freedom and with power. Life in all its fullness is available to us. His resurrection is our assurance that one day we will be raised again to life to live forever with God and one another.

The Bible

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It tells the story of who God is and what He has done for His people. We see how God has been faithful and powerful among His people through the generations. Our church is committed to making the story of Jesus – told throughout the whole Bible – the starting point and guide for the way we live, the ultimate standard of truth. We want to teach, train, stretch and challenge each other as we allow the story of God to live in us and spill out of us.

The Kingdom of God

A kingdom is any place where a king rules and is in charge. Jesus came declaring that the Kingdom of God was at hand, that God's power and influence was breaking into the world. We enter this kingdom through faith in Jesus, and we see glimpses of the Kingdom around us – in ourselves, and in the people we meet. As disciples of Jesus today, we seek, embrace and build His Kingdom here.

The Church

Anyone who trusts in and follows Jesus belongs to His Church. Local church exists as a foretaste of God's Kingdom here on earth. It is the community where we are formed and learn to follow Jesus together, strengthening our faith, and discovering the ways God has gifted us and called us. We gather in the presence of the Holy Spirit around the practices of prayer, worship and reading Scripture, and we celebrate communion and baptism as activities gifted to us by Jesus Himself. The church does not exist solely for itself but to usher in the Kingdom of God on this earth and reflect God's image to all who do not yet know Jesus.

Theological Distinctives

In addition, in our teaching and leading we hold to the following distinctives:

- We are a Baptist church
- All leadership roles are open to men and women

- Marriage between a man and a woman is the place for sexual intimacy
- The Holy Spirit continues to give all His gifts set out in Scripture to the church.

History

Our journey began in 1894 as Morningside Baptist Church in the south of the city where over the years it ministered faithfully to that community.

2005 – More recently, Karl Martin's 14-year tenure as Senior Pastor, alongside his wife Niki, saw the church undergo a significant transformation from a local church in Morningside into a vibrant city-wide movement. During this time, the church outgrew two venues before moving to its current city centre location in 2011. With that move came a change of name to Central Church, in part a reference to the building, Central Hall, and also a re-imagining of the church's vision and identity. This signalled a commitment to the wider city – anchored in the idea of 'Loving Edinburgh, Being Family and Following Jesus'. This era was defined by inspirational, motivational teaching, missional outreach and creative worship. Central had a key role in starting the Cairn Movement network. During this period, we planted and /or partnered with three churches across the region and saw people with Central's missional discipleship vision contribute to other local churches.

2019-20 – After Karl's departure, Executive Pastor Andy Harding led a senior team of Odele Harding, Zak Robb, Becs Lee and Tom Montgomery. They worked together with the elders to continue the vision and mission of Central while the process started to appoint a new lead pastor. Lockdowns created many challenges to continue meeting in a meaningful way and provide adequate pastoral care. A particular feature of this period was that our community model of devolving leadership to our communities really showed its value. Our care ministries expanded to meet additional needs. As we came out of lockdown, the vacancy committee continued looking for a new lead pastor.

2023 – In May, the church meeting voted to appoint Don Palmer to this post. The ongoing wider leadership team included Andy Harding, Odele Harding, Zak Robb and Becs Lee.

2024-25 – Difficulties arose and through a process supported by the Baptist Union of Scotland, Don was asked to leave Central in April 2025. During this period, Andy and Odele Harding moved on to jointly lead Abbeyhill Baptist Church, Edinburgh. Zak Robb moved with his family to lead a church plant in Portlethen, Aberdeenshire, and Becs Lee left subsequently taking up a role with Christians Against Poverty UK.

2025-26 – Following these changes, Matt Tindale and Louise Wright stepped up to take senior leadership responsibility. The church continues to have a steady team working away behind the scenes and a committed group of people volunteering their time and support for the leadership and elders.

Following a time of upheaval and hurt within the church family, arising from changes over a number of years, the church went through a time of lamentation, repentance and is finding grace to move forward together. The senior leadership team and elders spent time seeking God for a renewed strategic priorities and began the process of looking for a lead pastor. A vacancy committee was selected and ratified at the church meeting in September 2026.

Our Church Today

Gathering and belonging

On Sundays we gather to worship, learn from the Bible, pray together and make space to listen to the Holy Spirit. Our gatherings include a quieter, reflective service, a morning gathering with a programme for children and young people, and an evening gathering that is particularly popular with students and young adults. Everyone is welcome, whether they have been part of church for years or are exploring faith for the first time. Alpha provides a welcoming setting to discuss life's big questions and explore Christianity.

Our Communities are central to how we understand church. Meeting across Edinburgh during the week, they offer places to build friendships, share meals, pray, read the Bible, support one another and serve their local areas. On the last Sunday of each month, we do things differently: meeting in communities for mission, worship, hospitality and practical service, gathering at Central Hall in different ways, focusing on prayer and worship in the evening.

Across the generations

Central is home to children, teenagers, students, young adults and people at every stage of life. Children are encouraged to grow in faith through worship, Bible teaching and activities. Our youth team leads a programme that combines small groups, social evenings, Sunday activities and mentoring. Student Nights offer friendship, discipleship and support during university life. Young adults build relationships through Communities, social gatherings and time away together. We want each generation to contribute to the life of the whole church.

Serving Edinburgh

Our commitment to Edinburgh is to the whole gospel for the whole of life, and so includes practical support for people experiencing poverty, isolation and other challenges. Central Hall currently hosts a welcoming community café, an accessible Christian counselling service, debt support through Christians Against Poverty, emergency clothing provision through Clothesbank+, and Soul Food, a free monthly meal. Pastoral support, bereavement support and Tollcross Tots also provide ways to care for individuals and families. Much of this work is sustained by volunteers who give their time and skills in service to people living in our city.

Growing and serving together

We seek to help people develop as disciples and leaders through Communities, serving in teams, mentoring and training opportunities, including an internship programme. Our church is sustained by people who offer their gifts in hospitality, worship, prayer, prophecy, children's and youth work, practical care and many other areas. Central Hall is both a gathering place for the church and a resource through which we can welcome and serve our wider community to reach them for Jesus.

Membership in 2026

Central has over 220 members, and around 120 active non-members. The majority of those who are non-members but regularly engaged are between 18-30. We have around 75 kids/youth. We have an open, self-identified membership structure. This is renewed annually. Our membership commitments can be found in this document.

Leadership

Central is currently led by a team of nine voluntary Elders and two full-time Senior Leaders. There are a further 13 mostly part-time staff across the church team. Our ministries and teams are also led and supported by voluntary church members.