

COMMITTED TO MISSION TOGETHER *Final – 28 January 2019*

For many years the Brethren movement in the UK has been a major influence in making Christ known, both here in the UK and overseas. Its effect on many other churches, missions and denominations has been immense. Its strong commitment to Biblical teaching and the self-governing nature of the local church, and to the gospel and mission, has greatly influenced the evangelical church in the UK and worldwide.

The movement in the UK is now at a crossroads. There remains great potential for this movement, and the resourceful and responsive approach that we have towards making Christ known. Right now, we have a great opportunity to work together more closely in the unity and power of the Spirit of the Lord so as to strengthen churches for the glory of Christ and the mission of the gospel.

A group of local church leaders, mainly those of Brethren background, but also others who share a similar approach to local church life, met in late 2018 alongside four support groups (Church Growth Trust, Counties, GLO, and Partnership). They concluded the time was opportune, *for the purpose of the gospel and mission*, to strengthen the network of, and networking between, self-governing evangelical churches who share many of the biblical values historically disseminated by the Brethren movement.

As a result of the discussion and the work of a Task Group set up to consider more detail, we are offering a new way of working with each other in dynamic partnership for the good of the gospel together.

1. The development of a more effective and wide-ranging networking body. This would absorb Partnership and its legacy, and be a very significant change from the present. There would be major representation of leaders of local churches and well as formal representation of Counties, GLO and Church Growth Trust. One key emphasis would be the self-governing character of local church.
2. Church Growth Trust, Counties, and GLO Europe with others would redouble their efforts to work closely with each other within the new networking body, to create a one-stop place for information, advice, and practical services to churches.
3. Commitment to reducing and merging the number of bodies which serve these local churches, so as to be able to give more coherent, understandable and effective support to local churches.

Mission should be the driving force of the network, with churches being strengthened to reach out into their communities and beyond. There is a longing to see Christ glorified, not through a structure, but through greater working together. It must be clear that the vision is not about maintenance and helping congregations survive, or setting up a denomination, or indeed the survival of the Brethren movement. It is about serving Christ, and doing the work of evangelism, mission, and serving local communities, better.

The local church leaders are greatly appreciative of the commitment of the Church Growth Trust, Counties, GLO, and Partnership to consider changing how they work, put aside their own identities, and form this collaborative venture. It is hoped that this will lead to:-

- *more visible and representative leadership within the movement*
- *much easier access to both visionary and practical resources for churches to grow in mission*
- *better provision of regional and national opportunities for building relationships between churches*
- *better communication as trust is built*
- *more accessible training opportunities*
- *clearer identification of what needs to be provided so to avoid duplication*

A series of local consultations has been planned early in 2019 to enable consultation with local churches. There will also be consultation with the key support bodies which would be affected. We hope that many churches and individuals which identify with our values and share some of our history will take part, become excited about the possibilities, and help shape the way forward. If as a result it is agreed to proceed, the aim would be to do so by the autumn.

KEY BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

Why make this change now?

The movement's commitment to self-governing congregations and non-denominational structures has meant many churches now no longer feel part of a wider movement. A wide variety of parachurch bodies has been created to fill the gap left by a visible structure and the relative strength of these separate "parachurch" bodies has meant weak coordination and duplication of activity and so poor stewardship of resources. At the same time, the movement has always been generous in giving away its best, with many mission and church leaders tracing their roots to the Brethren. Sadly recently we have seen the demise of some smaller and older congregations, while other churches which historically were linked to the movement have joined a denomination or just operate alone with no links.

Can the support agencies simply continue as now?

Separated and overlapping organisations are leading to wasteful use of kingdom resources. We believe in working in and through the gifts and calling of the local church. To continue on our current path would be to fragment and dissipate our efforts in the face of the increasing challenge.

Why should we network with churches of similar heritage?

The flexible and resourceful approach, and the shared history of the Brethren movement and the related parachurch groups means we can work together easily as we appreciate and value the same things.

What is actually being proposed?

The development of a more effective and wide-ranging networking body. This would absorb Partnership and its legacy, and be a very significant change from the present. There would be major representation of leaders of local churches and well as formal representation of Counties, GLO and Church Growth Trust, as well as direct relationship with the Living the Passion Conference and Enable Training. One essential keynote will be more visible spiritual leadership both in the work and among the churches. The model being proposed is on similar lines to that already being pursued successfully in Australia and New Zealand, which preserves and emphasises the self-governing character of local churches. More details are available, if wanted, in a summary of the report of a Task Group which has worked up plans for this new body (contact neil.summerton@partnershipuk.org).

Who can be part of this network?

All who can agree with the statement of faith (the Evangelical Alliance's is proposed) and are committed to the shared, Christ-centred values of our movement.